

In the name of Allah the most compassionate, ever compassionate

An Analysis of the Ups and Downs of fandom for BTS among Iranian fans
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2024

Table of Content

Introduction	5
2- The psychological effects of being a fan of BTS	13
1-2- Adolescent confusions	14
2-2- Motivating	23
2-3- increasing self-confidence	33
2-4- Helping to improve people's bad mood	37
2-5- Relaxation	40
2-6- Creating happiness	47
2-7- Adjust of effectiveness over time	51
2-8- Imaginary love	60
2-9- Maternal behavior	77
2-10- Satisfaction of sensation-seeking	81
2-11- Making emotional encounters	87
2-12- Psychological Release-Catharsis	100
2-13- Wasting time	105
2-14- Affective Dilution	109
2-15- remaining in the concrete operational stage	117
2-16- Gradual desensitization of sensitivities	124
2-17- Occurrence of significant cognitive distortions	128
2-18- Occurrence of some mental disorders	160
2-19- Sexual Identitylessness	181
2-20- Dependence and Addiction to BTS	189
2-21- Other Psychological Issues	194
3- Social Effects of supporting BTS group	208
3-1- Critique of the Limitations within Iran	210
3-2- A Critique of the Professional and Executive Weaknesses of Domestic Celebrities	218
3-3- Starting fandom at a young age	221
3-4- Idols Addressing Youth Issues	225
3-5- Deepening the Relationship between Stars and Fans	234
3-6- Multidimensional and multifaceted approach toward the group and its members.	242
3-7- Encouraging immigration to South Korea	246
3-8- In-person and virtual friendships	250
3-9- Altruism	254
3-10- Globalization and Global Thinking	259
3-11- Role Modeling from Stars	266
3-12- Identity Transformations	302
3-13- Transformation of Social Relationships of Fans	338
3-14- Feeling Committed to Supporting the Group	343
3-15- Efforts to Increase the numbers of Fans	352
3-16- Fanaticism in Fandom	359
3-17- Adopting emotional interactions with in-group and out-group individuals	368
3-18- Critique of Big Hit's Policies	377
3-19- Other Social Issues	393
4- Cultural Effects	399
4-1- The Growth of K-pop Groups in the Initial Cultural Foundation of Korea	399
4-2- The Promotion of K-pop Music to an Entertainment Industry	405
4-3- Providing content and entertainment that appeals to teenagers and young adults	411
4-4- Encouraging fans to read various books and watch movies	416

4-5- Interest in becoming familiar with Korean culture	420
4-6- Promotion of the Korean Language Among Fans	422
4-7- Reception of Korean Foods	424
4-8- Other Cultural Aspects	425
5- Educational Effects	430
5-1- Active Learning	430
5-2- Enhancing Technical Skills	442
5-3- Lack of attention to studies and academic decline	445
5-4- BTS Awareness Campaign	447
6- Moral and Ideological Effects	453
6-1- Fostering Moral Tolerance	453
6-2- Moral-Ideological Influences	458
6-3- Diminishing ideological Aspects	468
6-4- Guiding fans towards joining the sexual revolution	474
6-5- Acceptance of Moral Relativism	491
6-6- Moral Transformation in the Family Environment	496
6-7- Moral Transformation in Individual, Social, and Environmental Ethics of Some Fans	499
7- Economic-Political Effects	512
7-1- Alignment of BTS with the Capitalist System	512
7-2- Promotion of Consumerism	516
7-3- The Influence of Power Centers in Art	523
7-4- The Political Activities of BTS	527
7-5- Seeking a Model for Future Careers	534
7-6- Spending Money to Support BTS	537
7-7- Monetization of Some Fans through Promoting BTS	541
8- Artistic Effects	546
8-1- The Superiority of BTS K-Pop Over Western Pop	546
8-2- The Presence of Meaningful, Complex, and Enigmatic Content in BTS Music Videos	547
8-3- Diversity of BTS's Songs	550
8-4- Adding Appeal to the Stage	554
8-5- Side Attractions of the BTS Group	558
8-6- The Combination of BTS Music with Challenging and Exciting Dances	560
9- Aesthetic Effects	562
9-1- The Physical Attractiveness of Stars	562
9-2- Modeling After BTS Stars in Superficial Beauty	567
9-3- Modeling after BTS stars in Fashion and Trends	570
10- Family Effects	578
10-1- Feeling of being a Family with the Stars	578
10-2- Emergence of Family Conflicts Due to Fandom of BTS	583
10-3- Damage to Family	594

Introduction

Models play a crucial role in shaping the personalities of individuals and societies. Models are like lighthouses that show the way to ships, they show the way to the ship of existence of humans and societies. Therefore, from religious viewpoints to contemporary psychological and sociological perspectives, all of them have confirmed the significance of models as essential for guiding human behavior and societal norms.

The significant impact of models on the education of individuals and societies has led both well-intentioned individuals and institutions, as well as malicious entities seeking exploit societies and human existence, to recognize the power of modeling and utilize it to their desirable Models. While virtuous individuals and reputable institutions may use positive models to inspire and guide others, those with malicious intent may manipulate seemingly noble models to lure individual's malevolent goals. They try to turn people towards evil goals by processing seemingly valuable and sublime models, relying on seemingly attractive models.

Examining the progression of role models throughout human history reveals an intriguing trend. Early general role models in societies fixated on singular exceptional traits of individuals, such as Rostam was a mountain of muscles, Barbod and Nakisa were genius in musicianship or Cleopatra was a prototype of beauty. But, in the recent decades during developing role models, mankind has embraced more intricate and influential role models to achieve its goals. This shift is exemplified creation of two-dimensional Models by the fusion of sports and art. Individuals like Arnold, a renowned bodybuilding champion, ventured into the realm of art and turned to an iconic figure in movies. This integration showcases the importance of adapting to multidimensional models processing in human development.

In the new wave of role models processing, if someone was for example interested in sports, often find themselves drawn to the movies of iconic figures such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Bruce Lee for inspiration and entertainment; and if someone was interested in the art of cinema, Again, while cinema fans can admire their performances and contributions to the film industry and entertained the same movies.

Examining the model processing process currently shows that the sheer importance of models has caused some institutions and social movements to try to process multi-dimensional models in order to achieve their goals. Consequently, the process of model processing has transitioned from converting one to two-dimensional models to now encompassing the handling of multi-dimensional models as a necessary advancement.

Among the institutions that have been successful in processing multi-dimensional models, we can mention the Big Hit Entertainment Company (Kpopery BTS Group Company)¹. Right from the group's inception, the company strategically implemented the processing of multi-dimensional personalities.

In its initial operations, Big Hit Company handpicked "beautiful" boys to create a group. These individuals, known for their good looks, underwent rigorous disciplines such as singing, dancing, media, and acting. In addition to their vocal abilities, they also captivate audiences with dynamic, high-energy dance routines that are challenging even for the average person to perform.

In addition to their spectacular performances, the BTS boys have positioned themselves as champions of youth through their music, which addresses the challenges and conflicts faced by young people. Delving into themes of rebellion against outdated values, they have established themselves as an intellectual group and a beacon of hope for the younger generation. By offering guidance on overcoming the obstacles of the harsh world surrounded youth, and

¹ Big Hit Entertainment established BTS in 2010, and since 2013, the group has attained remarkable global success.

Bang Si-Hyuk, the CEO of Big Hit Entertainment Company, having this idea in mind that today's youth need heroes who support them without preaching to them from above (Wikipedia) established the Bangtan Boys (also known as BTS).

Suga, one of the seven members of BTS, expressed in an interview that they aim to empathize with their audience by telling stories that resonate with people's emotions, anxieties, worries, and pains. They focus on portraying aspects of human experience that may be overlooked by others.

These insights led the BTS group to cultivate a distinct atmosphere compared to other Korean pop groups, resulting in widespread recognition both domestically and internationally.

"BTS's "Blood, Sweat and Tears" topped all South Korean charts and their album "Map of the Soul: 7" ranked on number1 in Billboard Hot 100™ and Billboard Hot 200™ charts. Their music video also set a record for the most viewed YouTube premiere and garnered over 100 million views within 24 hours of its release. Additionally, BTS received awards at the Billboard Music Festival. These are just a few of the remarkable of the BTS group, which has become a role model for many teenagers and young people" (Wikipedia.)

In addition to their recent accomplishments, the Big Hit Entertainment Company and its BTS group have unexplored dimensions that this current compilation seeks to uncover through field interviews with Iranian fans of the BTS group. Beyond evaluating their recent global successes, the collection aims to analyze the overt and concealed economic, cultural, social, political, moral-ideological, psychological, and aesthetic goals of Big Hit Entertainment Company and its BTS group.

by portraying themselves as full supporter of the new generation, BTS has solidified their reputation as the "savior for the youth".

On the other hand, the boys of the BTS group, at the same time as trying to provide productions to "fill the leisure time of the fans and entertain them", started "they have also formed deep and meaningful connections with their followers", they, for example claim this slogan: "If you have no refuge If you don't have, we in Seoul think about you and you can always count on us as your support and allies".

The "philanthropic and seemingly altruistic" actions of the BTS group on the one hand and their "social-political activities" on the other hand, are other attractions that the Big Hit Entertainment Company has, and finally, boys by , by abstaining from marriage maintaining a distance from public romantic relationships with girls, indirectly present themselves as "love" and "potential wife of female audience".

The combination of attributes within the BTS group presents these stars as the multi-dimensional role models (beautiful, full of excitement, with a beautiful voice, altruistic, having socio-political concerns, intellectual depth, savior of the youth, and the like). It's possible that in the realm of human models it's rare to find individuals or groups who embody all these qualities simultaneously.

Analyzing the field evidence among BTS fans highlights the significant influence the group holds over its audience, particularly among female fans.

The preliminary investigations of the researcher and his students in the field of understanding the effects of the BTS group on its fans indicate that sometimes powerful fan organizations have been formed at the level of the BTS fans, which is assumed to be the case with the release of 8 hours of annual travel videos of the boys of BTS (Bon Voyage) in the virtual space, a dedicated fan organization mobilizes a team of 30 translators to work tirelessly throughout the night translating the content of the BTS boys' films, and after the translation is finished, they hand over the prepared content to the editors of the group and themselves try to take a rest or go to sleep while editors try to prepare the final edition of text, and leave it to the third team of their group for uploading and take a rest themselves. And, the uploading team immediately uploads the prepared content in the virtual space and delivers it to the hands of countless fans of The BTS group. Similarly, there have been instances where fans have exhibited intense dedication by streaming new BTS songs round the clock in order to boost their favorite group's ranking on global music platforms or to secure wins in popular people's choice awards. Fans have known to engage in

activities such as "continuous listening to the desired song for 24 hours a day" or "participating in voting campaigns" to increase song plays and votes, leading to high rankings on prominent music sites like Billboard, Spotify, and other similar platforms, and even win the people's choice awards.

One of the writer's students mentioned in her report that when she went to one of the girls' high schools to collect the required data, she noticed that almost half of the school's students were crying and when she was surprised to find out more about this asked if someone from your teaching staff had passed away that you are so impatient, the students answered that "No, Jin - one of the boys of BTS - has joined to the military service!"

During their interviews, many girls expressed extreme devotion to their favorite K-pop idols¹. Some stated that they were "willing to sacrifice their lives for the boy band", while others confessed to "experiencing panic attacks when confronted by rival group fans hat words". Shock, one girl claimed she "would sell her kidney to afford a night at Jimin's house". There were reports of "Some students argue over the claim that a specific idol is their "husband," leading to fights with other students and pulling each other hairs in school" and "have commissioned people who are good writers to prepare pornographic stories centered on themselves and one of the boys of the group". "Some fans even resorted to threatening their own families to fund trips to South Korea or engage in self-harm". Some have "started organizing large gatherings in the presence of BTS channel admins, BTS page admins, BTS collectors, BTS storytellers, and regular fans to honor the boys of the group in Iran". "Practiced dancing for 5-6 hours a day in the hopes of being selected as backstage dancers for BTS performances". "Hearing the rumor of their favorite star being in a relationship with a girl, they have started having suicidal thoughts." They talk as if they are married to the star they admire". Or even "They claim to be pregnant with a child from their favorite star".

The preliminary field investigation conducted by the research group has shown that numerous students, including elementary students, have started teaching themselves the Korean language. Some have become proficient that they can translate Korean texts with ease or manage their Instagram pages with Korean writing.

The high sales of Korean language teaching books, following English language books, in society of Iran is a clear example of the influence of K-pop groups, especially BTS, on Iranian teenagers and young people. Moreover, high school

¹ The literal meaning of 'idol' is a figure of worship, but in K-pop, it refers to a singer or members of a group. In the present text, this word is considered equivalent to 'star'

students are seen with the seven members of the boy band BTS as their computer screen background, while their parents or school staff are either unaware of them or simply overlook the reasons behind this behavior..

The collection of what was mentioned prompted the writer to act in the direction of clarifying the changes that have occurred in the processing of models in the contemporary world¹.

The author's approach in compiling this collection involved initial training of undergraduate, MA, and doctoral students on qualitative research methods, emphasized on the importance of role models and model processing of the BTS group under Big Hit Company. Subsequently, the students were instructed with conducting in-depth interviews with fans of the BTS group upon finding

¹ The research method employed in this study was qualitative in nature. In the realm of humanities, researchers often encounter issues and inquiries that cannot be adequately addressed through common research methods. These questions may involve complex or abstract concepts that defy easy definition, they may lack precedence in existing literature, making it difficult to formulate an easy to test hypothesis. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for addressing such novel and unexplored topics.

Qualitative research is characterized by a non-linear process where various components intersect rather than progress in a linear fashion. In other words, in qualitative research, data collection and analysis take place simultaneously, with the researcher continuing this iterative process until reaching a point of saturation. Saturation represents the stage at which the researcher is confident in the quality and adequacy of the collected data for generating a comprehensive and accurate analysis.

The qualitative research methodology adopted in this study was grounded theory. This approach is particularly well-suited for investigating topics with limited existing knowledge.

The theorists utilizing grounded theory strive to cultivate an understanding of the processes linked to issues. In qualitative research, it is essential for researchers to effectively report their interpretive findings without relying on statistical methods.

Qualitative research method books typically recommend conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with sample sizes ranging from 8-12 or 20 participants. However, I believe these suggested numbers may be unreliable in the Iranian context due to several factors.

The difference in the socialization processes between the West and Iran can be considered as the first key factor.

In Iran, socialization is often perceived as a challenging and occasionally conflicting process, contrasting with the smoother experience in Western societies.

For instance, the values instilled by the primary socializing institutions such as the home, school, and society in Iran exhibit a diversity of perspectives. In other words, parents emphasize survival skills and resilience, educational institutions highlight sacrifice, jihad, martyrdom, while, individuals in Iranian society observe that economic corruption has become pervasive, with many officials and their relatives engaging in rent-seeking activities. These scenarios contribute to challenges and hurdles in the socialization process in Iran, representing a complex landscape of integration and socialization compared to Western societies where socializing agents typically align their messages and actions.

Another factor that presents a significant challenge when deciding about increasing the sample size in qualitative research is the limited financial support available for many researchers in Iran. Unlike in the Western context that researchers typically compensate participants for their time and cooperation, such practices may not be feasible in the Iranian research environment. And this limitation can lead to interview endings as participants may be unwilling to spend sufficient time due to the lack of compensation and end the interview before providing enough information. Additionally, political apprehensions among respondents in Iran, although relatively minor in this study, along with issues such as respondent fatigue, lack of focus, conflicting responses, particularly commonplace among younger participants, further highlight the challenges faced in qualitative research settings in Iran.

The challenges faced by Iranian researchers have led to an increase in the number of in-depth interviews conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative phenomenon under study. And in the present study, the number of interviews required to collect research data exceeded the recommendations found in qualitative research literature.

participants. The interviews aimed to gather insights on the experiences, challenges, and successes of Big Hit Company, BTS, and their fan base. The unique challenges faced by Iranian researchers necessitate an increase in the number in-depth interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative phenomenon under study.

In the current research, interviews were conducted with available samples from various cities in Iran. The criteria for participating in the interviews were being a fan and having knowledge about BTS.

The collected information was categorized into three main headings after gathering the necessary field data: "Investigation of the obvious and hidden aspects of Big Hit Company" (the company that owns the BTS group), "Investigation of the obvious and hidden dimensions of the BTS boy group," and "Investigation of the ups and downs of fans of the BTS group."

The present book focuses on "analyzing fan works of BTS from the viewpoint of Iranian fans" and consists of an introduction and 10 chapters.

The introduction of the book outlining the research methodology while also provides an broad overview of the topics discussed.

The subsequent chapters of the book present the results of 47 in-depth interviews conducted with BTS fans, exploring the BTS impact on the Iranian fans across various dimensions including psychological, social, cultural, educational, moral-ideological, economic, political, artistic, aesthetic, and familial aspects.

In the chapter focusing on the psychological effects of BTS fandom, the following topics are covered:

Adolescent confusions, motivation, improved self-confidence, mood enhancement, relaxation, joy creation, Adjustment of impressionability over time, imaginative love, maternal relationship fulfillment, satisfaction of sensation-seeking , sensation-oriented engagement, mental exhaustion, time-wasting, hallucinations, being stuck in the concrete operational stage, gradual degradation of sensitivity , cognitive significant errors, occurrence of some mental disorders, Sexual ambiguity, dependence and addiction to BTS, and other psychological aspects are also discussed.

In the chapter on the social effects of BTS fandom, the following topics have been discussed:

Criticism of Iran's domestic constraints; Criticizing the professional and moral weaknesses of Iranian celebrities, Starting a fandom journey from a young age,

celebrities addressing the youth-related issues, deepening the relationship between celebrities and fans, to have a multi-dimensional and multifaceted approach toward the BTS group and its members, encouraging immigrating to South Korea, face-to-face and virtual friendships, altruism, globalization and global thinking, imitating celebrities, identity transformations, evolution of fans social relationships, feeling obligated to support the group, trying to increase fans, Being biased in favoritism, engaging in emotional encounters with insiders and outsiders, criticizing the policies of the BTS group company and other social issues.

In the chapter of cultural impressions of BTS fandom, the following topics have been discussed:

The growth of K-pop groups in the primary cultural infrastructure establishments of Korea, the promotion of K-pop music to an entertainment industry, the provision of content and entertainment of interest to teenagers and young people by the BTS group, encouraging fans to read books and watch videos, interest in learning more about Korean culture, spreading Korean language learning among fans, welcoming Korean food, appreciating fan-created content and exploring other cultural aspects.

In the chapter on the educational impacts of fandom from the BTS group, following topics are discussed, including:

Active learning techniques, improving fans' technical skills, lack of attention to lessons and academic failure, and various awareness campaigns.

In the chapter of moral-ideological impacts of fandom from BTS group, the following topics are discussed:

Encouraging moral tolerance, moral-value effectiveness, diminishing ideological dimensions, motivating fans to embrace the sexual revolution, accepting relativistic ethics, moral transformation in the family environment; and transformation in individual social and environmental ethics of some fans.

In the socio-political and economic impacts of being a BTS fan, various issues have been explored, including:

Alignment of BTS with the capitalist system, promotion of consumerism, influence of power center on artistic direction, political engagement of BTS, career role model, fan's spending to support BTS, income generation through fans advertising for BTS.

In the chapter on the artistic effects of fandom within the BTS community, the following topics are examined:

The superiority of BTS K-pop over Western pop, the presence of meaningful, complex, and mysterious content in BTS music videos, the variety of BTS songs, group's stage presence, their individual charms, and the fusion of BTS music intricate and exciting dance routines.

In the chapter of aesthetic works of fans of BTS group, the following topics are discussed:

The external attractiveness of BTS stars, their influence on beauty and fashion trends, and their modeling endeavors in fashion industry are discussed.

In the chapter on the impact of BTS on fans and their families, some aspects have been explored, including:

The feeling of being a family with the stars, the emergence of some familial conflicts due to fandom of the BTS group and damage to the family.

In the following, the aforementioned topics will be discussed in detail.

2- The psychological effects of being a fan of BTS

"Fire, fire, fire, fire,
When I wake up in my room, I have nothing.
After the sun sets, I stagger and walk.
I'm completely drunk, drunk.
Just cursing on the street, on the street.
I've lost my life, I'm like a crazy guy
Everything's a mess, livin' like beep
Live however you want, it's your life anyway
Stop trying, it's okay to lose
...
You compare me with others, who do you think you are to compare me?
Stop comparing, I'm just me!
So what?
Just live the way you want, your life is yours.
Don't try too hard, it's okay if you lose.
Fire, in every step you take,
Fire, jump and go crazy,
Set it all on fire, woo woo woo" (a part of BTS' Fire song).

The fandom surrounding various groups, with BTS being a prominent example, can have a multitude of effects on individuals spanning psychological, social, cultural, moral-ideological, educational, economic-political, aesthetic, artistic, health, and familial dimensions.

This discussion specifically explores the psychological impacts associated with being a fan of BTS. The following aspects will be considered in relation to the psychological effects of BTS fandom:

Adolescent identity struggles, motivation, bolstering of self-esteem, mood enhancement, help to feel comfort and happiness, fostering creative expression, adaptability over time, imaginative love, and realization of maternal treatment.

Satisfying excitement, making thrilling encounters, mental exhaustion, wasting time, engaging in illusions, being stuck in the concrete operational stage, gradual desensitization, serious cognitive errors (such as avoiding new information and lacking critical analysis, exaggeration, involvement in emotion-driven interactions, justification, disregarding contradictions, conflicting perceptions, reliance on weak logic and contradictory sources, interpreting intentions, deferring topics to third, engaging in futile disputes, self-deception, self-censorship, living in a fantasy world, dreaming, resorting to deception, pretense, impulsive reactions, shaping perceptions, manifestation of mental disorders (anxiety, mental preoccupation, feeling humiliation, frustration, jealousy, depression, nervousness, physical deformity, alienation), loss of sexual identity, dependency and addiction to BTS, and other psychological concerns (enhancement of critical thinking among fans, acceptance of fan-generated content, exploration of taboo thoughts, distraction of curiosity, seeking refuge in music, experience of content saturation, using of explicit content, sexual arousal among fans, disregard for mental health considerations).

In the following, the aforementioned topics will be examined.

1-2- Adolescent confusions

Adolescence is a crucial and tumultuous stage for teenagers, impacting not only the individual but also their family. It is a period marked substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and ideological transformations. Recent research brain imaging techniques has shed light on the significant changes that take place in the brain during puberty, adding another layer to our understanding of this developmental stage.

Recent research suggests that disparities in myelination and maturation of nerve in the adolescent brain contribute to heightened emotional responses. Due to incomplete development in cognitive centers, adolescents may experience more intense emotional reactions, impacting their recent emotional behavior. In addition, during adolescence, the brain reaches its peak growth in the gray cortex and accumbens, often referred to as the pleasure center of the brain. This growth leads to heightened experiences of pleasure for teenagers. However, as the gray cortex thins out post adolescence, the brain, including the nucleus accumbens may not be able to recreate the same level of pleasure experienced during adolescence in adulthood.

The transformation of the sleep cycle during adolescence is another biological factor that contributes to the challenges for both teenagers and parents. While an

increase in melatonin, sleep hormone, in parents' brains signals bedtime, fluctuating levels of melatonin in teenagers' brains can make them either alert and at the time that melatonin in the parents brain drains out, and they are awake, its abundance in the teen brain makes them sleepy. This mismatch in sleep patterns can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, as parents may not fully comprehend the biological changes occurring in their adolescent's brain.

What was mentioned will lead to an increase in risk-taking and emotional behaviors in teenagers, while parents often challenge them for their recent behaviors due to the lack of awareness of the adolescent's brain changes. .In addition to what was mentioned, the transformation of the sleep cycle during adolescence is another biological factor that provides reasons for the relative monotony of children and parents. This means that when the parents need to sleep due to the increase of melatonin (sleep hormone) in their brain and go to bed, a little melatonin in the brain of the teenager keeps him awake and when there is a lot of melatonin in the brain of the teenager, it makes him sleepy. He continues to sleep, at that time, there is no melatonin in the parents' brains and therefore they are awake, as a result, again, the lack of understanding of the specific biological changes that occur in the adolescent's brain, causes some other criticisms of the parents towards the adolescent.

In addition to the changes in the adolescent brain and sleep cycle, parents may struggle to understand the emotional and psychological changes their teenager is undergoing, leading to criticism or conflicts with their teen. Adolescence is often characterized by a period of negation and defiance as teenagers seek to establish their independence and identity. Psychologist Henry Wallen describes this as the "age of denial," where teenagers assert themselves by saying no to their parent's requests. During this stage, teenagers transition from complying with parental authority to their own autonomy and seeking independence. To illustrate this to their parents that it's important to understand that parents who once had to set boundaries for their child during their formative years, now find themselves confronting new reality as their child enters adolescence. At this stage, the child is transitioning being obedient to exploring their own autonomy and seeking independence. It allows them to establish their identity separate from their parents' control, and this process of self-discovery is essential for the child to learn how to stand on their own feet and navigate the complexities of adulthood.

During puberty, adolescents often experience a heightened sense of isolation which can lead to conflicts with their parents. This may lead parents to misconstrue their child behavior by assuming romantic relationships are the

cause of this isolation. But in fact, this period of self-absorption and isolation is a crucial phase for teenagers to engage in self-reflection. This offers them the opportunity to contemplate the values principles that will shape their identity as responsible male or female members of society in the future.

During adolescence, teenagers are often driven by a strong desire for independence, which may manifest in risky behavior and romantic relationships. Furthermore, adolescents go through a process of psychological weaning, where they start to distance themselves from their family's values and establish their own within their peer group. Misinterpretations of these developmental milestones by parents can to misunderstanding and strain in the parent-child relationship, ultimately resulting in a potential crisis.

Adolescent's desire for independence in the midst of his sensation-seeking , the interest of teenagers and young people in relationships with the opposite sex, finding the importance of the peer group for the teenager and the realization of psychological weaning (meaning a relative separation from the family and its values and entering the group of peers), Each of these factors can contribute to parents forming negative perceptions of their teenager, leading to misunderstandings and potentially straining the parent-child relationship, resulting in a crisis.

In addition to the mentioned scenarios, teenagers are also exposed to the virtual world, where they see curated versions of people's lives on social media platforms like Instagram. This exposure can distort their perception of reality, making them compare their own lives with the seemingly extravagant and perfect lives they see online.

These unrealistic expectations and perceptions can create tension within the family dynamic as teenagers may feel entitled to certain privileges that their parents are unable to provide.

In addition to the mentioned cases, the teenager's encounter with the virtual space and his encounter with the showcase of many people's lives in social networks such as Instagram, exposes the teenager to exaggerated realities. On the other hand, when the teenager does not have similar experiences in their own life, such as dining at luxury restaurants, attending extravagant parties, or going on foreign trips, having access to brand-name clothing, they may internalize feelings of guilt and inadequacy. This can create tension within the family as the teenager may their parents responsible for not being able to offer them the same level of material comforts as others.

Furthermore, as the teenager interacts with the society, they Given that, according to Piaget's theory, the teenager is in stage of idealism and may perceive himself as a savior Messiah, but the stark contrast between their idealistic view of the world and the harsh realities of the society like the class gap, the rent-seeking of many officials and their relatives, economic corruption and many other things they witness can lead to a profound sense of disappointment and frustration in the teenager.

Furthermore, as teenagers engage with society, they are confronted with societal expectations, such as the emphasis on physical attractiveness, particularly for women. Given that not girls are able to attain the societal standards of beauty during puberty, this pressure can undermine their self-confidence and create feelings of concern among young people, especially girls.

The combination of these factors that briefly described can leave the teenager feeling overwhelmed and even despondent as they perceive the disparities between themselves and their parents, educators, and community parents¹-including those observed in other countries.

The brain changes that occur in adolescents, coupled with the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, and ideological shifts experienced during their biological maturity, generate stressful conditions for the majority of teenagers.

In addition to factors that contribute to youth experiencing instability and unbalance, many parents, lacking understanding of their teenagers' brain development, often find themselves in and challenges with their children, exacerbating the adolescent crisis.

If there are individuals or groups who advocate for and support teenagers, promoting respect, dignity, and recognizing their potential as successful future leaders, teenagers are likely take notice. This is crucial, as teenagers often face misunderstanding and skepticism from biological parents, education parents, and community parents at large when it comes to the complexities of adolescence.

Amidst the recent confusion faced by teenagers and young people globally, Big Hit Company assigned their music group, BTS, the role of motivating, instilling hope, and supporting for the adolescent and the youth. This initiative aims to

¹ The term "social parents of adolescents and youth" primarily refers to the policymakers of society, while teachers and educators fall under the category of educational parents.

empower this big demographic portion and position BTS as youth leadership to continue promoting their ideology to teenagers and young people.

Based on the feedback from the surveyed population, it is evident that a significant portion of BTS fans, precisely from the critical age of their teen, discovered the boy group during their form years and found solace and comfort in their music during challenging times.

20-year-old Massoud, in his interview, mentioned that he discovered the BTS group at age of 13-14. During a statement, 18-year-old Fereshteh shared that she first encountered the BTS boys at the age of 13, finding their music to create a beautiful world during her teenage years. In her recollection, 15-year-old Diba recalled that when teenagers grapple with concerns about their appearance or self-image such as why my face is like this or why my height and skin are not like that, the group serves as a source of comfort and hope, guiding them towards peace through their empowering messages:

- "Masoud, which age group do you believe comprises the majority of BTS fans?

As far as I have seen, most of my friends are teenagers between the ages of thirteen, fourteen and twenty-five.

- Are there fans who are twenty-five years old or older?

Can't say no, but there are fewer fans of twenty-five years old and above. Most of the peak of fandom is in middle school and high school. The ones who are over twenty-five years old may prioritize important life events such as marriage, education, and career pursuits, causing their interest in fandom to diminish or wane over time."

- "Fereshteh, at what point do you feel your fascination with K-pop become more serious?

From the age of 13, it was summer and we definitely didn't have any special fun, and what could be better than a new, complete, beautiful, and captivating escape into a teenage world."

- "What age group does the majority of BTS audiences generally fall within?

In my opinion, the majority of BTS audiences typically start around 12 or 13 years old, known as the youth age, as children begin to explore virtual space and find new interests. The appeal of BTS and K-pop may be attractive for them.

The reason why they are attracted at a young age, in my opinion, is that at that age, a person finds fault with himself a lot and struggles with his self-knowledge and always says to himself, "why am I like this?" And why do I look like this? For this reason, I think that at that age it is possible to become familiar with K-pop."

In an interview, 17-year-old Samaneh pointed out that young individuals who are grappling with self-doubt and uncertainty can often find that the slogan of "Love yourself" promoted by the BTS group is a catalyst for them to value their own worth and increases their resilience in challenging situations.

25-year-old Shabnam also shared her personal experience of the uplifting impact of the recent slogan by reiterating similar themes:

- "What is the age range of fans of this group?"

Umm... well, it can be said that it starts from 12 or 13 years old and lasts until 20 or 22 years old, that is, with the majority of fans are in their teenage years.

- Then how do they, the BTS, affect this group of people?

They have both motivational and exciting songs, with some more mellow tracks as well. In my opinion, these songs have a double impact on teenagers, particularly in high spirits looking for music to match their mood. The lyrics often convey self-worth and love, instilling a sense of importance in the listener. This sentiment is encapsulated in their slogan: "Love yourself."

- Shabnam, how has your interest in BTS influenced your appearance?

Well, since childhood, I was fat, which often led to feelings of embarrassment. This was especially challenging in school where I faced taunts and teasing. When I discovered Korean movies and observed the looks and thinness of female artists, I might have felt embarrassed. I attempted various diets and exercise routines several times, but my efforts were often short-lived, and I eventually gave up halfway through.

But, as I little by little delved deeper into the messages and concepts embraced by BTS, particularly their emphasis on self-love and acceptance, being fat was not an important issue for me anymore. Firstly, I used to notice in fan dance videos that individuals, whether performing solo or in groups, were comfortable with their weight. Furthermore, the underlying message in BTS's songs was to accept yourself the way you are."

Some fans have highlighted other aspects of the BTS group that have positively impacted them.

In an interview, 21-year-old Reihaneh pointed out that individuals who faced oppression at home and in society for various reasons found a safe environment they, could be themselves within the BTS community, where they were treated without judgment or insult. Similarly 17-year-old Ehsan, citing the disparity between genders in many families, commended BTS's promotion of gender equality, which helped address feelings of inferiority and disadvantage among females. Additionally, 15-year-old Reihaneh expressed gratitude for the courage and independence that BTS, stilled in her and her friends, making it easier to confront challenges; And has made the feeling of being independent an accessible thing for them, she mentions this issue with gratitude:

"... While Western music often focuses on sexual and superficial themes, in K-pop you can see psychological, philosophical, and social issues (although there are also instances of sexual and superficial content in K-pop)."

"... While in the West, they mostly work on sexual and superficial content, in K-pop you can see many works with psychological, philosophical and social issues (of course, in K-pop there are also works with sexual and superficial content).

From their inception, BTS have been vocal about critiquing the Korean government and its education system in schools. Over time, they evolved to create an imaginative world to convey their narratives. Their stories often revolve around teens struggling with various problems during their puberty years, drawing from personal experiences to create relatable song lyrics that resonate with their fans. These narratives address issues that many of their followers may also be facing.

BTS provided a sanctuary for teenagers who felt being oppressed by society and within their own families. Through their message of self-love and acceptance, the group asked young people to open up and share their stories, no matter what race, color, country or gender they have. As a result, fans found a safe haven in BTS and other similar groups, allowing them to freely express themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination.

However, despite its positive aspects, the K-pop industry also had outcomes. These include fight among fans, fan fiction¹ that may contain superficial and sexual content although there are also high-quality fan fiction works), excessive

¹Fanfiction is a form of creative writing where fans of a specific book TV series, movie, music group, athletes, etc., craft fictional stories inspired the original work. Authors of fanfiction draw on the characters and storylines the source material to create fresh narratives in their own style. While fanfiction traditionally limited to fan magazines, it is now widely accessible on the Internet, alongside various other fan activities.

favoritism, unrealistic and extreme shippings¹, and the promotion of inappropriate role models, among other issues."

- "Why do you believe that the BTS group heavily emphasizes this slogan?

Because, as a South Korean group, BTS is aware the prevalent gender discrimination in Korean and many Asian societies, which often stems from families and manifested in societal norms. Traditionally, sons are favored over daughters, with families and relatives pride having more sons. Sons are typically encouraged and supported but there are fewer families that take pride in having daughters. Recognizing these disparities, BTS aims to challenge these gender stereotypes in Asian societies and fought it with the idea of equality among all humans."

"... However Helma is unaware that they won't get married.

- Don't get married?

Hell no! I want to tell you something, but please don't tell it to my mom. I have read somewhere, they don't plan on getting married because they are gay. I'm not sure what is it, but it seems that members of the group have romantic relationships with each other, this is what some of their videos and fan fictions shows. They display affection that looks like romantic partnerships, they are so close like real couples. Maybe they will marry each other. Don't know, Or it's just fan fiction portraying these relationships, so there's definitely another side to story. However, in principle, they are not supposed to get married, it is against BTS' rules.

- Well, what happens to their feelings and love towards the opposite gender?

They share those feelings with other members and idols, allowing them to express and receive love and affection. It can be said that this is a substitute for marriage.

- In your idea, can this serve as a substitute for one's romantic feelings towards the opposite gender

Well, maybe not 100%, but this is one of the BTS rules. As I said, they adhere and accepted all rules.

- Given these attributions, why do you think girls love BTS so much?

¹ "Shipping" refers to when an individual envisions two people in fictitious relationship, often idealizing them as a perfect couple and linking them together various scenarios. This phenomenon can involve anything from portraying them as close friends to depicting them in romantic or sexual relationships.

Look, at first glance, it may be it is because of their appearance, but I believe there are other things.

- For instance, what other things?

I believe that girls like me like to make decisions for themselves and stay independent rather than dependence on others... you know, BTS gives us the courage to stay strong and independent. Additionally, all people respect for likes kind and compassionate people, BTS is really kind, compassionate, supports all the youth."

As it has been said, by promoting the message that the future belongs to teenagers and young people, BTS provides hope, motivation, and a sense of purpose to their fan. They aim to inspire the youth to become future leaders who can bring about change in society. By instilling hope in teenagers and young people, BTS significantly reduces confusion among this group in navigating family, school, and societal challenges. Additionally, they distinguish themselves from other K-pop and pop groups that do not address the issues faced by teenagers and young people.

2-2- Motivating

Adolescents and young people go through significant changes in their brains, physical bodies, cognitive abilities, emotions, social interactions, cultural influences, and ideological anchors. They often encounter numerous inconsistencies and conflicts in their daily experiences, leading to a sense of criticality in their situation.

Alternatively, teenagers and young individuals who lack significant social experiences may struggle to cope with the numerous inconsistencies and conflicts they face, they may become overwhelmed and perceive their losses and failures as inevitable outcomes for their future.

In such circumstances, if an individual or a group stand up and by offering hope and encouragement, motivate teenagers and young individuals to navigate through their challenges, this help can be deeply appreciated by teenagers and young people. And they will try to count on him/her as a model for to emulate in their own lives.

Analysis of interviews conducted with teenagers and young individuals reveals that fans of the BTS group are influenced by the group members' strong work ethic. Additionally, they indirectly influenced by the themes present in the group's songs and are directly impacted by statements made by the group members.

This shows how they have been influenced by of the BTS group and the Big Hit company's ideas and have made some changes in their life policies. These impacts can be categorized as surface-level impacts in terms of common acceptance and deeper, more profound effects.

Examining the backgrounds of BTS group members reveals that, with the exception of one member who came from a wealthy family, the rest of the members belonged to poor families. After being recruited by the company, they underwent extensive training and received minimal from the company. They all shared accommodation in the same unit and they were required to provide for their own basic needs for living so that they had to work along with their trainings.

Some of the interviewees, when reflecting on the previous life conditions of their favorite role models, mentioned that they looked up to them as examples and found inspiration to endeavor harder to achieve their own dreams.

In their exclusive interviews, 15-year-old Diba, 18-year-old Pooneh, and 21-year-old Mahshid all expressed how they draw inspiration from the challenging backgrounds of the BTS group members.

- "Have these messages in BTS songs had an effect on you?"

I have come to a point where I love myself more now. I wouldn't attribute it solely to BTS songs. Other content I came across on social media also played a big role in influencing me. However, I do acknowledge that BTS has had a meaningful impact on my self-love journey, and let's say their dedication and hard work ethic have inspired me as well."

- "How do the group members motivate you?"

Through their words, actions, music, and their endeavors. I remember the first days of joining the BTS army¹, a friend sent me a video of them in which boys were begging people in the streets Korea, asking them to watch their performance. Despite being ignored by many the time, they continued to push forward. Take a closer look at these seven boys and how they managed to defy all odds to the point where they now aspire to inspire others. They have become the beacon of hope and motivation for individuals across Asia, Europe, and America. Their progress has been so remarkable that they have been called upon to address the United Nations as representatives of Korea. When I witness their hard work and success, I am inspired and remind myself that with effort comes success. More often when I didn't feel well, watched a clip of them, and instantly felt better. Their words often leave me impressed and watching their live stream really made my day. They really leave a lasting impression. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I am alive because of these boys. Here's why."

- "What was the special about the BTS group that caught your attention?"

Look, there are some distinct differences between the music of our country and K-pop that have contributed to the growing number of fans for this genre. Here are a few reasons for this trend. Their lyrics often focus on such as self-love, goal seeking, not being disappointed and not giving up; and this form of meaningfulness and positive energy are what attracts many fans.

The second point is that differences are inherently attractive. K-pop combines' music song, and dance, that has caught the attention people around the world. If you follow the history of music, any form of innovation or has always been appealing and gain a base of fans.

BTS is renowned for their unwavering determination and belief that nothing is impossible for them and this is a shared thing between all groups. They

¹ ARMY, in its original meaning, refers to an army or a group of soldiers, but today in popular culture and in the virtual space, the word ARMY is considered as the name for the fanbase of the music group BTS, which also means BTS's legion

fight tirelessly and do hard work to achieve their goals, they also heavily maneuver on this and teach it to their fans.... They maneuver on 2 things, one is self-love which they prioritize. They believe that if we love ourselves we can obtain any goal, so we can outshine others. And there is nothing in the world more valuable than ourselves, we should never give up in any circumstances and we shouldn't give up when we fail...

Having a goal and fighting for it, no matter the obstacles, you do not give up and relentlessly pursue it, these two things are very prominent themes in this group. The theme of their poems is mostly the same, to have hope, to cultivate hope, love yourself, think positively and don't change yourself for the sake of others and do not without succumbing to external pressures. Don't be lazy, don't make excuses for the features you don't have, for example, if I had the money, I would get there, if I had some external supports, I would get to something, these are all excuses. You didn't want it, so it didn't happen.

For example, a few years ago they made a campaign called Love Yourself and gave an album with the same title. This campaign became bigger and bigger and they promoted this to every country they went to and they promoted this in their songs until UNICEF invited them, they had a speech there, their speech was very good and attractive, since then every year even in During Covid pandemic, they continued to convey their message through video messages or attended in UNICEF in person, and just a few months ago, they had the opportunity to address the United Nations as a representative of the Asian continent. In their speech they talked about the problems that exist in Asia and about this racial discrimination and the differences between Asia, Europe and America."



On another level, the individuals interviewed emphasized that they found profound motivation to address their personal challenges through the meaningful lyrics of BTS songs.

During interviews, 13-year-old Sarina and Negin, as well as 20-year-old Baran, pointed out the impact of the themes founded in the BTS songs on their lives and confirmed that the music has played a significant role in their day-to-day living.

- "You said that BTS often incorporates the theme of self-love in their songs, how this has influenced your own life and self-love?

Not too much overwhelming, but it's highly hopeful and it has a 70% influence in my life, and Whenever I am feeling down or disappointed, I listen to them and it works wonders."

- "What emotions have the formation of a girl group sparked in the audience?

Honestly, I don't know, but what I do know is that when BTS eventually disbands, it is certain that many ARMYs will experience a sense depression. For instance, some of my friends and I are so deeply connected to the group, that If someday we hear that this group is not going to exist anymore, it would feel as though life had lost its meaning to us. (When she was talking, her worries and anxieties about it were apparent in her words and demeanor).

- What roles do they play in your life and in what aspects?

It varies based on what everyone learns from BTS' message. Personally, I need to hear from others that I am beautiful or any other compliment to believe that I am so. I am not that kind of person who loves herself, but BTS became famous with promoting a hashtag like "Love Yourself", and after that, their fans increased steadily.

- Do the words in the poems fill you with motivation and strength?

Yes".

- "Can you please recite the lyrics of your favorite song and explain what feeling you have about it?

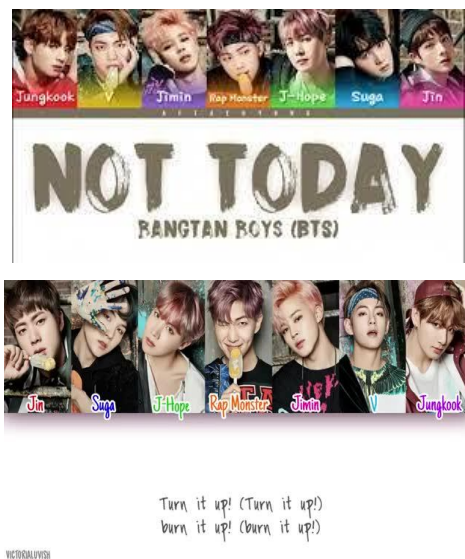
Kookie's "Still With You" and Jimin's "With You" songs, along with "Magic Shop" and "Bulletproof". Kookie covered two songs that I listen when I am very sad; one is "Falling" of Harry Styles and other one is "2 U" of Justin

Bieber¹. The Zero O’Clock holds significant importance to me, and I will share you the lyric. Please ensure that to include it in my interview. I like it very much, because it imply this message that "one can always begin again".

I believe that the song "Life Goes On," released during the COVID, aimed to provide a better feeling for all. It has an excellent lyric, consider this as a part of my talks. "

Several participants have highlighted that upon internalizing the direct messages conveyed by their favorite idols, they have made efforts to align their actions accordingly, resulting in both minor and significant transformations in their daily lives:

"...but it seems that BTS truly worked hard to reach what they want. And every day they tell their fans to improve each day more than the day before. This was one of their messages. That this we strive to show the best version of ourselves, and improve more than yesterday, or as they put it to be 1% better than they were yesterday. They tried to capture this concept a song like "Not Today." Overall, their songs are in this context, and I like their mood and the messages they convey."



¹ David Guetta feat Justin Bieber - 2U

- "Don't you think that being a BTS fan may have consumed too much of your time that could have been allocated to more important priorities?"

No, because I managed to control my time. It wasn't like that to allocate all my time to them in way that ignore my work and life responsibilities. In fact, my involvement with BTS had some positive impacts on my studies. For example I wasn't interested in math at all. But when Namjoon emphasized the importance of studying math, I gained some motivation."

- "What are the concerns they talk about in their poems?"

In a general sense, the concept of their poems is proper and their themes often center on the everyday living and social realities that exist in many societies.

- Can you please give an example about it?

Sure, for example, in some of their poems, they speak about the theme of elders interfering in the decisions that should be taken by youth, imposing their will, pressuring juniors to choose a future path that may not align with their true passions but are based on their desires. And lastly it says that individuals should follow their own desires and others shouldn't dictate what you don't like. Or, the concept of self-confidence [is also highlighted], or another lyric [theme] is the idea of enjoying of journey towards a goal rather than focusing just on the end result, or that the life goes on

- Can you please elaborate on these three aspects, I mean self-confidence, continuing to live and enjoying the path to reach the goal, similar to the previous concept?

In several of their songs, they have talked about self-confidence the most famous of which is Love Yourself, which says that you should love yourself, despite the diverse range of the differences between individuals, for example, one is fat, one is thin, one is tall or one is short, well, all of these characteristics, good or bad, should be accepted and we should love ourselves.

Life Goes On also implies that despite the challenges and difficulties we face, life has its own inherent beauty and it is important to enjoy the moments as much as possible."

Field investigations have revealed that fans being inspired by the hard work ethic demonstrated by the members of the BTS boys. Fans often draw motivation from the themes explored in their songs and the direct messages conveyed by the group members. The impact of this influence varies depending

on the individual fan's interest and engagement level, ranging from low to moderate effectiveness to deeply transformative effects.

During their interviews, 15-year-old Shadi, 16-year-old Sana, and 21-year-old Narges shared how the BTS group has moderately motivated them in various ways.

- "You said you know their dance, right?

Yes perfectly

- How did you learned it?

I learned from their clips. I watch them a lot.

- How long did it take you to learn it?

Almost one or two months, but I was watching a lot.

- How much time you spend watching their videos?

I can say, 5 hours a day.

- What about their language?

To some extent, but it is very difficult (laughs). It is similar to Chinese, but not the same; Chinese is more difficult.

- Do you know how to write in Korean?

No, just listening, I know how to speak it too."

"... I was really feeling aloof, and the kids didn't talk me much; they underestimated me. I discovered an application called Lingbe. Using it one can talk with people from different nationalities. I started calling and conversing individuals in English in front of our family, leaving them speechless. They asked me how you have learned English."

- What's the connection between learning English and BTS?

I said that I plan to go to Korea to pursue my education. One needs to know both English and Korean, I had to learn both. With a little background, I attended language classes and now my language skills are great.

- Well, what does this have to do with BTS??

I learned about Korea through BTS, then during my research, I discovered that Korean universities require proficiency in English and Korean languages. So I improved my English skills with hard work."

- "Did you mentioned that you had an academic failure at that time?

Yes, too much! I explained that I struggled to concentrate on studying and apart that I was never interested reading my books. Additionally, my constant preoccupation with BTS only made the situation worse. As a result, my academic performance declined significantly for a period.

- Many people claim that BTS motivates them to study. Wasn't this correct about you?

Well, no, generally I have never been interested in studying and still I'm not. Since childhood, I have continued my passion for dance. While BTS maybe didn't inspired me to study my books, but they have been a significant influence on my dance journey. I remember once aspired to become a K-pop dancer and improve my skills in the hope of day dancing alongside BTS. Motivation in school might vary from person to person, somehow it depends on their individual interests and passions."

Some interviewees have shared the profound influence that the BTS members and their messages have had on themselves and those within their circles. In her interview, 19-year-old Marzieh shared how she found meaning in her life through her connection with the BTS group. Elnaz, 12-year-old, mentioned fans who had previously struggled with suicidal experience, but after discovering BTS, they were able to distance themselves from those suicidal thoughts. Parinaz, 18, shared a story of someone had three suicide attempts. And lastly, Tarannom, now 18, reveals the harrowing experience of attempting suicide during the most challenging of his teenage years (during which adolescents perceive emotional feelings more intensely than adults. This can be attributed to the peak activity of the brain grey cortex - responsible for experiencing pleasure -and nucleus accumbens). During these years she faced with the pain of his parents' separation when she was 13, the distress caused by his mother's secretive meetings with a stranger, the animosity from his stepmother, and the decision by father to discontinue her education when she was just 15 old. But after getting familiar with the thoughts and messages of BTS, has found a way to break free from the grips of suicidal ideation and embark on a journey self-recovery and rebuilding:

"Before discovering BTS, I often felt like I was born in the wrong place and time. I belonged to the era when Van Gogh sitting on a corner of his room painting his dreams, or to an era when Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson roamed the streets of England looking for criminals and sinners; that era was 17th century, the pre machinery [pre industrial] age. Yet, when I discovered

BTS, they became the reason I felt happy to be alive in this century. Being able to watch them perform on my phone screen or attend concerts brings joy and color to my life, rekindling a sense of meaning that had been missing for a long time."

- "Why do you think you were drawn to BTS and their music?"

Well, I felt good about them and they helped us, the army members, a lot.

- What help they provided to BTS army members?

While I didn't experience this personally, I have heard stories from fellow ARMY members who were in strict family environments or struggling with bad feelings leading to suicidal attempts. BTS along with its symbolic purple light came in to the scene, took our hands and lifted us up. Told us, hold on, you are strong; this was the help from BTS.

She continued that, "I heard from a friend who had three suicide attempts that BTS has given her a newfound reason to live. This is interesting for me too, and shared how she loves herself and has learned that bad feelings and difficulties are in the life of everybody. And, suicide is not a true solution, and her life expectancy has improved. Personally, after discovering BTS, I feel a sense of increased wisdom allowing me to navigate through tough circumstances with greater ease. Never lose myself, never give up, because I am stronger than before"

- "May I ask you a few questions about BTS?"

Sure, feel free to ask.

- How long have you been a fan of BTS since you first discovered them?

To provide some background before answering your question, I would like to share a bit about my personal life. Due to family issues, I wasn't able to study and had to drop out of school, but I hope pursue my education in the future. I have been a fan of BTS for nearly 5 years now. But to explain how I became a fan of BTS, it was a sudden and honestly I don't know what a journey it was. I can remember when I was 13, my parents went through a divorce, during which my mother started visiting a stranger. Meanwhile, my father remarried a woman who subjected me to emotional and physical abuse on a daily basis. Being an only child, constant turmoil took a toll on me, all my grades were 0 of 20 and 1 of 20, and it was a bad living. My father would often scold me and compare me to my friends due my grades, I was totally alone. I rarely left my room during the day except for school. Until a neighbor's daughter recommended a song, she said it will shift completely

your mood and will add you some energy. Accepted her offer and asked her to send me the song to see what it is. When I listened the song, with its meaning and its rhythm conveyed a message that "no one could prevent me from loving myself. After listening that song, googled them and delved into each member of the group, watching their MVs¹, videos, concert performances, and interviews. In just a month or two, I found I am heavily depended to them. How they helped me to get rid of that bad mood, I was changed during this short period of time. I was so encouraged that when my stepmother's abuse intensified, I stood to her face like a firm wall. It was only after that incident that she lost her self-esteem to beat me again, even she became afraid that I would tell my dad about her misconduct. However when I turned 15, exactly a day after my birthday, my father abruptly forbade me from attending school. Burst on tears and was sad, asked myself why he is doing that. Later I find that all of it was because of accusations from my stepmother. She had told my father that she saw me with a group of boys sitting in a café. At that moment, my father expressed, "My honor and dignity do not permit you to continue your education," which led to my decision to escape my grandmother's home. I can recall spending two nights sleeping in the park because my grandmother wasn't home, as I had nowhere else to turn. I was forced to do so. Throughout this challenging period, BTS a constant source of support and inspiration. How can I put it into words, Their messages was that you can do what you want, everything, and it made me feel as though were watching over me like unseen guardian angels. My adolescence was extremely tough, but presence and songs of BTS kept me from getting lost. If there were no BTS, or even if I didn't knew them I might not be here today. There was a moment when I even was thinking about suicide, with their support, I came to understand that if I don't believe in myself, who else will embrace me and help me achieve my dreams? Who should act recklessly, sing and dance with passion? This experience taught me the true essence of life at a young age. In essence, the lyrics of that song echoed words that no one had expressed to me, reigniting my passion and love for life and self. What truly resonated with me and served a driving force to keep going were their words on encouraging self-love.

The melody, lyrics and the positive feeling that BTS resonated with me was new, attractive and refreshing. It felt like they were directly talking to me and their music was composed solely for me, lifted my energy me every time I listened to their songs.

¹ Music Video

- Have you tried introducing BTS to others after discovering them?

When I turned 15, I fled to my grandmother's house and realized the immense hope and support she had given me, pulling me back from the brink of self-destruction. After 15, I made it my mission to share BTS with other girls who, like me, were struggling and feeling disheartened. I wanted them to experience the same motivation and inspiration as I did so that they can go on with their life. I know many people that through BTS' music, their meaningful lyrics, and more than anything else, with their speeches, were able to rebuild themselves and emerge as newfound, resilient individuals."

2-3- increasing self-confidence

In interviews, the surveyed participants highlighted being motivated after encountered with BTS boy group and noted that their self-confidence has significantly increased as a result of this connection.

The self-confidence mentioned by many fans interviewed can be perceived as either false or true self-confidence.

False self-confidence does not lead to any personal growth or lacks any value in this regard, whereas true self-confidence can have a profound impact on one's life.

In an interview, 21-year-old Mohammadreza shared an example of false self-confidence. He mentioned feeling a heightened sense of self-esteem merely styling his hair similar to a member of the BTS group and receiving compliments on the resemblance:

- "How did you feel when others said you looked like one of the BTS members?

It was a great feeling, as they are extremely popular. When people pointed out the resemblance, it boosted my self-confidence, and that felt really good.

- What do you think is the reason behind this surge in self-confidence?

Well, BTS has a massive fan following and well, many are admiring them and follow them, for their appearance. So, when I resemble them and receive such compliments, it raises a sense of self-confidence in me, making me feel good about myself too.

Well, there are many who do the same, look, you know there are many that, well, do not necessarily follow K-pop or have not a liking for Korean groups

and their music and as such, but appreciate their fashion sense and eagerly try to look like them".

Delving into the fans whose self-confidence truly elevates when interacting with the BTS group, we can categorize them into two groups. The first group includes individuals, because of adoration for the group members, create fan pages to showcase their own content as a tribute to their idols in the online realm.

The 15-year-old Pooneh, mentioned in the interview that she uses Google Translate to translate the contents and then shares them with others.

Similarly, 15-year-old, Sahar, reported that she had created a fan page for the group's male members a while back. Additionally, the 14-year-old Golnoosh, stated that she edited pictures of BTS members, created video clips from these pictures, and adding a song to her video edits.

- "What sources do you use for your channel?

I follow the Twitter and Instagram accounts of sasaeng fans, translate their posts using Google Translate, and share this information on my channel. While many of the sasaeng fans are Korean, but I also know a few English and Arabic sasangs."

- "Dear Sahar, have you ever had a fan page?

Yes, when I had just joined the army, I made a channel on WhatsApp for BTS. Its name was BTS World and its members had increased a lot.

- How many members did your fan page have?

A bit more than 100, but at that time I believed that this number was too high.

When I first started the channel, BTS wasn't as popular and not many people appreciated it. However, shortly after I closed my channel, BTS skyrocketed fame, many individuals started their own channels. Around 1,000 people joined these newly-created channels at a time, and all I could think was, "Why it wasn't like that for me?" (laughs). It seemed like luck was never my side. Even when I created the first K-pop channel for the J-Idol group on WhatsApp, it received little to no acceptance. But as soon as I shut down the channel, hundreds of channels emerged, all claim themselves to be first and original J-Idol channel. This is where that luck just isn't on my side.

- Can you explain more about what content you post on your page?

I edit and post the photos of Namjoon and the others or create video clips featuring their photos and songs. I also provide updates on news events related to them, and occasionally make some dubsmaashes.

- How do you create clips?

I create clips using my mobile phone. I have several good applications, especially for editing and making videos that are easy to work with. I find that I am able produce the best clips with this phone.

- Doesn't it mean that you spend three or four hours a day creating content for BTS?

Yes. Sometimes even more time than I expected."

Certainly, when an individual develops a strong attachment to their favorite idols at a young age, and incorporate tasks such as content production or fan page management in their daily routine; it can be expected that this active involvement lead to enhanced learning and technical skills in areas of their life, leading to personal growth and mutual benefit.

In interviews, some fans have highlighted that following the agenda of BTS members, has led them to reconsider their value system, subsequently replenished their self-confidence and experienced a sense of enhanced self-confident.

13-year-old Sarina stated that interacting with BTS has increased her self-confidence. However, 15-year-old Nikoo and 18-year-old Maryam in their statements that they have learned not to perceive occasional setbacks as abnormal or their value be determined solely by their skills. They stressed the importance of their existential worth independent of having or not having skills, individuals should consider their inner values as the true measure of their existential value.

- "Has being a fan of BTS influenced the development of your personality in general?

I don't believe so, but if I'm honest, it has had a little impact.

- What do you mean by "it has had a little impact"?

For instance, after getting known to BTS, I received feedback from others saying that you've improved, you seems to have more self-confident.

- What impact did listening to these songs have on you? Did the messages in their songs directly influence your life or change something about your life?

Yes, for example, prior to becoming a fan, I had never encountered the message of self-love. After discovering BTS, I gained an understanding of importance of this concept and find a better understanding about my own issues. Despite my imperfections and flaws, I still struggle to fully love myself, though I have made progress in this aspect, but I can't tell that I am fully self-confident. For example few years ago I was like that if I saw myself in a mirror I would curse myself because of my appearance. But after listening this message, it influenced me, to love my style, love my body, be open to my personality. But, well, it had impacted my friends –that are fan of BTS – too. Highly impacted some of them, and one can easily notice the heightened level of their self-confident... or for instance, for a while, I used to feel sad without any apparent reason or over trivial matters, mistakenly believing that it indicated weakness on my part. It wasn't correct at all. This was wrong and I noticed this mistake when I heard a member of BTS, Suga, expressed in a program (whose name I cannot recall) that it is ok and normal to feel down, even without a specific cause. This is natural and it has no problem. And we must remain strong in the midst of challenges, imperfections and in dealing with difficult circumstances. It is a part of life that good people may face with series of horrible events. In is a part of life, It is natural for humans to feel sadness and shed tears at times, and this is perfectly okay and does not signify weakness. This particular message left a profound impact on me".

- "It means that love yourself slogan, has boosted your self-confidence?

Yes, my mother enrolled me in various classes since childhood, such as drawing, guitar, French, English, volleyball, and Photoshop. I had a busy attending classes daily, and for a long time, I believed my worth and usefulness stemmed from these pursuits. If I ever missed a class due to not feeling well, I would feel I am lazy and would hate myself. However, BTS helped me understand that worth and usefulness of individuals is not solely based on our skills. My skills or assets are not going to describe me and my existence. Above all, our inherent worth comes from being alive, breathing, and having a soul and consciousness. Even without all the skills I currently possess, I should still recognize my value because we are not robots but are complex human beings."

2-4- Helping to improve people's bad mood

"Let me share something with you, we as adolescents are going through a tough phase [of our life]. At times, we feel down and low; but, you know, there is no specific reason for it, it seems we just go mad. I've seen with my bare eyes my classmates recounting how they were in a gloomy state where nothing seemed to lift their spirits until they discovered BTS. A significant aspect to consider, they say, is that many BTS fans are children under the age 15. It is because these individuals can have fun with this group, it really can alleviate their sadness, this is why it is so cherished by all of its ARMYs." (Parinaz, 18 year old).

One thing that fans who were interviewed highlighted was how BTS boys, along with their company, have contributed to lifting their spirits during difficult times. The group's impact on their well-being can be attributed to three key factors: providing a platform for psychological and emotional discharge, shifting their perspectives on values, and enhancing mental resilience of audiences.

Regarding first aspect, BTS boys have offered an avenue for emotional and psychological release through their dynamic live concerts. These concerts serve as a safe space for fans who are under societal and personal pressures to channel and ease their internal struggles. In her interview, 18-year-old Maryam expresses how she and other fans find solace in the opportunity provided by BTS for catharsis:

"I personally enjoy the uplifting atmosphere of BTS performances the most. When I watch their concerts on YouTube, I feel a sense of empowerment. The grandeur their dances and performances is truly captivating and evokes excitement. As we are in Iran we have to just watch its video, imagine what feeling have ARMYs who are witnessing a live performance. I think they put a lot of effort into perfecting each dance and performance, which sets them apart from other singers.

- Does this mean that watching BTS's performances helps you release your excitement?

Somehow yes. I feel happy whenever I watch their performances. Back in high school, during exam periods, I used to motivate myself setting a goal to complete a study session by a certain time in order to myself with watching a BTS concert at night. It always lifted my spirits."

On a deeper level, BTS has significantly impacted the mental well-being of their fans by reshaping their value systems and offering guidance that fosters personal growth and mental resilience.

In their interviews, 14-year-old Gelareh and 21-year-old Narges have both acknowledged a shift in their value criterion due to BTS's influence. Narges shared in her interview that BTS has had such a profound impact on her that she divides her life into two parts: before and after becoming a BTS fan:

"I believe that nearly 90% of ARMYs have experienced a phase of distress or dab feelings during adolescence or puberty. It is during this period that they discovered BTS, and their mood significantly improved.

Rather than instructing us on how to get on with others, BTS teaches self-love, self-care, and the art of living, which is incredibly effective. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to share this, but there was a time in my youth when I would cry myself to sleep feeling miserable, no one was aware of it. However, BTS, not just through their songs emphasizes that you should go on with your life but also in everything, in their runs, programs, and interviews, offer us hope and talk about their love for us. This has had a profound positive effect on me and helped me feel better."

- "How did you feel when you thought about them or spent time with them?"

During those days when there wasn't much rambunctious around BTS didn't, I did feel good with them. Whenever I felt down, their songs would bring me to tears, and in my mind, I would talk to them. Some may think it's crazy, but I always felt their presence beside me. This connection helped alleviate my stress in various situations, such as at parties or school and I would feel good dancing to their music. From dawn to dusk I would immerse myself in their world, and loved them more than anyone in the world, even more than my parents. During youth hood was a difficult times, BTS was my force, preventing me from making reckless and silly choices. They attached me to the life. Each day, my love for deepened, my attire was like them and room filled with BTS memorabilia. In conversations, BTS became my sole topic of discussion, as if they were my only this I could talk about. They became my personality. At school and in the classroom, I gained a reputation as the most ardent ARMY. Let alone that my behavior attracted many of friends to the ARMY.

- What do you mean they were your personality?

Look, as soon as the kids saw me at school, they remembered BTS. Over time I noticed that my manner of speaking, my hobbies, my behavior and attire and even my fashion sense began to mirror their's, particularly that of Suga, as I was biased towards him among the BTS members.

At that time, my life was divided into two distinct periods: before BTS and after. The period before seems hazy to me, I can't recall what used to give me a good feeling, what used to bring me joy or motivation. But everything after discovering BTS is shining in my memory. During those years, I felt lost, and nothing had greater impact on me than a music band with who can lift your mood. They rebuilt me. This is why I say they became my personality".

14-year-old Hadith and 18-year-old Taranom, in their interview statements, have highlighted a positive impact on their mental resilience due to association with the BTS group. Taranom described the depth of BTS's effectiveness by mentioning how she was drawn from darkness to the light:

- "You mentioned that after watching their performances and dances, you are drawn to the lyrics of BTS songs because you find them hopeful. Could you elaborate on what specific aspects of these lyrics give you a sense of promise and hope?

You know, it seems they have a music for every mood and emotions. Whether you're feeling sad, going through a conflict with friends, you feel being betrayed, experiencing depression, or you think no one loves you. [There's a BTS song for every situation]. Personally, when I listen their music, I find solace in the fact that I'm not alone in these emotions, and it helps me navigate through those tough emotions more easily.

- Can you share one of these songs that you love it so much?

One piece of the song of Life Goes On, which I like very much, is as follows:

Like an echo in the forest
The day will come back around
As if nothing happened
Yeah, life goes on
Like an arrow in the blue sky
Another day flying by (we will progress)
On my pillow, on my table

Yeah, life goes on

Like this again

I remember listening to this particular song when I was feeling really down after I messed up an exam and my family blaming me all the time. The music and lyrics made me feel relief. It was after this experience that my admiration for BTS grew even more."

- "In what aspects of your personal life do you believe BTS has made the most profound impact?

It has been impactful in all aspects. First and foremost, it has significantly improved my emotional well-being. Since discovering BTS, I have found I feel I am happier than before. Second, they have empowered me to make big decisions at a young age. such as standing up for myself when I was being mistreated by my stepmother The lyrics of "Fire" resonated with me, saying you are young, crush it, defend yourself, they can't understand you, so you understand yourself. I used to have a more callous moral outlook. But I have become much kinder. I now understand that one cannot find a solution in conflict and irrational behavior for challenging situations. Encountering BTS a time when I needed such positive changes, resorting to my dreams and abilities, I have constructed a protective space around me with their support. I feel save in it. Moreover, my interactions with others greatly improved socially. In the past, I had a mindset of constantly seeking validation from others, expecting that in school, wedding parties, celebrations or any [gathering] people to say hello, initiate conversations or friendships with me. I felt inferior and hesitated to approach others first. However, after discovering BTS, perspective shifted significantly. I now initiate interactions and ask to be friend, when I see one is down, I will try to make them happy, making eye contact more than before, have the courage that when I have a feeling toward a person, stay in front of her or his face and explain my feeling. I can easily share my issues with people, discuss it. By interacting with others in this new way, I have noticed that people are more attentive and appreciative of me. The negative self-perception I once had evaporated, leading me from a place of darkness to one of light."

2-5- Relaxation

To provide motivation, enhance self-confidence, and uplift people's moods, BTS emphasizes the importance of relaxation in their agenda. Many of

interviews shows that fans have identified these qualities in BTS group, recognizing them as role models for their supportive and positive influence.

Analyzing the responses collected regarding relaxation, it becomes clear that the relaxation provided by the BTS group can be categorized into distinct types. These categories include relaxation from the soothing voice of specific members, relaxation in coping with personal and societal of individuals, relaxation during the stressful period of the Covid pandemic, relaxation focused on overcoming upcoming struggles—illustrated by the members' own journeys—and euphoric relaxation transports individuals into a trance-like state, offering the person a temporary escape from the surrounding tension.

In her interview, 18-year-old Maryam says that she discovers solace in the most straightforward manner by listening to Taehyung's voice.

- "Maryam do you think BTS have songs for every mood?

Yes, their range of songs is quite diverse. You feeling happy, they have vibrant song, you feel romantic, they have a lot of romantic songs, you feel disappointed, they have songs to instill hope, you feel sad, they have comforting songs, or even you feel weakness, they have songs like Not Today to enhance your mood.



- When you feel sad and listen to their songs, do you find that it helps improve your mood?

Yes, definitely. I find solace in their music, especially when I listen to Taehyung's voice. During the stressful entrance exam period, I had less time to keep up with their activities, but in my free moments listening to their songs provided me with the feeling that I can pursue my job with greater strength."

At a higher level, the interviewees have expressed that BTS' content serves as a source of comfort and solace amidst the challenges and struggles of their everyday lives, serving as a remedy for their troubles.

During an interview, 13-year-old Negin revealed that in response to the cell phone ban at school, she finds solace by closing her eyes and reviewing the lyrics of BTS songs.

21-year-old Mohammadreza also mentioned that not only does he find solace in listening to BTS songs as he falls asleep, but also during challenging moments of work, the content of BTS' songs brings him a sense of peace.

Finally, in his interview, 20-year-old Massoud emphasizes that the content shared by BTS brings him peace as the lyric offers a sense of hope for a brighter future and gives him the hope to overcome challenges:

- "In what situations do you find yourself using the phrase "love yourself"?

Honestly, I don't really have any good feelings during school because there always seems to be someone who has a problem with me, and blame me because of my appearance or academic performance weaknesses. When I reach a point where I can no longer tolerate the situation and overwhelmed, as I don't have a mobile phone or anything there, I find solace in the BTS videos and dialogues that I have memorized. I sit quietly on a bench, close my eyes, and immerse myself in their dreams, recalling moments that have brought me joy. This practice helps me to calm down.

- Can you please tell me how did you memorized all those videos?

I memorized the dialogues. I have memorized many of their songs. There are various YouTube channels that teach how to do it. I listen to them, listen them, listen them repeatedly and so that I can memorize them. When you repeat songs, you learn the way of speaking, the way of uttering the words. This is how you can memorize them."

- "Apart from listening to music while working, during which activities do you listen to music?

For instance, if you go to a library setting, you find that one out of ten individuals is listening to Korean music, not rap or alike. Take the song "Promise" of Jimin, for example. If someone listens to this [track], he find a sense of peace. A part of it is in English and another part is in Korean, Even if a person understands nothing of either languages, the music still resonates with him and brings a feeling of solace.

I mentioned the library specifically because I've seen many individuals listening to such songs while engrossed in a book. I find it wonderful how a serene "Promise" creates a peaceful ambiance.

- Do you mean that it increase their concentration?

I believe it varies for each individual. Personally, I have sleeping problems, and upon observing others who do so, who read books along with listening music, I decided it a try to see how is effective. To my surprise, I found it quite beneficial. Especially at nights, I read book along with listening to with music. At least I can say it was significantly effective for me. Even when my work becomes chaotic and situations are less than ideal, again I find solace in listening to music. It really calms me, enabling me to relax and to think about the situation and what I need to do with a clearer mind."

- "What impact do the meaning of the lyrics of BTS songs have on their fans?

It is quiet effective. Each of the fans may have one of these problems or concerns. It teaches patience and effort to reach the goal. They invite everyone to calm down and with their songs teach fans how to overcome problems.

- Can you please provide an example?

I myself am an example. While I was aware that if furthering my education it can lead to a brighter future than this, I made the choice to enter the job market to support my sisters and brothers so they can continue their education and to ease the financial burden on my parents. BTS was aware of the struggles of people like me, offering sympathy and solace to get rid of this problem. And encouraged me to remain at peace with my decision; They reminded me to focus on the noble behind my actions. As a result, I was able to send my sisters to university, easing their financial burdens and allowing my father to work fewer hours and take time off to rest some days."

During separate interviews, 15-year-old Diba and 20-year-old Masoud discussed the challenging circumstances brought about by the global covid pandemic. They believe that songs by BTS, such as "Permission to Dance," spreads the seeds of hope in the heart. These songs inspire confidence and renewed optimism, empowering people to bravely go through the Covid-19 challenges they face.

"The song "Permission To Dance" was released sometime after the pandemic, carrying a notably positive vibe. And it really made you feel

better. For example the music video, featuring energetic dancing and joy scenes, depicted a sense of shared happiness. Additionally, the song was referring to the newspaper in Jimin's hand which was displaying a date marking the end of the pandemic. Or in BTS's new album, the song "Run BTS!" it says in order to live fully, I should not put excessive pressure on myself and instead I should go along with the flow of the life and in, find joy in it, and seek vibe in it. While it doesn't mean that we forget the seriousness of life (laughs)."

- "How did BTS's activities impact fans during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

Many BTS fans, who were predominantly students, found solace in BTS's music during the COVID-19 pandemic as they were confined to their homes. Listening to their songs provided them encouragement and comfort to those mourning the loss of dear ones due to the virus. BTS's unwavering support for their fans was evident during this. During which the world was grappling with fear and despair because of Coive-19. The group's music served as a beacon of hope for many fans."

In a distinct level, the surveyed population also mentioned that members of the BTS group, through designing their own experiences or sharing similar models effectively demonstrate to their audience that they have faced similar challenges in the past. By breaking through of this challenges they could grab their success. This, in turn, helps the audience to maintain hope for a brighter future, find solace in the present moment, and navigate through challenging obstacles:

"Even sad music has the power to connect with the audience through its deep, perhaps emotional and sad aspects. It can evoke feelings that the listeners feel is hearing their inner words. To feel that is not alone and there many people who suffer such pains and are willing to express it.

For example, the solo music of BTS member Min Yoongi²-also known as Agust D- like The Last³ focuses on mental health issues and intellectual challenges that any adolescent or young people may face and make them feel alone, unheard, and misunderstood. However, listening to this music can provide hope

¹ Run BTS is a South Korean internet reality show featuring the members of the group BTS. In each episode, the group members participate in various games and activities, complete different challenges, and sometimes undertake secret missions to ultimately receive a reward or punishment.

² Min Yoongi, known by the stage names Suga and August D, is a South Korean rapper, songwriter and music producer.

³ The song "The Last" is featured on the mixtape album Suga (Min Yoongi) BTS rapper, (with the stage name of Agust D), which was released in 2016. The lyrics of this song is about struggles and obstacles that the rapper faced before achieving success.

for individuals. "My favorite singer has overcome this intellectual challenge, so can I," (Reihaneh, 21-year-old).

- In Hollywood, there are singers like Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez who are known for both singing and dancing simultaneously. Can you explain the difference between these artists and K-pop groups?

The difference is here that K-pop is free from any depression and does not promote depression like singers from other countries. In the K-pop world there was never a depression style, songs are generally upbeat and dance. BTS group came forth and produced counter depression songs and asked for self-love, I like it that their music conveys a sense of optimism and doesn't convey any depression, making listeners feel even if they are not an ARMY, need to dance upon hearing the music.

- Well, what about their sad songs?

There are also slower-paced, emotionally-rich songs in K-pop but they do not convey a message of depression or hopelessness. Instead they in songs like "Spring Day" show that difficult times will eventually come to an end and will be replaced by better days (15-year-old Sahar).

"...BTS really has very strong songs. The lyrics, melody and everything of their songs are beautiful and strong. I really feel a sense of identification with their songs.

- Can you think of a particular BTS song that you strongly identify with?

Fake love

- What is this song about?

Love.



- Is it okay to ask why do you feel a sense of identification with this song?

This song focuses on fake love and relationships. I had feelings for someone and talked about my feeling with him, but he kindly rejected me. Listening to this song always brings back my feeling toward that person. However, their music isn't just about evoking sadness or recalling bitter memories.

Many times, their songs uplift me and have motivated me (Pooneh, 18 years old).

Kowsar, 25-year-old, on a different level, talks about her ecstatic peace. She has noted that shared a deeply personal experience of finding solace and comfort in the music of the BTS group. He describes that in her tough period of teenage, BTS songs acted as a form of support, like a caretaker, offering her hope for a brighter future. Kowsar due to this ecstatic peace confided in her friends that the anticipation of attending a BTS concert at the end the month was a significant factor keeping him from suicide.

- Additionally, in your idea how being fan of BTS has impacted your life?

Definitely a positive effect! I am saying this based on my current point of view, I mean, nowadays I do not love them that much anymore, nor follow any news about them. But as an outside observer who looks at those years of adolescent and being a fan of BTS, or was a K-poper or anything else, as life can be tough sometimes, I needed to have something like that in my life. Needed to love anyone who cares about me. I mean you can clearly see they give their time to help you, whether with his sympathy or by offering positive advises, or anything else. Loving such a thing that gives you a sense of being cared can be incredibly important during challenging times.

- Uh huh.

And I'm sure many people may have the same sentiment that, even if they have distanced themselves now, they acknowledge they have needed BTS in actually this is why they have been attracted to it at the first place. The void for was felt and they have fill that place with something that have a limited consequences. While the K-pop industry may be considered as a dirty industry, everything deemed filthy in nature cannot necessarily have a negative impact on you, it is not going to have a negative impact on you. Also, there is not a detrimental good or bad thing. Its benefits were higher for me. For example, may argue that the 5-6h of time I spent for BTS, is converted to money in the company pocket, or converted to the money in the pocket of the singer. Nonetheless, if BTS were absent from my life, it's conceivable that I would be in a radically different place. This may sound

incomprehensible to outsider, but the absence of BTS could have significantly altered my trajectory.

- What does it mean?

It means that there are many people who... I'm sure if other interviews are conducted with fans of BTS or groups with activities like them... will say that they owe their lives to that [or this] artist and it is not a lie. Because when a person has suicidal thoughts, he desperately needs to establish such a safe relationship, relationship with something. It is a thing that has the least amount of harm for him and feels that it gives him hope for life. I remember joking at that time... because I didn't realize that I had suicidal thoughts at all... but at that time, I said this as a joke that one of the reasons I'm not killing myself now is that BTS has a concert at the end of this month."

2-6- Creating happiness

In their statements some participants have referred to the happy and joyful category of the BTS group.

The recent concept of happiness can be divided into two categories: inappropriate and morbid happiness and normal happiness.

In inappropriate instances of happiness, some individuals may portray a smile of satisfaction on their face by mocking the members of the BTS group or insulting them, leading to laughter from those around them. This behavior fall under the category of morbid happiness.

Normal instances of happiness provide conditions for individuals to laugh together or being pleasantly surprised by circumstances that bring them joy, even if such happiness is temporal.

In his interview Mohsen, 22-year-old, exposes an example of inappropriate happiness:

"... because Jin had to enlist in the military service, I cursed the Korean government as much as you want (laughter).

- Why?

Because I don't want Jin to leave the group.

- If Jin leaves the group for personal reasons, will you curse him too?

I'm will leave him a comment, and like the others, throw in some spicy curses.

- Why don't you ask Jin directly about the reason behind leaving the group or to ask him to stay in the group?

My friends see my comment and laugh. I curse him under his posts, say silly things, the same things that many Iranians do.

- Are your friends laughing at your cheeky comments or at the request for Jin to stay in the group?

No, they laugh at my silly posts.

The concept of normal happiness can be further subdivided into the joy derived from humor, jokes, and similar sources, as well as the happiness stemming from thrilling and varied experiences.

During their interviews, 13-year-old Sarina and Negin, as well as 19-year-old Marzieh, mentioned laughing at the jokes of the group members and shows like Run BTS.

- Why are you breaking up with a friend just because she don't like BTS?

Because that person clearly does not want to be a friend of mine, and I no have desire to be friend with someone who cannot accept me for who I am and does not respect my interests.

- What characteristic of BTS made them your favorite group in K-pop?

Honestly, not just BTS, but also I consider Blackpink as my favorite group, I favor them equally. When it comes to music, in general, BTS's songs are aligned more with my taste mood; it was more attractive to me. I love Blackpink as they were the first K-pop group I discovered, also because of their style and tone, they place in my heart. In general, I find it difficult to choose between these two groups. There isn't a clear reason why I lean towards BTS. It's as if they appeared out of the blue and captured my attention, but I can't pinpoint a specific reason why. Ultimately, it all comes down personal taste, and for me, BTS just appealed the most.

- Does this imply that BTS didn't have any particular standout features or superiority over other K-pop groups that led to your preference?

If I'm being honest, their fame, records, and views wasn't really important to me. I was suddenly drawn to BTS and somehow ended up falling in love with everything about them for no particular reason.

- Is it possible to fall in love with something, but that thing does not have any special quality?

When I say there wasn't a particular reason, I don't mean there was no reason at all, but rather that it wasn't a major one. I was captivated by their positive energy and the joy they bring, which became the foundation for my preference for them."

When I say there wasn't a specific reason, I don't mean there was no reason at all, but rather that it wasn't a major one. I was drawn to their wackiness; they give positive energy and brings joy to me (laughs)."

- Is there anything else that attracted you?

It usually falls into two categories, one is the same sentence repeating in my mind or I think about the fun and amusing videos they create. You know, for example, it is not possible to ask an ARMY if he[she]¹ has watched the Run of BTS or not and [s]he says no. It's impossible, all ARMYs watched all its parts 10 times, because it's very interesting and funny for us.

- ... If we proceed with a bit more caution, in a video they say "Does Yoon-Gi today," do you believe that watching videos, looking at photos, and listening to BTS songs for you as a true fan, acts like a sedative and make you feel better?

Uhummm, its really true., they make us feel good. There was a time when I was feeling unwell, I used to smoke, but cigarettes didn't have the same effect as BTS. Ok, cigarettes may calm you down, but these abnormal (laughing) Korean boys make me laugh and laughter is a medicine for every incurable pain, what their laughter does to a person, is more powerful than a hundred painkillers morphine.

- (Laughing) Why abnormal?

Just kidding, don't take it too seriously, it's just that they are so adorable and playful and do silly things.

Fariba, a 46-year-old woman, shared in an interview that the energetic performances of the BTS has drawn her and her daughter were drawn to the group. Because the exciting performances of this group have reduced the usual monotony veiling on her life.

- How long have you have known BTS?

Almost 2 years ago when my daughter find them introduced to BTS me.

¹ In English, the gender is clearly indicated in the third-person singular pronouns, showing whether it refers to a male, female, or object. But in Persian, "او" (pronounced "oo") refers to both genders and can be used to refer to people or objects.

- Do both of you and your daughter follow BTS?

Yes, I am even more dedicated to following BTS than my daughter these days.

- How?

I am strongly interested in this group too, and... well, my daughter is also influenced by them. I am concerned about her, which motivates me keep to a close eye on the group.

- Well, when did your daughter discovered them and how did she introduce you to this group?

My daughter has a passion for dancing and has learned various dance styles including Arabic and Azeri. And as she went to zumba dance class, they did a group dance there. She told me that there was a song that she liked. The instructor told that it was one of BTS songs. That song marked the beginning of me and my daughter's journey into the world of BTS.

- Do you remember the name of the song?

Yes, it was Magic Shop.

- Why did you like this song?

We both continue to love the song because it is a happy and energetic song. In times of sadness and depression, a bit of joy is essential. I personally listen happy songs a lot, and I like my daughter to do the same. BTS song is also a happy one.

21-year-old Mohammadreza brings up a crucial point in his interview. He notes that while the happiness derived from the humor and performances of the BTS may be temporary, it does not necessarily ensure long-term or stable inner happiness for individuals.

- How long does the happiness and sense of well-being obtained from listening to last? I mean, Is it temporary, or does it have a lasting effect?

No, it's not like that it has a long-lasting effect, you know, at least for me it wasn't permanent and long-term, but it distracts me from my problems a little."

2-7- Adjust of effectiveness over time

It was mentioned earlier about the brain changes of the teenager, in which, due to the lack of simultaneous cognitive and emotional development of the teenager's brain, they simply become a prisoner of their emotions in their daily life and show strong emotional reactions.

But, over time, as the brain undergoes a pruning process where unused connections are eliminated, the thickness of the gray matter decreases, and the nucleus accumb, also known as the pleasure center of the brain, shrinks as well. At the same time of development of the cognitive functions of the adolescent brain, they gain better control over their extreme emotional reactions. By exercising control over the cognitive centers, young individuals are able to have more reasonable reactions.

Based on the feedback from the interviewed teenagers and young people, it appears while they initially showed strong and intense support for the BTS group, over time, they have toned down this support and approached it more logically. This change in behavior can be attributed to the gradual thinning of the gray cortex in the brain, and a decreased emotional intensity of teenagers and increased regulation by the cognitive centers over their emotional responses.

The remarks made by 13-year-old Sarina and 15-year-old Niko highlight the overshadowing of logic over the initial extreme behavior of these fans.

- "Dear Sarina, you mentioned that you used to hold strong prejudices in favor of Blackpink but not anymore. Do you also hold similar prejudices about BTS?"

Yes, I do, but now I try to avoid it because it worsens my nerves, whether it's about Blackpink or BTS. And, aside of being a fan of both Blackpink and BTS, I am a fan of five other fandoms. Although they are not as big as these two. If I were to argue about every fandom, I would be drained of all my energy. Previously, as a new fan, I used to get in arguments with haters¹ more, but now I make a conscious effort to avoid getting too. If I do engage, I try to approach it rationally. For example, I would say that their choice to wear makeup is none of your business or my taste and style also has nothing to do with you; it doesn't hurt you and not everyone has to be the same."

¹ Hate means to have a strong dislike or aversion, and "hater" refers to a person who hates someone or something, being the opposite of a supporter (fan).

- "Have you ever attempted to repeat BTS songs or practice K-pop dance routines?"

When it comes to the dances, I believe it would be amazing to learn them as it would give me a good prestige among my friends. In general, it is considered impressive within BTS fan groups if someone has memorized their dance style. I did covering, both dance cover and song covers. I did so not just because of BTS, I enjoy making covers as I am interested in singing and these covers serve as a form of exercise.

Regarding dance, I want to add this that before discovering BTS, I was only familiar with Iranian dance styles. However, after becoming a fan of the group, I was introduced to hip-hop and K dance genres. As my K-pop friends knew how to dance, I found myself with a sense of obligation that as I am a fan so I have to learn and perform their choreography. It almost felt like a duty at times, and not being to perform a piece of their choreography well would leave me feeling disappointed and inadequate. At some point, my feeling shifted, and I told myself that I enjoy dancing not just because I was a fan of BTS, but simply because I loved dancing in general. Now, I don't dance the BTS style, unless I'm hanging up with my friends and we want to perform one of their dance together. Nowadays, I exercise at home with various music pieces."

As stated earlier, some researchers tend to attribute adolescent changes solely to brain-based findings, but it is important to acknowledge that various factors influence adolescent development. In addition to considering changes, aspects such as physical, psychological, social, cultural, ideological, and political factors all play a role in shaping adolescent behavior. For example, the 17-year-old Ehsan attributed transformation in his approach solely to his admiration of BTS but this single causal explanation may not capture the complexity of adolescent behavioral adjustments over time.

- "Has being a fan of BTS influenced your moral values as well?"

Yes, it has had a significant influence. Previously, I was impatient and quick to react, but through BTS, I have learned the value of patience. It have also instilled in me the importance of respecting parents, elders, and professors, as well as showing compassion towards those in need and the sick.

- Can you please share an example?

For example, previously, I would engage in frequent arguments with my classmates over minor issues, but now I am not like that. Instead of reacting

impulsively to insults, I now and choose not to escalate the situation. I aim to promote calmness and resolve disagreements peacefully."

In her interview, 15-year-old Diba shared her experience of initially wanting to emulate idols and feeling insecure about her nose or appearance not aligning with theirs. However, with time and especially with her mother's guidance, she reached a realization to accept that every feature of her face has its own unique beauty and instead of striving to resemble idols, she learned the importance of embracing her life authentically.

- "So there were times when you felt pressured to look like idols, right?

Yes, I have experienced this too. For example, there was a time when I was younger and I used to question why my nose wasn't smaller or I had same question for other parts of my body. However, now, I have reached to a level of self-love that no longer think like that.

- In the beginning, when - as you said- you felt extremely the need to look like idols, what was going through your mind?

For example, I wanted to be as slim like them, or to dress like idols, or to be able to dance and sing like them.

- How did it make you feel when you were comparing yourself to idols or BTS?

Back in those days, even though I wasn't into K-pop, social media had a way to press everyone to compare herself to others. However, I didn't feel the need to something, say a surgery on my appearance. My mom used to reassure me, saying, "You are beautiful, don't be silly," (laughter) and would question why you are comparing yourself to them, when they have their own unique beauty and you have your own unique beauty too. While I would occasionally go crazy and think that I am ugly, but it wasn't always like that. Or I would also compare myself to others in terms of dance and other skills, but my mom used to tell me that those performers had dedicated years to training, practicing, and exercising to reach the level where they can dance and sing this way. Or she emphasized that you are sitting in your room and wondering why you are not like them? Obviously when you don't do hard work you cannot be like them. Here I gradually came to this realization that their ability to dance or singing was not a gift, reaching to this level of expertise was the result of dedication and hard work.

- You mentioned that you found the physical appearances of BTS members and K-pop idols attractive. Have you ever felt the desire to look like them?

Look, I have made efforts in terms of diet and exercise, not specifically to look like idols or lose weight, but about desire to look like BTS members, I wasn't extremely preoccupied about this that oh my eyes should be like this, my belly should look like that, or things like that, but generally I want to be comfortable and satisfied with my own body.

When I first discovered K-Pop, I used to extremely think about issues such as "oh my nose too big; it should be smaller, or my eyes should be more elongated", but as I've matured, appreciating my body as it is...

- Dear Diba, have you ever thought about or wanted to become an idol?

Yes, I have thought about it. Initially, I was thinking about it more, because of their amazing concerts, performances, and dedicated fan base. Their captivating dances, songs, concepts of their music videos, trendy fashion, and their makeup styles really caught my attention. I loved to be like them from bottom of my heart and wanted to emulate those behaviors and have many how love me. Even now, I still enjoy imagining all the cool things they do, I love it, but all of it is a fantasy nothing more, in a way that I want do anything special. Overall, I have a strong passion for signing."

As I continue to grow intellectually, I prefer to focus on my own life do not think about being an idol career as it is incredibly challenging to reach that level.

14-year-old Gelareh and 19-year-old Mahlagha also in a revolutionary approach, addressed the community in their interviews.

Reflecting on some social determinants, Gelareh humbly acknowledged his previous perspective as naive. Mahlagha also has mentioned that, although initially was into immigrating to Korea, but as she grew up, realized the fact not placing oneself at the forefront of the universe. Furthermore, according to the principals of capitalism, she came to this conclusion that the K-Pop and similar groups, prioritize generating profits for the capitalist system rather than addressing deeper societal issues and treatment of humanity sorrows

"In my perspective, the desire to live there solely because of idols or BTS seems somewhat naive. I often ponder on the idea that perhaps one day admiration for BTS may wane, not to hate them, but just loses me interest. Observing my parents and other elders, their love toward others is not in a

way that they consistently seek out opportunities to be with them or follow them every moment.

As one matures and their preferences evolve, holding on to the desire to move and live there may come across as naive. I don't want to say I out of desire to meet them, I have come to terms with reality that it may not happen, because you know, our constraints are numerous.

- Do you know someone who aspire to reside in Korea and live there due to their admiration for BTS or K-pop?

For instance, there are some ARMYs who are still young, immature and impressionable, boasting that yes I want go to Korea and meet the band. Their aspirations and lusts often revolve around attending fan signings¹, concerts, and even visiting the company members. Such fans harbor seemingly frivolous fantasies about the band. Additionally, some individuals are drawn to learning their language, or solely because group members are living in Korea they want to emigrate and live there.

- Can you please explain constraints that that made you believe that you will never be able to visit BTS?

In our Islamic country, BTS is banned to visit us. While Saudi Arabia permitted BTS to hold a concert there, Iran has not extended the same invitation restriction. One reason is this fact that Iran do not allow us to do such a thing so, if we are not reach enough to attend a concert, or emigrate or have a short trip to Korea, we cannot visit the BTS and also they cannot see us. Another factor is that Iran is not as high-profile and eye catching country as England or United States, which are regions where BTS frequently interacts with fans and remember their fans. Although BTS often addresses Muslim and Iranian fans, we represent a very small portion of their global following. Thirdly, there are religious considerations in Islam that forbids things like listening foreign music, following them as they consider them as bad guys who may do unacceptable behaviors. But I should say, this is not the Islam but the country is like this. Given these issues I think prospect of meeting BTS remains a dream and will not become a reality.

- How does it feel when you think that meeting BTS is a dream that cannot become a reality?

¹ A fan sign event is similar to meeting an idol, but it is a more intimate affair. During a fan sign, fans have the opportunity to get the star's autograph on their latest album, as well as interact with them and take photographs.

You know, I almost got used to the fact that BTS are only some people who can be seen from behind the phone, but when you think about it a lot and see that there are many people who can see them, go to a fan sign several times, go to a concert several times, or see, for example they hold a concert in the same neighboring country like Qatar, that for example, many of them are also religious and one of the members of BTS has visited there, it is very pressuring (laughs). I mean, it feels bad to see these things and I can't describe it and I don't know what to say at all. If I want to express the feeling that, for example, I am far from the one who I want to see, well, ... it is for example, like that you want to see him with all your heart and hug him like everyone else and get his autograph, but you can't.

- What leads you to believe that fans aspiring to live in Korea due to K-pop idols are driven by mere desire or craving?

Well, look, I think given the circumstances for us who are living here, it seems highly improbable for most of us, except for reach guys, to travel to Korea and contact with the members BTS and see them. So it is useless to think about that, and when there are subtitles [on videos] what is the necessity of learning the Korean language. Perhaps it is just my view that I think cultivating this skill demands a significant level of dedication, patience, and at the same time is useless."

- "Can you please tell me what field study you are pursuing and elaborate on how the group of the [BTS] boys has assisted you in finding your goal?

I am not currently enrolled in university, but I have studied music at the conservatory. It is better to say that the group of boys deepened my passion for music and served as source of motivation for me. During those times I had a big desire to emigrate and pursue studies in Korea. However, as I matured, my idealized and romanticized perception of this dream faded, and I became more aware of the downsides of Korean culture. This realization caused the idol I had built to shatter.

- What do you mean by saying the idol that you have built?

At that time, I used to say Korea is same as our country. As we have some bigotry here, there is some there too. Instead there are more facilities. However, over time, I became more aware of their culture, those racial prejudice and other issues. These negative aspects overshadowed my previous views.

- During this period, have you ever desired to go to Korea, as a emigration destination?

Yes, for a period of two years my absolute goal was to study composition in Korea. However, later I find that it is very very very difficult than that I have ever imagined. Moreover, my dreams about of Korea underwent a significant shift, leading me to confront the stark reality that this country might not be the most viable or healthy option for emigration.

- What do you mean when you say that Korea is not a healthy country?

From an emigrant perspective, the cost of living is relatively high, income and expenses are not balanced and the economic conditions do not seem conducive to seamless integration. Additionally or generally, in the cultural aspect, they emphasize on showing respect toward elders but I am completely against such a notion that you should respect in any manner to someone just because [he or she] was born earlier than you. You should not respect everyone equally, not just because they are older than you. You should not idolize this being older ... and also they are racist and excessively focus on appearance. Ummm, they interfere a lot in other's life, or they are very indifferent to each other and they are jealous, and you can't easily trust anyone there. It is true that every country has its mix of good and bad, but there are some rigid cultural norms in Korea. Ummm, they have a guard toward foreigners, and also, ummm, all of this stories have soured my feeling toward this country as a place that I like to visit someday but no to live there. Because it is an eastern country and still many things are considered as taboos. Or for example they still show a negative stance against LGBTQ. And many things are not still collateralized. This issue brought me to a point that don't want to enter this country as an immigrant and to live there, because a big part of their cultural norms are still like what is in Iran and maybe even worse...

- You are no longer a K-Poper, right?

No, it's been almost a year since I stopped actively keeping up with K-pop.

- Can you please explain the reason?

My mindset and life have shifted, outgrow the youthful fantasies. I have come to realize that the concept of "fandome" meaning idolization, willy-nilly instills seeds of prejudice within oneself.

- What do you mean when you say that I outgrow the youthful fantasies, how did it happen?

Look, when you're young, I mean, when you are too young, you have this approach that, "what?", perceive yourself as at the center of the world, believing that everything revolves around you. It seems everything depends on you. However, as you grow, you come to realize that it is not true and you are not the center of the world, and not even you are in a remote part of this world, that if you no longer exist, except for few people around you, no one will be concerned with your absence, or nothing will happen to them, nothing special happens in the world. Person has more ambitions during adolescent as it seems [like a roaring river] still didn't joined to the vast ocean. Because in the for example lower age you are a river, or a lake or at most a sea, as you grow, your world grows too. But in a glance you find yourself in a big ocean with a numerous fishes around you that are bigger and more powerful than you. They can easily eat you easily overpower you, violate you right or do anything bad toward you. This teaches you that you are not the center of the world. And that your fantasy illusion about world, that everything will go well, is not fully aligned with reality. I have always the notion that hard work is the key to success. While we are not taught fully about concept of luck. We do not know that a part of the things is not in our control, you may put your 100% for something, but the gain is sometime zero, and this may be not your fault, decisions made by others or unforeseeable chain of circumstances may impact your life and outcomes of your endeavors, so here it doesn't matter if you do your best efforts or not, even if you have put much more efforts, the result and the gain was still nothing.

- What do you mean by market music and capitalist music and what exactly are these genres?

Look, in general, the Korean music industry, particularly K-pop, places a emphasis on appearance. This means if you have a unique voice or strong dance skills not be enough to secure a contract with a company if you do not have a good looking body. So you should do too much exercise or undergo some surgeries to reach to those ideals or get closer to those standards. It is just at this stage that they may consider accepting you and enrolling you as a trainee. K-pop is an industry that places a significant emphasis on appearance, which is why they invest more heavily in their music videos compared to Western artists. Because they want their music videos to be attractive enough, the vibrant use of color and engaging visuals can attract audiences. This is how it brings you into the story, you become immersed in the latest news and events, ... there are a chain of events you cannot follow little by little, if you get involved, you will be totally involved, if you can pull yourself out of it, you will be totally out of its chains. You can't have it

bit by bit, it is highly addictive. As I mentioned before, the way of doing it, using various methods, using programs and festivals and like that, obviously it is connected to capitalism. All of it revolve around money, all of these thing happen so that some can make money, and naturally, and the more money that is accumulated, the better for the capitalist system.

The primary objective of capitalism is to maximize profit and expand its reach, in a way that if it dominated on the world. It seems that no matter what we do, capitalism reach is inescapable. It seems no one cares about it, its influence is evident in music [industry]. Some of music videos have a commercial success no matter of the voice or, what to say, artistic skills of the person. From the time that platforms like TikTok introduced, songs featuring one cool line, and reproduce that one to gain repetitive hooks and viral such music. If you take the time to listen to whole of such a music, you will quickly realize its lack of substance, with only a few standout phrases. This trend reflects the industrialization of music, where profitability often takes precedence over artistic merit. Capitalism and the market-driven music industry, means that songs lacking in musical depth are often prioritized for their marketability, using gimmicks to attract attention and boost the artist's fame and make some profits for him.

- So, you exhibited unintentional prejudice?

Yes, it wasn't necessarily unknowingly... Unintentionally, some times I've come to recognize that this stemmed from prejudice, some times I've come to an understand that a certain behavior of mine is stemmed from prejudice, so wanted to reduce it. However, even the concept of being a fan can harbor elements of prejudice, you can't say it is not a result of prejudice. For example I now say that I am deeply appreciate Lana, her music, and the unique perspectives she instills in her music, the sheer of ideas she nurtures in her mind. But I am not her fan anymore, I refrain from idolizing her. She is imperfect, she has many issues, and thousands of other things, of us. Whole of my life is not devoted to Lana, yes, I may listen to her music extensively and find solace in it, I enjoy her music a lot, but no, Lana is not the sole focus of my life, no."

From Mahlagha's perspective, it is evident that her thinking has evolved from a focus on concrete objective thinking to a more abstract thinking. Through her understanding of the capitalist system, she has come to recognize its fundamental basis on profit maxim, where everything, including entities like K-pop groups that claim to advocate for youth empowerment, can be subject to exploitation of this system. Rather than genuinely addressing the issues facing

by youth and communities, these entities may prioritize profit generation in alignment with the interests of their company and the capitalist system.

2-8- Imaginary love

- "Do you have a friend who is particularly sensitive about dating of the BTS group and reacts strongly to this issue?

Yes, most of my friends are quite like that and always talk about this that what if their "base" being in relationship or dates with someone else.

Whenever news breaks out about a member dating someone, they quickly get mad and asking is it real? Or not? Is it real? Does he love her? This often leads to judgments about the poor partner involved. For example, if she matches Taehyung, why this or that part of her body is like that, she is a bagger, and so on." (Banfesheh, 18 years old).

In his theory, Freud highlights that while children initially exhibit interest in the parent of the opposite sex, during puberty, teenagers shift their focus and attraction towards significant others of the opposite sex in society and the global community. This implies that girls become more attentive to male singers, actors, athletes, and other prominent social figures, while boys look for famous female artists, athletes, and social figures and both show their passion and love toward such figures in their behaviors.

If the recent concept of love, often observed in various human societies during adolescence and early adulthood, is as "imaginary love", it can be said that during this form of love teenagers and young individuals experience the romantic and passionate emotions towards famous social figures in their immediate or global community. In this form of affection, the expressions and manifestations of love are no different from traditional passionate relationships.

In this form of love, teenagers or young individuals express their admiration and affection toward an artistic, sports, or social figure, aspiring to establish a relation them and often viewing them as a potential romantic partner or future spouse of the opposite sex.

Losing touch with reason (e.g., fantasizing about reaching a desired individual who may live on the other side of the world), becoming immersed in unrealistic dreams, engaging in symbolic romantic gestures and acts of devotion (such as getting tattoos of beloved's name), experiencing feelings of anger and jealousy towards potential rivals, and lastly displaying protective behavior to safeguard the lover against external rivals are common characteristics observed in imaginary love.

If in this part we limit the discussion to the BTS context, it is evident that many extremist fans of idols, will be particularly young women. They are fans of the idols, and may develop romantic feelings towards a specific member. And often create imaginary romantic scenarios their favorite idol.

The participants in the study frequently described how their admiration for the members of BTS led to developing strong feelings of love for them. They spoke about fantasizing their ideal relationships with the idols and stayed alive with their memories.

The portrayal of emotions and sentiments of individuals in love with a celebrity often takes the form of storytelling, a common practice among fans of BTS -and other celebrities. This may involve engaging in symbolic behaviors towards the beloved one, striving to protect them, as well as experiencing feelings of loss and emotional turmoil for instance, if a person experiences the loss of their beloved (e.g., if she/he dating someone else or gets married), it can trigger negative emotions such as hatred, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide due to emotional distress. These are common occurrences among passionate fans.

During her interview, 25-year-old Kowsar highlighted the difference between American and Eastern television series. She observed that in American shows, love develops quickly and often results in instant closeness between the characters, whereas in Korean series, the process of falling in love is depicted as a gradual journey. This aspect of Korean dramas, which may feature idols as part of the cast, appeals to teenagers and young adults who are intrigued by the nuanced exploration of romantic emotions, making them more popular than American shows in this demographic.

"...what stands out in Iranian television series is that you can't see anything as a scale of everyday life. Many scenes are censored, with characters waking up while she is fully dressed in hijab or wakes up with full make up. Or... they are overly unreal. As a teenager of thirteen or fourteen, I found Iranian series to be incredulous and ridiculous. I was always telling myself that they are far removed from the reality of my own life. I do not get out of my bed like that."

- uh huh.

"As a teenager back then, feelings of romance would naturally arise, such as falling in love with someone, and so on. However, we couldn't see such things in the Iranian television series. How to put it in word, our romantic serials were often superficial and unloving, focused on portraying themes of

sadness and despair. This trend was particularly prevalent during that time. Even today, Iranian dramas are still same as before. They are not attractive enough. Are disconnected from reality. Although they now try to be connected more with reality, but are still far from it. It doesn't satisfy you, it is not what you desire, it goes through the censors. But, in the contrary, Korean takes such an item. While Korean TV may also have censorship more than American series, but for me as a teenager, the romantic relationships, engaging plots, and appealing storylines presented in Korean dramas provided me with a sense of fulfillment and the possibility of experiencing similar emotions in real life.

- Uhummm... Given the relatively lower level of censorship in Korean series and also in Western productions, what factors influenced your preference for Eastern content over Western shows?

I think it was because of the romantic part of the Korean series I found it more prevalent compared to American series.

- Ahuh!

You know, for example, I found most of American series I was watching were culturally distant and disconnected from our culture. It was far away from what we were able to experience. At least for me as a 13-14 year old teen, and for the cultural context I was in. However, Korean dramas resonated more with as they felt closer to reality and were more relatable in terms of the life I was living. Most of the American series I used to watch were far away from our culture. It was far from what we might experience. At least for me, thirteen, fourteen years old and in the cultural context that I was in. Korean dramas stood out for being more in tune with everyday life and experiences that felt closer to my reality compared to Iranian and American shows."

In one of her remarks, Kowsar discussed the concept of fantasy love and highlighted the low age of BTS fans, attributing their interest in romantic relationships and emotional experiences to their age and natural inclination towards love.

- "There was a survey that revealed that nearly 20% of K-pop fans are aged over thirty. This 20% portion is too high in the overall Kpop fanbase worldwide.

Yes...

"But, a significant percentage of them are teenagers, something about a half of it. As I can't remember the statistics I can't give the exact number. But I can say a half or a bit higher than it, are teenagers. Being a teen simply leads

to a situation that unconsciously his mental belief is toward romanticization of those mental communications with that artist, I mean, she wants that artist to be solely her own. Even if she knows that he is not her own. But when one grows up and the teenage years fade away, and is still fan of the K-pop bands, this idealization may fade, making it easier for them to see that person gets married. Teenagers, in particular, in particular, may struggle with this as they might feel that the idol no longer cares about them as fans."

In her interview, 14-year-old Gelareh described how the idols' behaviour, such as acting like gentlemen, intensifies the attraction for fan girls triggers an emotional turmoil, resulting in the formation of imaginary love.

- "Do idols influence fans to believe that they should marry our particular idols?

Well, idols portray themselves as gentlemen, then fans create scenarios in their minds about the idols.

- What do you mean when you say they portray themselves as gentlemen? For example, idols are seen as the favorite type for girls due to their fashion style, their gestures during singing, their flirtatious behavior, and their mannerisms.

- What are the attributes of Jungkook that make you admire him to such a significant extent?

Based on my observations of him, he embodies my ideal type in various aspects. He is exceptional in athlete and have a unique physique.

Furthermore as music plays a significant role as one of my hobbies, a singer's voice holds great, and Jungkook's voice captivates me. Additionally, his distinct personality and genuine care for his fans, the ARMYs, are qualities that deeply admire. Oh gosh, I can't convey all of his virtues with my words."

In his interview, 21-year-old Mohammad Reza - although according to research literature, men usually act more rationally than women - speaking from a male perspective about girls dreams, describes their imaginative love as illusory.

- "Mohammad Reza, what is the root cause of this prejudice??"

Well, look, K-pop members are idols and idol refers to the K-pop singers. In fact, Idols are not allowed to get married or have girlfriends, and so on. Generally they are heavily restricted in this regard.

As a result, some fans, mostly those who are already biased, may develop some tiny illusions about their favorite (laughter), such as considering them

their boyfriends. For example some of fans may truly live with just a picture of them, collecting merchandise like bags, clothes, notebooks, posters, anything. These illusions can lead to prejudices, this is how they may feel that he is their boyfriend and show a strong prejudice in favor of him. They can't resist any criticism and react strongly when anyone criticizes them."

With the rise of imaginative love, many young girls envision romantic scenarios like getting married with their favorite idols or just being with him as a girlfriend. 20-old Sheida, 15-year-old Niko, and 16-year-old Rukhsareh shared their fantasies about marrying their beloved idols as follows

- "How about you? Do you also have fantasies and stories about BTS members involving yourself?

Not at all.

- Is there any special idol, someone who you are a big fan of?

"Yes, I used to be a big fan of Luhan from EXO. I even dreamed of him being my future husband," (she giggles shyly)

"Some Sasungfans are very dangerous creatures, for example in platforms like TikTok and Instagram, often creating videos that they have been in a secret marriage with Jungkook, or someone else boldly declared that I am in love with Taehyung and someday we will marry. No one has the right to have any biased toward Taehyung. Although, Taehyung has many fans, surprising how some fans try to convince everyone that just herself is the ultimate fan of that idol. Is it impossible?"

- "Are you saying that a number of ARMYs have imagined themselves marrying BTS members?

Yeah.

- What are your thoughts on this matter?

I feel a tinge of jealousy when some ARMYs claim that I love Taehyung. Taehyung is my husband. You have no right to love him. Some of ARMYs are like this, and I get really nervous with their words. Why you think you should be their only fan, I mean, and it is really ridiculous.

- Have you ever witnessed or come across such behavior in your circle or online comments?

For instance, during a chat in Rubika, I noticed that some new users are like this. One of my friends even used Taehyung's profile picture and received a message from a girl claiming Taehyung as her 'husband' and demanding to delete it immediately or I will deport you."

Some interviewees who have experienced imaginary love also shared that they turned to story-writing as a way express the overwhelming emotions they experienced during their imaginary love.

These story writings has been reported in both purely emotional forms and pornographic expressions of personal whims and fancies. 18-year-old Raha and 21-old Mohammad Reza have shared examples of these varied approaches to story-writing in respective interviews:

"...Well, fiction has its name [because of its imagined aspects]. It is an imaginative realm where characters are real. They are limitless. For instance, you can create a story where you ship Jimin with Jungkook and write about their adventures. While the characters themselves are real, the narrative is entirely up to your imagination and this is you who shape the things. And yes, like books, this has different genres too. And from many years ago, this form of fiction, hmmm, not just because of K-pop but fan fiction as a whole has gained recognition globally. And is accepted as a book genre, a book you read on your mobile phone. It has stemmed toward K-pop too, it encompasses various genres, topics, and different ships, and so on.

- Have you tried writing fiction stories yet?

Not to publish it somewhere. However, I do occasionally. I write few lines. But it's not about everyone (laughs). There's one particular idol whom I love him a lot. Even though he do not do any special (laughs), I am kind of a person that when I speak about him, I talk with my whole heart (laughs). Most of the fiction that I imagine or jot down revolves around him.

- What kind of fiction do you write?

Well, for example (laughs) love stories.

- Mohammadreza, what is your idea about fanfictions?

I haven't seen much, but it seems that it mostly girls who write them. I don't think there is any special thought behind it. They do it for entertainment and to give themselves a sense of hope, generally it is for such purposes.

- You said that it is more prevalent among girls, any special reason do you see for it?

Well, look, many of these fictions revolve around themes of love and fantasizing about romantic scenarios with group members. They are just seven boys, this might explain why there are more female writers. It is largely similar to this. For example [in the storylines] there is a girl somewhere without informing Taehyung, then Taehyung messages her "where are you?", she

responds with her location. Taehyung, replies "stay there, I'm on my way!" (Laughs). This kind of stories.

- Well, as far as I understand, fanfictions do not have a very specific content, right?

It doesn't have any special content at all (laughs). That's why I don't follow it myself because seems like a waste of time. And, you see, most of them make the story dramatic and pornographic, which is why I feel it lacks substance. For example, one of my friends, Baran, is very sensitive about these things. I remember a day when we were out together, she is reach, but actually not her, her father is reach. She, for example wears custom-sew and print designs on her clothes. Once, she printed a photo of Taehyung on her t-shirt, someone confronted her, asked her what are these things you watch and buy their cloths! In response, she escalated it into a fight; and also she posts plenty of these stories (fanfics) on his Instagram page. Personally, I am not a fan of these as they seem to be products of their imagination, but it's something they love."

- What do you think motivates them to invest their time in writing these stories?

Well, overall, everyone may have their own individual goals. Personally, when I asked my friend - Baran, as I have mentioned her before- about it, she admitted that she is a devoted fan. She was really going to start a fight for no reason. And she enjoys creating drama for her own amusement. Some girls has a crush on this boy. This is why they start writing imaginative stories, like claiming that Taehyung visited their house last night and we did something ugly (laughs). However, each person may have their own reasons."

Displaying romantic emotions extends beyond just writing romantic stories; it can also manifest in other forms, such as making symbolic gestures like getting a tattoo of a beloved one's name or face, or expressing romantic sentiments with slogans like "love until death." In their separate interviews, 21-year-old Narges and 20-year-old Sheida shared examples of these romantic behaviors as follows.

- "How did you feel about Suga and how much of an impact did he have on you?

Ummm, everyone knew that Suga was my boyfriend. No one could dare to disrespect him. They had no right to even express interest in Suga. In school, if I saw someone becoming an army, I would work on her mind so that she wouldn't choose Suga as her bias¹. If they made the wrong choice, they

¹ The person who is more favored by fans than other members of the group is called the Bias

would face with me. I have even got a tattoo of Suga name on my chest back then."

"Personally, I believe there are two groups of BTS fans. One group appreciates the style of their music, or likes Korean language and music, or love their attire and the cheerful atmosphere. The other group is drawn to them based on their words, opinions, and personalities."

As I travel back and forth on the subway, I often see many people watching BTS concerts on their phones. For instance, I overheard a conversation between two girls, where one of them jokingly said on the phone, "If I was dead, please call JiKooke and declare my love for him, tell him I was ready to sacrifice my life or him, but I couldn't have him with me." Oh, gosh! What is happening to us! This level of imagination was quite surprising.

Personally, my fantasies take a different direction. I would like to see two individuals in person and have them as my fab friends, one is Sogand and other one is Lady Gaga."

One significant aspect fictional love is the theme of protecting and nurturing one's affection for the desired idol or celebrity. These idols and celebrities are well known in the society, so obviously they are not only attractive for love seeking fans but also to others who are drawn to their appearance, gestures, and demeanor. As a result, every love seeking individual inevitably faces competition from other admirers, which need to be mindful about them.

Once the fantasy of imaginative love has taken root and aspirations toward the celebrity figure have begun in the mind of girls, an important issue that sometimes arises is the news of the idol celebrity getting married. This may trigger concerns about potential rivals within the fan base who potentially portray itself as a candidate to enter into a relationship or even marry the idol or celebrity whom one admires.

Hence, and first of all, that idol should not get married. Because his marriage can shatter the dreams of romantic fan girls who fantasized about being with him and hoped for mutual affection.

In interviews, 16-year-old Rokhsareh, 13-year-old Negin, and 15-year-old Diba expressed their desire for idol to remain single. They believe that if the idol stays single, it keep their hopes alive. Furthermore, they feel even it is impossible to possess that idol, at least that there will be no other person who could have a romantic relationship with him, and this minimizes feelings of jealousy.

"Usually they during concerts, they emotionally call the Armys, expressing genuine appreciation and gratitude from the depths of their hearts."

And on several occasions, he did so and asked, "Will you promise to always be here? We truly have the best fans in world. Uh, you are the brightest stars in my world" he says something like this, and somehow loudly shout, "Armys, we love you no matter where you are in the world." (she sent me the video).

- And it seems that you think you believe their words, right?

Yep, really. I feel that someone genuinely cares about me.

- Yeah, and how did you feel when they were gearing up to enlist in the military service and their contract was up for renewal?

Umm. I felt sad. The thought of them disbanding consumed me, wondering what I would do without them. It brought me to tears.

- So you just recently recovered from the depression you experienced regarding them?

Yes. Currently they have announced that, because of military service, as we have the enrolled in the service, we will not be enlisting in the army in 2027 either. We are with you. The exact timing of enlistment remains uncertain, but for now they have assured fans that they will be there.

- Oh, for now, it is implicit that it has been postponed for two years.

Somehow yes. However, the exact date and details are still pending. Eventually, they will go, will tie the knot and begin married life.

- Does this mean that their marriage will be very nerve-wracking If they do get married, will the group inevitably disband?

Yes. One of the Army girls have told the Jungkook that being a fan is challenging because we are aware that one day you will get married and leave us behind. In response, Jungkook have told her that being an idol is difficult too. As we know one day I would shatter the hearts of millions butterflies.

- But look, why when he gets married, there is such a feeling that he has left his fans behind?

Because now he has someone who adores him more than his fans, loves him, hugs him, and kisses him. They will make babies. That's why the fans feel a little lonelier, because it seems Jungkook has found someone he loves more than us.

- I'm thinking that he is somehow flirting when he says I am going to break the hearts of so many butterflies; it gives you a feeling that he is a special person, so I should be by his side?

This is how he talks to Army like now Armies are in love with you or for example one of the members says: I am the moon and Army are my stars. This is how they talk to the army. They talk to each other with a lot of love and affection, and for example, if he leave and get married, he will share his wife a hundred times better than this words, this is why Army will definitely be upset. They get a feeling of being empty."

- "How does restricting their ability to date someone of the opposite sex benefit the company?

If they date girls, their fan base may decrease.

- How does idols being single contribute to increasing their fan base?

I still don't understand either why fans expect their idols to be single when a couple of idols who were dating received high levels of hits.

- They don't mention in their comments what exactly makes them popular?

I think it's because in the fangirl community for boy bands, having a wife and child shatters their fantasies, and that's why [they prefer idols to be single].

- Is it to preserve their fantasies that forbid them from dating the opposite sex?

Yes, it would restrict the idol's autonomy and ability to make choices."

- "Why do companies, fans, and or those haters are strongly sensitive toward idols dating rumors?

Many fans have intense adoration for their idols and are possessive toward him. And even when they know that they can't have him, they expect that their idols should remain single forever and should not touch or even date with any girl. They become upset when they see their idols with someone else and this can lead negative hits and backlash. They cannot accept the idea of their idol being with his favorite girl."

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that some love seeking girls may be hesitant to start a virtual communication, such as sending emails, to their lover. They may fear if their message reach to him, receive negative reactions. So, in order to protect their imaginative love, they may do not accept the risk of sending a message to their love, despite the uncertainty of their response. In a

similar vein, a 25-year-old Shabnam provided an anecdote to illustrate this point:

- "What were your fantasies regarding the series' hero?

(She gets embarrassed and chuckles) In my dreams, I would myself chase him out and eventually find him. This is actually the first time I've shared this with anyone. It was like that when I see him, my heart would race and would feel exhilarated, to the point where I wanted to go to Korea and find him. I loved him to the point that his image dominated my thoughts to the extent that didn't even want to engage with any other boys. One of my main motivations to go to Korea was that I wanted meet him in any way possible and to converse and hopefully establish a friendship or relationship with him. This is why I followed numerous Instagram accounts. One belonged to an Iranian-Korean couples who moved back and forth to Korea and Iran every six months. They have a cute baby. I yearned for a similar future for myself. Please don't tease me (laughs).

- How old was you when did you first experience these strong feelings of love and feelings?

As I have told before, it started when I was 14, but it lasted till 18; that was a time I purchased their serial.

- Did you ever attempt to reach out to that person via email or social media?

No. I wasn't into these things at all.

- Do you think that you didn't follow up because you were afraid that the beautiful and imaginary picture you created in your mind would be ruined by your e-mail being neglected and unanswered?

Well, yes¹. Well, after all, many people probably email him, if one can even find his email address! Therefore, it feels more disappointing to make an attempt and not receive a response than to hold onto this fantasy in my mind.

- Now that you reflect on that times, do you feel content with the amount of time and effort you invested in it?

Yes, I am not unhappy at all. Not at all. In fact, if I could go back in time, I would make the same choice again and do not say I have waste my time. I believe my feelings were sincere. I have no regrets about dedicating seven or eight years of my life to it.

- What achievement this follow-up brought to you?

¹ Her tone and diminishing voice shows her sadness

Well, I am confident that it will bring me success in the future.

- What is your plan for the future?

(Pauses) Well, my plan is to go to Korea and become a successful person there.

- So, is that plan to go to Korea still on your mind?

Yeah. One hundred percent."

In another segment of her interview, Shabnam discussed the prejudice and jealousy experienced by love seeking girls with their significant others, as followed:

- "Can you please explain more about this feeling?

Look, many of the BTS fans that I know, such as my sister's friends and the younger ones, express sentiments like "I wouldn't want anyone to have relationship with that particular member of the group." It's almost as if they take them as their boyfriends and exhibit jealous and biased behavior.

However, I don't feel that way. My admiration for them is the way that I admire their values. For example such as dedication to the people, they care about people, and they are honest in doing so, and unlike many other groups who prioritize hypocrisy."

Striving to defend the beloved against potential rivals is a big concern that love seeking girls may experience, prompting them to take protective measures to keep potential competitors away from their beloved.

In her interview, 46-year-old Fariba shared her daughter's jealousy towards a potential rival. 14-year-old Gelareh talked about manipulating popular image in the videos she shares with others. Additionally, 15-year Shadi mentioned in her interview how her friends tease each other about not getting close to their crushes.

- "Do you yourself want girls to join to the group?

I don't mind, because I don't pay much attention to these things, and I don't care about the emotional dimension, but for my daughter, it's completely different, and even once we had a conversation about it, she was completely against it and said, it's going to destroy the group and I no longer support the band.

- Did she explained why involving girls in the group would lead her to cease support for the group?

She always says it makes me love them less, because she is straightforward, she admits she is jealous. And this envy towards those girls causes her to lose interest in following the group."

- "In general, what are the attributions and characteristics of these fanatical fans that you mentioned?

For instance, they exhibit very childish behaviors such as claiming a particular member as "theirs" or referring to a member as "my husband." Moreover, tend to scribble videos¹ of members and circulate them among their peers.

- I don't quite grasp the reason behind scribbling out the videos of the members. Could you elaborate on that?

For instance, these ARMYs or K-pop fans, in general, create video montages of their favorite idols and share them with others as part of fangirling activities. They are possessive over these videos and do not want anyone to have their favorite video of their beloved idol. Therefore, they would scribe out the video and write their own name on it as a way of claiming ownership and as the proverb says, but not as the proverb says, they have created this words to prevent from skiing and sharing it."

- "Did you mention that there have been conflicts among your friends over those idols?

Oh, absolutely, a lot of arguments happen. One claims ownership of one idol, says he is my crush, which often leads to arguments and fights. They indulge fantasies about marriages and even having children with them and other related topics.

- Are these conflicts serious or just playful banter?

Sometimes it's in jest, but often it's serious. It seems a banter with underlying seriousness. It is so. They genuinely hold these beliefs but express them a joking manner to avoid intense arguments. But they are serious."

Subsequently, some of the participants mentioned that if their light-hearted warnings do not deter their friends from pursuing their crushes, they might resort to aggressive by using harsh language or even engaging in physical altercations. This behavior is by their desire to ensure that their friends do not encroach upon their admiration for their idols:

¹ This means that they distort the video in the desired parts so that, for example, the person of interest is not clearly seen in the video, and new romantic rivals are not found for the individual.

"From my perspective, it seems that girls are more drawn to BTS while boys tend to prefer Blackpink. There appears to be a preference for the opposite gender.

- In your case, do you prefer BTS because they are a boy group?

Well, one reason could be this. Maybe that's the primary reason.

- Do you regard idols as potential husband; for instance, do you envision marrying them?

Who doesn't fantasize about that, but yes it's ridiculous to think about it (laughs).

- Why is it ridiculous?

First of all, they might not even get married, and if they do, they would likely marry someone who is similarly successful and well-known.

- Do your friends also wish to marry these idols?

Yes, many girls desire it, my friend too.

- Do they compete with each other over who will marry the idols?

Sometimes, they engage in arguments and disputes. Their biases frequently argue in the comments on Instagram, sometimes resorting to profanity. If haters criticize them, all of them will reply with severe backlash. Once, one individual came across a video Instagram where Angelina Jolie mentioned that her daughter admires Jungkook and suggested they would make a good couple. Since that incident, since then this person holds a grudge against Angelina Jolie and her daughter.

- Does that mean she is jealous of Angelina Jolie's daughter potentially marrying Jungkook?

Yes, she was extremely upset that day, whenever we tried to reason with her, she would become even more agitated. It's as if Jungkook is on his way to claim her as his own wife!" (Reihaneh, 15 years old).

- "What did your friends think about them?

My friends who were fans of the group were deeply devoted to them. Each one claimed a member as their crush or husband, and were fervent supporters. They would often argue with each other, staking claim on this one or another or shouting that do not talk about mine. Such biases were prevalent among them" (Shaghayegh, 19 years old).

- "You mentioned that started some challenges with your friends. Could you elaborate the nature of these disagreements?

For instance, Dorsa is in love Namjoon, while I am deeply attached to Jimin, and this causes competition between us. On couple of occasions, Fatemeh and Dorsa were teased at school leading to the intervention of our teachers and principal. In our class chat room also discuss them. However, there is a girl in our class who is not into these things and dismisses us as crazy, resulting in us distancing ourselves from her. Dorsa goes as far as choosing Namjoon and BTS for her profile, or mimicking their hairstyles. I think Dorsa is displeasing. I, along with Fatemeh, am considering ways to tickle her obsession. It is cool to bother her, Meanwhile, another friend, Helma, is fully immersed in fantasy, saying that she desires to marry Jimin and attend his concert with him (Laughs), without realizing the impracticality of her aspirations"(Reihaneh, 15 years old).

If the person whom the girls have feelings for enters into a relationship with another girl, the love seeking girls may feel that they have been betrayed.

- "Well, you were saying that you were upset about others leaving comments for Yoongi, didn't this kind of look bother you?
Yes, it was, definitely.

I truly felt like I belonged to Yoongi until 2015. He was always on my mind. I would go on dates with him, make plans, flirt, and kiss him. At night, before I fell asleep, I would think about him until I drifted off. I always lost my focus. I was distracted. In school, I didn't pay attention to what the teacher was saying at all. When someone talked to me, I would only half understand until 2015, when suddenly a news broke that Suga was dating a girl.

You can't believe! It felt like my boyfriend had cheated on me. How do boys and girls break up in the real world, and one or both sides get emotionally hurt? I felt exactly that way. I remember that for two weeks after the news, I cried every night. I got sick. I didn't eat. I skipped school for a few days. I was really in a bad place. Because until that day, I thought Yoongi would always remain single, and I could forever think of him as belonging to me in my mind. After two weeks, I managed to pull myself together a bit. I started to look at BTS news a little because for those two weeks, I was running away from BTS and didn't want to hear any new news at all. But it wasn't like after two weeks I said, 'Okay, it's all over, and I'm fine now.' No, I really wasn't. I was just a bit calmer. A month passed, and when my monthly report card came, my grades had dropped significantly because I didn't have the nerves to study at all.

During that time, our school had a system where students with low grades were required to visit the counseling office to discuss their issues.

Reluctantly, I went there too. Mrs. Rezaei, our counselor, was compassionate and understanding. Although I initially hesitated to share my concerns, after facing her persistent I eventually confided that there is some issue that made me loss my concentration. Didn't talked about the real cuse at the first session, but promised to be more honest with her and share my problem and seek out her help, this is how I decided to speak out. Upon speaking about it, she seemed a bit buzzy, but she listened attentively and then talked to me a lot, and provided me with exercises to redirect my focus away from the upsetting situation. Most importantly, she helped me realize as a person, Suga is entitled to pursue relationships regardless of my feelings and is not going to stay single. This was a fact that I accepted at that moment. Somehow I had to accept, there was no other choice and I was not going to kill myself [it wasn't a solution]. Even though I never wanted Suga to date anyone, but, well, there was no other choice and I should have come up with it. Of course, I was a child then, I was not so extreme when I grew up. But I was very annoyed at that time.

- How long did this type of behavior persist, and did your feelings diminish or intensify over time?

It was continuous. I say it wasn't like that finding that Suga has a girlfriend, my enthusiasm decreases or my extreme interest disappear. However, as time went on, I learned that the girl was not actually Suga's real girlfriend, and the whole relationship seemed to be a fabricated story aimed at capturing public attention. Despite this, I always had a nagging feeling about that supposed relationship. When I eventually found out that Suga was no longer involved with that girl, I celebrated by treating my friend to lunch. I felt overjoyed. For a whole year, I kept telling myself that I was ready for Suga to date a boy, but never a girl. I used to think, 'If that girl is not with me, then I hope she won't be with any other girl.' The thought of Suga being in a relationship with another girl pained me deeply."

In interviews, 19-year-old Marzieh and 18-year-old Raha have expressed that love seeking fans may feel a sense defeat upon realizing that their fictional love affair has come to an end. This loss lead to feelings of resentment towards the idol:

- "If you were to hear news of marriage or dating of your bias or other boys, how would you react to such situation?

I would feel happy, although there might be a tinge of jealousy (laughs).

- As someone familiar with fandom culture, what types of reactions do you think will be triggered among fandoms in response to such news?

Ummm, many of us in the fandom would love to see the boys start to make their own families and have adorable children, but there are also those who view the boys solely as their own husbands (laughs); they might feel upset, cancel everything, or curse him or even get angry (laughs). Who knows, they might become a hater in the future."

- "Have any of your friends experienced feeling upset or distressed upon hearing news of their favorite idol dating someone?

Oh, yes (laughs). I had a friend who was a Blackpink fan (member of Blink) and also a big EXO fan. When news broke about Jennie and Kai from EXO dating, she gently kissed Black Pink and put it aside. And totally became a hater.

- How did she feel?

(laughs) She was completely in the "my oppa is going to date me" phase¹. She was broken, she cried at that point. But eventually, she calmed down."

In her interview, 20-year-old sheida shared a disturbing example involving the group EXO. She mentioned that when one of the members got married, numerous female fans were so devastated, they contemplated suicide. This extreme reaction was like a situation in Iran, where some fans of Mohammadreza Golzar expressed similar sentiments after he was infected with COVID-19, indicating that they felt the world is no longer worth to live in without Golzar.

- "Do you think this can have negative consequences and damages for them?

Yeah. For example, I think one of the EXO members was "Tao" or "Kai" who was married. I remember that Fanash went to the point of suicide! It shows to what extent that person can immerse in the atmosphere. I mean, they love the other side. But someone like me likes the style of their songs.

- Don't you find this incredibly scary?

It is really so? This same happens for all of the singers and actors. For example, I've heard stories about Lady Gaga, fans expressed their unconditional love and devotion. There was also a video for Golzar, where fan girls were crying, telling that the world had no meaning without Golzar or they even couldn't imagine his absence, they were shed in tears and

¹ Korean form of address for an older brother (or by extension, male friend) of a woman or girl.

emotional outbursts. Or someone had proposed to marry him. As for the personal experience, my sister is a fan of an Indian actor named Ebram¹. She admires his style, appearance, and personality, so much so that she don't want him get married. She says if he choose to marry someone, I will feel upset, unwell, or inadequate. Similarly, I have a friend who, despite being married, harbors a deep affection for Shah Rukh Khan. At times, she is so invested in this admiration that she jokingly remarks that her husband is envious of Shah Rukh Khan. Jesus Christ, I was like that too! I think people immersing themselves fully in the movie atmosphere, putting themselves into the roles of the partner of the main character and aspiring to experience similar levels of affection and interest."

With what has been said about imaginary love, it can be concluded that the emotional interests of young people (especially in females) are intense during the early stages of adolescence. Attractive figures in the fields of art, sports, and social life can easily capture the attention of young people and become the objects of their affection, love, and care.

With the emergence of imaginative love individuals may exhibit symptoms that mirror those of genuine love. Love seeking individuals in their dreams along with reaching to their beloved idol, suffer from destruction of their imaginative love foundations. Hence, these group of youth tend to grasp in romantic and symbolic gestures with their imaginary partners and finding solace in these dream interactions. They may resort to protective behaviors to preserve their romantic dreams as long as is possible. This tendency leads to protective and defensive behaviors of this lovers can distort their social life and their interactions with others (others who like them may love a special person). Furthermore, the repercussions of emotional disappointment resulting from the idol selecting a female can be equally devastating, akin to the challenges brought on by genuine romantic disappoint, causing prolonged distress and hardship for those involved in love fantasies.

2-9- Maternal behavior

In the discussion on imaginary love, it was highlighted that both sexes often observe captivating celebrities during puberty. They subsequently direct their emotional energy towards these figures, and nurturing their imaginary love. In the female population, which is biologically susceptible to stronger emotional

¹ John Abraham

responses compared to males, this imaginative love tends to be more intense and widespread.

Besides imaginary love, which manifests as intense emotional experiences in adolescents and adults, particularly in girls, females also exhibit distinctive characteristics. One such characteristic is the presence of tender maternal sentiments. Meaning that, girls often express these maternal feelings from a young age through interactions with dolls or caring for younger siblings.

Reflecting on this concept Manteghi (2013) in his book "Eastern Woman Western Man" acknowledges the maternal essence innate in girls, acknowledging their nurturing tendencies from a developmental stage:

Through exploring the experiences of girls and boys as they navigate mutual emotional relationships, it becomes evident that both genders confirmed the maternal behaviors, either issued by themselves or being evident in behaviors of their girlfriends.

Displaying an attitude akin to a caring mother, girls often offer general guidance and instructions to their admired individuals, urging their boyfriend "to avoid engaging in unfavorable or immoral", while doing "good behaviors". Moreover, they demonstrate their concern for the "nourishment and food", "clothing", and "health" needs of their boyfriend. Taking practical steps, to provide them for their favored individual.

The girls have shared in their public guidance to their boyfriends that they approach their romantic partners with caring and firm guidance, offering instructions in various and tasks. These directives encompass diverse areas including health, dietary considerations, clothing choices, academic responsibilities, and choosing friends, proper recreational activities, finding proper job, and appropriate behavioral conduct across both personal and social domains.

Girls often offer advice and counsel to their partners, encouraging them to engage in positive and enjoyable activities. Their guidance includes instructions such as "respecting to parents and being obedient to them," "selecting good friendships," "spending time with good companions" "dedicating time to academic pursuits," "maintaining physical fitness," and "behaving in line with moral values or doing godly behaviors."

Conversely, adopting a maternal role, girls often advise their favorite boy to steer clear of negative influences and behaviors, recommending them to "distance themselves from negative friends," "abstain from smoking," "refrain from engaging in kitty and immature actions in social settings," "abstain from

disruptive behavior in class," "avoid wearing indecent attire," and avoid of involvement in evil or forbidden activities."

"At times, my girlfriend would offer guidance and support, displaying a maternal essence through her reassurances such as, "do you understand it my baby", "you know what to do my darling, you must not engage in that practice."

"She told me not to smoke, respecting and listening to my parents, do not bother them, tidy yourself up, prioritize your studies, hang out with whom and avoid whom in my circle of friends."

During an interview with female fans of the BTS group, it became apparent that some girls, rather than nurturing romantic fantasies, foster a maternal connection towards their idols, affectionately referring to them as "my baby" or recalling them as my son. For instance, 16-year-old Ghazaleh affectionately treats Taehyung as her own child, despite their age disparity. In a same vein, 18-year-old Parinaz regards Suga as her son establishing a maternal bond with the idol.

- "What are your plans for Taehyung's birthday this year?"

Of course, it's not only Taehyung's birthday. Jine's birthday was few days ago, birthday of all of them, it is BTS debut date. These are too. Taehyung tends to have a slightly more international following and also do more activities than others. Also, Jin's birthday coincided with the time he was doing a concert in Los Angeles. His fans and American fans, in particular, organized a multitude of birthday surprises the concert venue to rejoice in his special day. They dedicated long hours, 24 hours a day in preparation exemplifying their dedication. You don't know, the joy on face of my baby during the concert upon receiving these surprises was truly heartwarming."

"... Suga's renowned nickname is 'sleepy king' since my baby is known for his penchant for sleeping. He once mentioned during a live broadcast that when he is exhausted, he is unfazed by his surroundings and is content to sleep regardless of his location. Even if he finds himself the middle of a street, he will comfortably doze off."

"...JHope's nickname is "sun shine" because he always strives to bring happiness and laughter to people's lives, especially in difficult times. In addition to being talented dancer and the group's main dancer, my baby is third person to join the company and the group."

Jungkook, the youngest member of the group, earned nickname Golden Maknae' because my son do whatever he like to do, and no one can stop him".

In an interview, 19-year-old Marzieh shared her admiration for her role models. She expressed her surprise at affectionately addressing older boys as her babies, highlighting her aspiration to marry one of the idols. However, as she recognizes the impracticality of nurturing romantic feelings for someone who is thousands of kilometers away understanding that such imaginary relationships may not result in a tangible outcome. Consequently, she transforms those romantic sentiments into maternal feelings, endearingly referring to her beloved role models as her children.

- "I have come across videos where ARMYs mention Jeon Jungkook their ideal boyfriend. I am interested in understanding if this perspective is prevalent ARMYs and if viewing BTS members as virtual boyfriends is a common within the fandom."

Indeed, there are individuals who exhibit excessive emotional attachment and tend to go to extremes. This behavior is commonly observed among young ARMYs who indulge in intense fantasies.

- Now I'm interested to know if you perceive the members as potential romantic partners or boyfriends, and if you harbor aspirations or fantasies in this regard?

I reflect on how my emotions were more intense and dominant when I was younger, but I have since mellowed and gained a sense of calm.

Yes, I had some fantasies and I had written my thoughts on my phone, but I do not like them anymore, they seem unappealing and irrelevant. My feelings have evolved over time. Just like a book when you read it multiple times can evoke different emotions without any changes to the content, it is the personal evolution that influences the perception of the book. It is like this now, if I am given the right to choose of to be in my side, I am willing to choose one of these boys, I admire each of the boys for their unique qualities. JHope, Jungkook, Taehyung, Namjoon, and Suga all hold appeals to me. Jin, on the other hand, resembles a sibling to me, but upon hearing his remarks about growing together, his saying understanding us, like when you see your cheldering is walking toward school, recognize our personal growth journey along the way, lets move on with full power and ... we were side by side all these years, and this album is the story of you and the story of us. They gave me a vibe a friend, I no longer see the individuals who were once

my source of comfort and positivity as romantic partners or lovers. They are my close friends and sometimes I feel myself as their mother, even I didn't give birth to them - it's a strange feeling, as if I'm the mother to someone older than me (laughs). While I love and attached to them, I no longer view them in a fake lover or as boyfriends. This prompts me to ponder - can you truly love someone without fantasizing about him? Even if you strive to be grounded in reality, certain thoughts inevitably find way into your mind and are challenging to suppress."



In other word, when the imaginative love of BTS female fans wane, the affectionate connection can transition into maternal love, fostering a warm and familiar bond the fan and their beloved role model.

2-10- Satisfaction of sensation-seeking

Sensation seeking behavior is epitomized by an individual's inclination towards seeking novel, complex, and exhilarating sensations and experiences that may involve physical or risks. As such, sensation seeking reflects an individual's appetite for diverse and adventurous encounters.

Similar to the basic needs for physical nourishment, humans also require emotional fulfillment to maintain their mental well-being.

Research suggests that sensation seeking tends to peak between the ages of 10 to 15 years, gradually tapering off after the age of 24.

The presence of individuals motivated by sensation-seeking impulses prompts societies to devise strategies to cater to the sensation-seeking inclinations of their populace.

In western countries, various engaging activities such as festivals involving flour tossing, paint wars, tomato fights, desert rallies, and even frozen lake rallies, bullfighting, climbing, motorcycle and bicycle marathons, art competitions under special conditions (such as painting in challenging environments), and so on. These events offer acceptable platforms for individuals to satisfy their sensation-seeking desires. However, in Iran, such pursuits are viewed negatively with limited availability in community level. As a result, at the national level, there is a lack of attention towards fulfilling the natural sensation-seeking needs of individuals. This neglect may lead individuals to seek undesirable avenues to fulfill their sensation-seeking needs.

To cater to the emotional needs of their audience, BTS has mastered the art of creating immersive concerts that exude magnificence. Right from the outset, group incorporates attractive individuals into their lineup. They complement their performances with challenging and diverse dances holds their viewers captivated. The singers are adorned in appealing costumes, sporting a variety of hairstyles and accessories, which enhance their stage presence. They add light choreography into their performances, backed by a team of talented dancers. Select eye-catching backgrounds, they provide fans with Bluetooth-synced light sticks in myriad colors, creating a mesmerizing spectacle for sensation-seeking needs of individuals. Additionally, recent instances such as widespread advertisement for the group and extravagant idol birthday celebrations should also be considered.

In her interview, 24-year-old Zahra highlighted how the company builds anticipation around the release of BTS's new music:

- "What are the popular types of posts commonly shared on the BTS group or its member pages?

Usually, individual or group photos, occasionally involving multiple members in a single snapshot. When there is a new song or music release, they announce it on their pages. Similarly, details regarding upcoming concerts are. But all seven members of the group do not post simultaneously, with each member taking turns to share content. For instance, Jimin may post first followed by Jungook after a few days, followed by another member later all featuring the exact time of release. They also share advertisement for campaigns, particularly those related to clothing."

Attending BTS concerts, particularly those held in large stadiums, vividly demonstrates that the audience members are not only standing and watching the

stage with excitement. But also they enthusiastically join in singing along with the performers, engaging in dance and exuberantly stomping their feet.

In her report, 19-year-old Fatemeh illustrates the behavior of idols -and the subsequent reaction of fervent fans.

"I've noticed that during concerts or events, or when videos or photos of BTS members are shared within the fandom, or when someone like as J-Hope asks: "how are you my lovers" sometime members of the fandom reply with remarks like "I can't stand on my feet", "I have been attacked" "I got pregnant I'm expecting my baby with you Kuki". I often see such words in their comments and messages."

In her account of BTS concerts, 19-year-old Tina mentions that her excitement peaked to the extent that her hair stood on end just by watching a video of the concert, underscoring the electrifying atmosphere of BTS's live performances.

"When I watch their concerts, I truly yearn to experience the sensation of one standing in front of a, let's say, ten thousand people. The moment when a highly beautiful connection is established between the fan and the performer is incredibly charming. In my view, being on stage at that juncture must be an exquisite feeling. It conveys the sense of being a successful individual, surrounded numerous people who brings them happiness and love. All of these people love me, but just those fleeting instances during the concert ignite a sense of need within me, prompting me to wish to experience a similar sensation. Perhaps, in doing so, do not want to become a singer or an idol myself.

Previously, I had experienced same sensation to other groups, before my introduction to BTS. Conversely, I recall occasions when One Day performed concert in Milan. It drew massive crowds and generated significant buzz. There was a moment when the audience passionately sang along, and the One Day group was watching enthusiastically. At that moment I was like this, oh, man.... when I watched their concert, my hair stood on end. Or the Taylor Swift's 1989 tour, a moment that was later captured in a documentary. Entire crowd was singing along her. The memory of the audience harmonizing to her song still gives me gooseumps to this day. The sheer delight of that moment remains etched in mind as a beautiful and profound experience."

In a similar anecdote, 20-year-old Sheida recounted an experience akin to BTS concerts within the Iranian community:

- "Do your students share common interests or hobbies related to BTS?"

"There are some artists, much like old days of myself and my friends, they engage in dancing, practicing routines, or partaking in similar activities, and emulate styles and set their cloths. Another intriguing event that caught my attention was the live online broadcast of a BTS held in a Tehran venue some time ago. Tickets were available for purchase, enabling fans to attend virtually. During which, Exo-Ls¹ gathered at one place, set up group photos, and relayed the concert through large screens displaying videos. All of their fane were there. I have seen this in a story posted by one of my friends. It was interesting that it Iran permitted such a thing. All bustling with screams of and fervor. It gave me a good feeling. They have sang the songs together, This initiative was eye-opening as such activities were a rarity Iran. Additionally, fan meetings were arranged where enthusiasts came together to engage in, talk about their idols' give their analyses and stay updated on news. They show their dedication and commitment".

Analysis of the participants' remarks shows that their admiration for the BTS group primarily stemmed from the captivating appearances of the group members as well as impressive dance performances during the shows:

- "What specific qualities or characteristics of the BTS group captivated your interest, and how did they differ from what you observed in Iranian music?

Well, I enjoy their songs, style of their music and their dances were fantastic I loved it. As well as their music videos are impressive and appealing to me. Above all, I drawn to their appearance and find their voices to be beautiful." (Elnaz, 12 years old).

- "What initially drew you to BTS?

They dance. It wasn't like static performances of Iranian artists who typically stand behind a microphone without much movement. Their dance was appealing to me, I found their vibrant hair colors to be intriguing too. Their appearance, voices, everything. Their musical rhythm in particular, was appealing" (Sahar, 15 years old).

- "What initially attracted you to the BTS group?

Initially, I saw their dance performances. It was attracting to me.

- Their dance?

¹ EXO-L is the collective name for the fanbase of EXO, individually, fans are called 'Stars/Aeris. But BTS fanbase are called ARMY

Yes, because was not familiar with their names at the time, I initially overlooked them. However as I came across more of their videos, my excitement grew. Gradually, I became an ARMY and accustomed to their appearances.

- What aspects of their physique appealed to you?

They have a lean physique with defined muscles, showcasing a normal body type is not overly muscular or fat. Their slim build includes a visible six-pack, their long and elegant fingers are particularly attractive to me, I like it," (Rokhsareh, 16-years-old).

In an innovative departure from traditional approaches, Big Hit Company has taken measures to position the music group BTS in the entertainment industry. Meaning that, due to gaps between concerts and new releases. Group members by offering diverse entertainment programs for fans, as Run BTS and Bon Voyage, facilitating interactions through events like fan meetings and fan signs, fostering fan communities, and disseminating updates and information via the company dedicated news agency. Through these active engagements, the BTS members effectively maintain ongoing contacts with their fans, sustaining their interest and involvement.

During her interview 15-year-old Razieh discusses the "BTS Run" program

- "Darling, have you watched Run BTS?

Yes.

- Can you please explain its content?

As I mentioned earlier, it's entertaining and engaging. In every episode, they partake in a variety of games, which is fun and attractive for the fans.

The "Bon Voyage" program shares similarities with the "Run BTS" series, both programs revolve around humor, jokes, and entertainment."

In addition, the company fosters a deeper bond between fans and idols through fan meetings and signing sessions. 18-year-old Poneh defined fan meetings as to small concerts, and fansigns depicted as intimate, private gatherings. In which, fans and idols have the opportunity to gather and interact closely. At these events, fans receive autographs, take pictures with their idols, and establish a more personal connection.

- "What is a fanmeeting exactly?

During fan meetings, BTS members interact with ARMY, engaging in games, singing, and occasionally surprising ARMY members. These events are akin to a mini-concert experience. On the other hand, fansigns differ slightly from fan meetings. They are held privately, allowing fans to interact directly with the members, receive autographs, take photos, and engage in conversations. Idols show their love toward fans and also fans have an opportunity to show their love toward them. Furthermore, they do a good thing, for example if a muslim ARMY member partake in fan meetings, they show a full respect toward her, do not touch her except for when she is willing to do so, they exhibit kindness and consideration in interactions, akin to how they treat all fans".

In addition to the thrill and emotional fulfillment BTS provides, it is essential to recognize that individuals can be categorized into two groups: those who are drawn to high thrilling experiences and those who prefer less thrilling experiences. This dichotomy is underpinned by concept of arousal, where individuals with a high inclination for excitement crave continuous stimulation to prevent boredom and seek out thrilling experiences. Conversely, individuals who are not sensation-seekers are content with less brain stimulation and can tolerate monotony.

Sensation-seeking is associated with an individual's arousability. Those who highly excitable typically seek continuous brain stimulation and can become bored with monotony actively pursuing thrilling experiences to maintain arousal. On the other hand, individuals who are inclined towards seeking thrills can tolerate mundane tasks well and prefer less brain stimulation.

Zuckerman's identifies high sensation seekers as individuals who enjoy activities like mountain climbing, drone flying, car racing, skiing, and scuba diving. But low sensation seekers are generally less inclined towards such activities. Sensation seekers may prefer diverse experiences over risky ones. Also it has been found that high sensation seekers are more likely to use illegal drugs compared to those with lower sensation seekers. These individuals are open to new experiences and are less constrained by societal norms. They are likely to make impromptu decisions, such as cancel prior engagements in favor of engaging in an exciting program.

Zuckerman's contemplates that sensation-seeking tendencies manifest in various ways depending on the social context. In a delinquent peer group, this motive enacted through drug use and engaging in illegal activities. In contrast, in a conventional social setting, sensation-seeking behaviors may manifest in activities like extreme sports or artistic expressions. Sensation-seekers have a

penchant for exploring novel music and diverse forms of entertainment, relishing poetry, humor, and wit.

Thus, the thrilling programs offered by the BTS group cater not only for high and low sensation-seekers but also effectively stoke excitement among fans, particularly those with inclinations. With Big Hit Company's innovative approach in the entertainment industry, notably those with intense emotional tendencies, are effectively immersed in emotion-driven contexts, fostering connected and engaging experiences, as highlighted in the following section.

2-11- Making emotional encounters

Different people have different ways of dealing with the problems they encounter. Some individuals approach problems in a rational and reasoned manner, seeking appropriate solutions to address the issue. On the other hand, others either avoid the problems altogether or handle them in an emotionally-driven manner.

In psychology literature, problem-solving strategies are categorized as coping methods based on logical problem-solving and coping methods based on emotional problem-solving. When individuals engage in reasoned and rational problem-solving, they endeavor to find a suitable solution through logical reasoning. Conversely, emotional problem-solving involves addressing challenges through an emotionally charged approach.

Adolescents and young people who frequently consume emotion-oriented content may internalize and practice emotion-oriented interactions in their daily lives. Instead of using logic and reasoning to analyze various issues, they may rely on a simplistic zero or one approach, resulting in emotional responses rather than practical problem-solving strategies. This behavior is inappropriate and may lead to inaccurate conclusions about events.

The emotional connection that fans of the BTS boys' group develop towards the band is a key factor in their strong. The various events and entertainment offerings, including BTS concerts, programs like Run and Bon Voyage, fan meetings, and engaging with BTS technologies, all contribute to creating an exciting and immersive atmosphere for the fans.

Upcoming examination of fan behavior reveals that fans also react with emotion oriented approach to the BTS group by creating one-shots, fictions, fanarts, and engaging in challenge activities inspired by the group. Additionally, fans engage in various activities such as various polls, content creation through weblogs and video clips, as well as forming fan pages and groups. These activities

collectively contribute to fostering an emotional atmosphere in relation to the K-Pop group of BTS.

Reviewing the statements of the interviewed fans reveals that the strong emotional bond between the BTS group and its fans leads to heightened emotional interactions and emotion oriented problem solving for the issues that arise between fans and others.

This section highlights some of activities undertaken by fans for the group their idols- that mostly have an emotional nature. Subsequently, it will address the emotion-oriented training of fans that is a result of the primary emotional contextualization of Big Hit Company and the reciprocal emotional responses of the fans themselves.

Engaging in discussions about emotional behaviors within the BTS fan community, organizing majestic birthday celebrations for idols, shipping, one shots, storytelling, fan art, and offering various challenges, conducting surveys, content production - as blogs, photo editing, sharing clips - establishing fan pages, and fandoms -fan organizations - are all common behaviors among fans of the BTS boys.

15-year-old Shadi shared about her emotional discussions and behaviors with his friends at school regarding the BTS group:

- "Honey, how did you first discovered this group?

I've been following Korean singers for about one or two years ago, generally I was familiar with this style. But I've been particularly interested in BTS for the past year and a half. Well I think school and my fellows were a big motivation for me. Although I attend in a non governmental school, many of my peers are also fans of the group. They often play their songs in school, and listen to them. Or they would sneak off to their dance in the class when the teacher wasn't around. Then they would talk together about the one [BTS member] who is more attractive or more handsome or even fight together over him. This was how I found myself unknowingly drawn to them, although I can't pinpoint what initially captivated me. Anyway, gradually I enjoyed watching their videos with them and found their cute faces. I would watch them at home and gradually familiarized myself with their songs and even learned some of their dance routines.

- What really stood out to you the most about BTS?

Ummm, in the first encounter, it was their style that is eye catching and then their music."

Organizing company sponsored majestic birthdays celebrations for it idols with active involvement of fan organizations (fandoms) is another significant aspect of global fan participation.

Shipping stars events, is another category that is occasionally organized by fans.

"Shipping" refers to the act of creating a hypothetical relationship between idols. Shipping can be either platonic friendships or romantic entanglements (whether the opposite or same sex). Some unrestrained Fans, observe the interactions between idols and speculate on potential romantic connections between them.

Company's role should not be overlooked in this regard. As sometimes companies may instruct idols to engage in behaviors (that further fuel speculation and brings more profits for the company), such staging scenarios where idols kiss each other in leaps or touch and exchanging intimate gestures, thus implicitly encouraging homoerotic interpretations.

In the interview, 18-year-old Pooneh discusses the concept of "shipping" and its impact on fan relationships with idols.

"There are several popular ships within the BTS, with Taehyung and kook, aka "Taekook," being the most famous. Prior to Taekook, there was another popular ship involving Taehyung, known as the "Taennie" ship. This ship is blatantly fake but portrayed Jennie and Taehyung together to attract a wider audience. Followed by this is a ship involving Jungkook and Taehyung with higher level of fans. But also others make ships between jimin and Kook or Jimin and Yoongi, or ship the namjoon and Jin.

As a Kookmin shipper myself, I personally believe that Jim and Jungkook make a great pairing. However, there are speculations about him having a secret boyfriend, with some fans even suggesting it is Yoongi. I find this highly unlikely..."

In line with shipping idols, the fan community often creates one-shots and fan fiction about idols as a way to further solidify the romantic narrative between them, sometimes even including themselves or the fans within the stories.

In her interview, 14-year-old Hadith explains the distinction between one-shots and fanfiction:

- "What sets fanfiction apart from oneshots?

A one-shot – as its name can convey- is a short, concise story that typically consists of one or two parts, not exceeding three or four parts. So, if there is

a long story, it is not a one-shot. On the other hand, fanfiction is a longer, more elaborate story that is consist of for example twelve parts. Generally main difference of one-shot and fanfiction lieys in the length of the story. While one-shot tend to focus on romantic themes, but fanfiction can encompass a variety of genres and storylines."

In the interview, 18-year-old Poone provides insight into their views on fanfiction by stating:

- "What exactly is fanfiction?

Wattpad¹ is a platform that has been around for many years. It is designed for reading and writing. Now, some fans write about anything you want to read, and it's not limited to ships in music groups. A big part of Wattpad is dedicated to such fan fictions. Here, fans write stories about their favorite idol ships or even individual artists. Many read these stories and engage with the content by, commenting, voting, and liking. It is not exclusive to Iranian users; there are numerous international authors who write their stories. This Wattpad was just an example.

Aside from Wattpad, there are also many individuals who write their stories on platforms like Telegram or Instagram and share them with readers. These stories have amassed significant following. Personally, I have delved into approximately 300 books centered around Kookmin and other ships exclusively on Wattpad. The allure is undeniable...

- Can you provide more detail about the stories that you mentioned were sexist?

The truth is, it makes me uncomfortable to discuss it.

- Take it easy. Please share what you are willing of your thoughts or any - information you have on the subject.

Ok, look, stories written on platforms like Wattpad, Instagram, and Telegram that delve into relationships, they often encompass a ship's full relationship journey –whatever topic or couple it focus on- from building familiarity and interest to love, conflicts, and everything in between. Writer puts all of these topics in the text. Amidst these narratives, one key aspect of relationships that is often depicted is intimacy and sex. It is worth noting that the majority of stories found on these platforms contain explicit content, with a heavy focus on sex and smut (pornographic content). If the story does not contain smut content, many readers may choose not to read it at all. Additionally,

¹ <https://www.wattpad.com/>

there are many books solely depicting smut content and are labeled as "smut books". For instance, it is a short story revolving around the intimate encounters of two couplers. I am sorry to say that but many of fans enjoy to read explicit depictions of sexual encounters of these couples. And again I feel sorry to say that but they are sexually aroused when reading these stories and feel no shame at all. They somehow enjoy reading such contents. Or along with such smut books, there exist numerous conventional stories that also incorporate smut things into their narrative structure. To illustrate, for example out of every three story segments, one is typically dedicated to containing smut.

I have seen frequent instances where fans ask writer to write smut, or there are many channel of this kind in Telegram, where they produce pornographic fanarts of various ships and couples, or write sexual and smut stories. They also feature audio recordings impersonating the voices of idols engaging in intimate encounters."

Fan art is another highly popular category among fans. Many individuals create intricate artistic pieces based on the artistic possessing of Idols and share them with fellow BTS enthusiasts.

Polling and organizing various challenges are also activities that fans frequently engage in within their fandom community.

22-year-old Shirin recalls how she used to conduct polls on her fan page, which eventually escalated into profanity content. She believes that everyone was having a blast with this story!

- "Could you provide an example of the types of questions you ask in the polls that you share with your fans?"

On my dedicated BTS fan page, I often engage fans by posing questions related to the group through polls to gather their opinions. For instance, one question I asked was, "what feeling does BTS evokes in you?" The responses varied, with individual expressing, "I cannot imagine my life without BTS," while another shared, "BTS has reignited my joy, passion, and youthfulness." Another mentioned, "BTS is my love; it has shown me the importance self-love." Furthermore, someone stated, "With BTS, I always feel uplifted," and another fan shared, "BTS has motivated me to set goals and strive towards achieving them." Lastly, a respondent shared, "Prior to BTS, I was feeling isolated and despondent, but now I feel like the happiest version of myself, more outgoing and I like to have many people around me.

- Are there any critical or negative comments among the responses you received [on your fan page]?

No, rarely.

- Could you provide examples of any negative comments?

Certainly! Here are some examples of negative comments: One individual remarked, "BTS members appear arrogant self-assured," while another commented, "I tired of their heavy makeup; a real man doesn't need cosmetics," among other critical statements.

- How do other fans typically respond when they come across such unfavorable comments?

(Laughs heartily) These objections lead to a heated war with fans expressing unpleasant and vulgar comments against other opposing fans. The number of comments increases exponentially, causing those who contradict each other to become frustrated. At times, fans intentionally post opinions to incite debates and spark a virtual war and, which ultimately entertains everyone involved."

In her interview, 12-year-old Elnaz discussed challenging other fans by stating:

- "When did you create your fan page?

I have had this page since 2018-19.

- Did you initiate your Fanpage activities with a focus on being ARMY?

No, I have been running my fan page for approximately a year.

- Have you ever encountered harassment or negative comments about BTS on your fan page?

Yes!

- Could you provide an example of a specific incident and how it unfolded?

One time, I posted a dance challenge featuring a BTS song on my fan page. A girl left a comment criticizing my dance moves, saying that: Oh, do you really believe you're such an amazing dancer?

- How did you respond to her comment?

I responded by saying, "Yeah, I don't need you to watch me," and then my sister blocked her from the page.

- Does your sister also follow your fan page?

Yes.

- How about your parents?

My father doesn't follow my fan page, but my mother does.

- What about your friends?

It's not my school classmates, but my Korean language classmates who follow it.

- Well, when the girl posted that comment on your page, how did it make you feel?

Initially, I felt a surge of hatred and anger, and I was even willing to choke her, but those feelings dissipated within two days."

Additionally, fans commonly engage in creating content such as writing blogs, photo editing, producing video clips, and more. For instance, Narges, a 21-year-old fan, shared her experience in creating a blog dedicated to one of the idols, stating:

- "What was your feelings towards Suga, and how has he impacted you?

Ummm. All knew that Suga was my boyfriend. If anyone dared to speak ill of him or they had no right to like Suga. Even within school, if I noticed someone becoming an ARMY, I would work on her mind to ensure she didn't choose him as her bias. If they did, I would not hesitate to take an action. At point, I even went as far as getting a tattoo of Shuga's on my chest, although I recently decided to have it covered up two months ago. I also went to great lengths in my attempt to acquire his contact information. Because many of online channels purported to provide Korean artists' contact details, though most of them were likely fake. Eventually, I managed to find Suga's Snapchat ID and would send him messages in a daily basis. During that period, they didn't have personal Instagram accounts, there was just one BTS account, so I cherished having direct contact with him through Snapchat. In the early stages of my fandom, I created a blog dedicated to Suga, naming it 'Yoongi's Secret Lover' (laughs)."

I used to write about my feelings and experiences, and some people would visit my blog to read it. Back then, when Telegram and Instagram weren't as popular as they are now, websites and blogs had more followers. Eventually, I started crafting stories about myself and Suga. For instance, portraying a fictional romantic relationship between Suga and myself, I noticed an increase in my blog's readers. Many readers began to immerse themselves in

the storyline, imagining themselves as the character (which was essentially me), and they liked it, left some comments and expressed gratitude.

However, some comments made me uneasy, particularly those that involved discussions about Suga. Despite my speaking in front of groups, I excel at expressing myself through writing.

- What were your thoughts on their comments?

I didn't said anything to them, but I felt possessive. I hated it to see anyone other than me spoke about Yoongi that way. I would sink my teeth into their throats if they dared to come near me. In my mind, I believed that Yoongi was meant for me, and no one else had the right to love him as I do. I silently thought, "It's either for me or no one."

One of the most common activities among BTS fans is creating fan pages and forming fan groups. However, it's essential to consider the emotional and sometimes aggressive conducts of many fans on these platforms or during fan gatherings. In separate interviews, Nastaran and Fereshtes –both 19 years old, and Sofia 18-years-old, in their interviews shared their perspectives on this issue.

- "Do you hate other artists because of your love toward boy band or this comparison is irrelevant?

Not necessarily. If they were not involved with us, we didn't pay attention to them either. However, if I found a particular artist's voice appealing I would acknowledge that. But I wouldn't consider myself a fan or anything like that. If, for instance, that artist or their fandoms spoke negatively about the boys, then we would become adversaries (laughs)."

- "Can you describe the fake fans?

They are only looking to create chaos. Some fans are so extreme that it's hard to differentiate between fans and haters. They cross boundaries by invading the member's privacy, interfere in their life, threatening them, and spreading negativity about them. It's as though they expect you to be as perfect as they expect or they would not love you and devalue you. They disregard the artists' talent entirely. This destructive behavior could even be linked to idol suicides.

Conversely, there are some overly possessive fans who perceive BTS as their paternal inheritance. They engage in disrespectful behavior and bullying towards others.

Even the slightest hint of criticism could lead to being canceled on Twitter or within Army groups, even if your intentions were not negative at all. All the time they are in fight with other fandoms, with everyone vying to be at the forefront."

- "How do you respond to their hates and negativity directed at K-pop?"

I remember when I was in Twitter before (laughs). It was quite confrontational... However, when I discovered that I was engaging with individuals who as young as ten, twelve years, or eleven years old, it struck me that root of the issue lies within society- particularly with parents who instill such ideologies in their children. These kids then express these beliefs on social media platforms, others with their misguided thoughts. In such cases, it may be best to refrain engaging with them, unless there is a possibility of gently guiding them towards a more positive direction.

- What does it mean when you say your hair stood on end?

It's challenging to reason with a ten-year. They are too young, often have a fixed perspective, believing that the first thing they encounter is correct. It's as their minds are closed-off, hindering clear comprehension. When you try to explain something to them, they might simply react with profanity. Some artists and actors give such hits too often do so as a strategy to garner attention and establish for themselves, they make use of BTS to pull themselves up. I believe it's futile to engage arguments with them as it only plays into their hands and furthers their objectives."

Another issue that contributes to the fervor of the K-Pop realm is the breach of idols' privacy. Some fans and a Korean news agency are actively investigating this matter.

One of the most common breaches of idols' privacy is from fans illegal actions including activities like stalking their homes and breaching their privacy, installing cameras in their residences, tailing them, and disturbances. These individuals are known as "Sasaeng." Another aspect of breaching privacy involves news agencies stirring controversies by divulging idols' private information. A severe form of privacy violation entails the publication of personal messages and conversations of idols, notably Dispatch news agency. Despite being a blatant infringement of privacy, such incidents didn't evoked any significant response from the government. Some – especially international fans- believe that a large portion of idol scandals may be fabricated, serving as a distraction from other political events.

On one hand, the emotional provisions of Big Hit Company and fans' predominantly emotional interactions in the other hand, evolve over time to escalate to an emotional based educate of fans. This transformation involves addressing everyday challenges approaching them from an emotional standpoint rather than seeking solely rational solutions.

According to the survey responses, some fans tend to become aggressive even at the slightest jest regarding idols. Instances of reacting with anger, severing ties, slurring, profanity and offensive language, and ultimately experiencing confusion, outbursts and conflicts and beating each other, are recounted by some of the interviewees as their methods of coping with issues.

Sana, a 16-year-old interviewee, shared that she can't even make light-hearted jokes about the members of BTS with her classmate who are a fan of the group.

- "Do you have friends who are such devoted fans of BTS that they are not willing to acknowledge and possibly accept any weaknesses or flaws in the group?

I can say all of them are like that. There is a classmate, Sara, who is a year older than me since he repeated the first grade, and she is a bit dimwitted (laughs) and incredibly stubborn. Critizing BTS in her presence is not an option as any consequences of her aggression will be on you. She has a dominant personality, and I wouldn't dare mention that I have a liking for Jimin or to say that Jimin has some problems with BTS, as even a joke about that could escalate into a serious issue."

In her interview, Sana became upset with one of the interviewers and attempted to halt the interview.

"Jimin spends hours on his cellphone, no one questions him, and he reads books and like delving into various novels. His passion influenced me to start reading novels myself, even though I wasn't keen on them before. Other idols also have their own hobbies, I have seen videos of them visiting museums, embarking on trips with friends, and engaging in numerous other activities."

- It is often mentioned that many of the activities idols engage in are by their management companies. While they may not necessarily enjoy all of these activities do they still partake in them?

I don't believe so, or at least not to the extent that it is portrayed. People often exaggerate, claiming that idols don't eat but no offence work like a

horse. It's a somewhat comical notion. These speak more of their intention to undermine them rather than any factual basis.

- What makes you confident that such claims are unfounded?

How can you be certain of that? (Her voice was louder than before, and there was a slight flush on the face).

- I was merely relaying what is commonly stated, not sharing my personal opinion (with a smile).

I see, I thought you have a bias against this group and are among those who enjoy criticizing them!

- Would it matter if it was my personal opinion?

I would request to end the interview as I prefer not engage with individuals with extreme views."

13-year-old Sarina mentioned that she ended her friendship with one of her classmates due to their criticism of BTS. She added that she would react similarly other critic, even if they were a close friend.

"I tend to have more conflicts with individuals who criticize. For instance, I had a classmate who was against BTS, and I chose to end our friendship because of it.

- Can you provide an example of what she was saying about BTS?

For instance, questioned why BTS wore make-up and why their appearance was feminine-like. All of their body has undergone surgery, criticism like these.

- Well, were the remarks made by your ex-friend inaccurate or false?

No, but he would make those comments in a mocking and racist manner, and it bothered me immensely.

- How long ago did you end your friendship with your classmate?

That was about two years ago when I was in fifth or sixth grade.

- How do you reflect on that decision to end your friendship now that you're sharing this story?

In hindsight, I realize how silly it was to be friends with her in the first place, and I'm glad that it ended.

- If you have a friend now who is great in every aspect but don't like BTS, would you react in the same manner?

Yes, I would end the friendship."

In their individual interviews, 16-year-old Sana, 20-year-old Baran, and 25-year-old Shabnam discussed how they have resorted to insults when they observed criticism towards BTS members from family, friends, or others:

"I got into a disagreement with my cousin a while back because she mentioned that Jimin is skinny. I disagreed and pointed out that RM is the skinny one urging her not to demean Jimin. My cousin is a fan of RM. She finds him handsome and also my cousin is a fan of rap music and enjoys listening to rap. RM is a rapper too, do not bother you, our discussion about them overweight or underweight escalated into insults and curses".

- "What makes K-pop groups attract such fanatical fans?"

I believe it's a result of the abnormal behavior of others. For instance, I typically refrain from revealing my K-pop fandom to others, as people tend to pick on and insult toward those with similar interests or judge us, which creates unease. On the other hand, ARMYs and other K-pop fans engage in significant charity work, donating to charities in honor of members' birthdays. The members themselves are active in endeavors and help charities, and also exhibit great camaraderie by supporting one another. Out of doors or anywhere I have seen some ARMY they were highly friendly and positive, as they are generally kind and supportive. However, some individuals focus solely on our colorful attire and makeup and use that as a justification to insult us, f***ers."

- "How did you respond to those individuals who expressed skepticism or disapproval regarding your interest in the BTS group?"

I faced a lot of challenges dealing with criticism, and initially found it difficult to accept. I didn't argue with anyone but I tended to internalize the negativity, engaging in internal battles and feeling upset. For instance, many individuals mocked the Korean language, which deeply affected me. However, I was encouraged and supported by my teacher, who advised me not to take those comments to heart. People often dismissed me as a child and my interest as childish, which also saddened me too. I recall having a heated altercation with a close friend who criticized BTS for alleged fickleness and homosexuality. I defended the group by pointing out that she had no right to judge others, but our quarrel grew so intense that she resorted to insults (laughs)."

In her interview, 13-year-old Negin expressed a desire to tear her friend into pieces over criticizing BTS members.

- "How did you feel when you see your friend hates idols?

I was on the verge of losing my temper tear her down; she was really getting on my nerves."

16-year-old Saba reveals that her affiliation with the BTS group has resulted in her being quick to clash and argue with others, leading to fights even with friends.

- "How has being part of this group impacted your emotions and interactions with others?

Umm, I noticed that I've become more excitable in general - their songs have an energizing and raise your emotions. However, this has also led to me to have a more emotional and irrational stance toward matters, which is not beneficial always. Also, the vibrant lighting and energetic dance sequences in their music videos, combined with my familiarity with their choreography, gives me a sense of dynamism."

Excitement indeed yields positive effects, such as uplifting mood, and boosting dopamine levels. However, excess excitement can be detrimental, especially for teenagers.

- "Can you elaborate on how you observed an increase in your excitement level?

I find myself displaying heightened reactions to events, regardless of whether they are good or bad. I have become more prone to feeling nervous, and I notice I get agitated quickly during simple conversations which was not characteristic of me before. The day of having argue with my friend it happened too, lossed my temper and fight her back."

14-year-old Golnoosh, a devoted BTS fan, mentions that if her phone gets confiscated at home, she experiences a meltdown and resorts to breaking things around the house to retrieve it.

Shadi, 15years-old, further discloses that her affiliation with the BTS group has led to confrontations with her mother and vandalism at home.

Shadi's anger has escalated to the point where she reacts angrily to her own appearance:

- "Are your parents aware that you take your phone to school?

No, even if they find out, there would not be any consequences, but I'll find a way to sneak it back.

- How would you react if they were to confiscate your phone?

They would never dare to take my phone because they know it would go crazy.

- What do you mean by saying you would "go crazy"?

I mean that I would become so agitated that I might lose my control, breaking things around the house until they are forced to return my phone.

- Have you resorted to such behavior in the past?

No, but I came very close to doing so. That's why I say they are never going to do such a thing, as they understand my tendencies. They don't want to step on my tail."

- "How has BTS influenced you emotionally and mentally?

Hmm, I've noticed that I've become more emotional in general, which has reduced my patience threshold and quickened my temper. And well, I find myself spending significant amount of time watching their videos. So I find fewer time to spend with family and studies. This has been on my nerves at times. Additionally, I've adopted a more black and white outlook, either wholeheartedly to an activity or abandoning it completely. This tendency toward extremism even extends to my-image. I have lost my contact with relativity. I can be quite critical of everything now, even of my appearance. I might say that my skin is totally ruined when I see one or two acne on my face, or that my eyes are ugly when I compare them to the features of BTS members, uh, they have elongated eyes."

2-12- Psychological Release-Catharsis

In the course of daily life, people often face numerous pressures that are inescapable. The process of alleviating and releasing some of these pressures, resulting a sense of balance and relaxation, is referred to as psychological evacuation.

Research on emerging technologies suggests that these new advancements, characterized by their relative disinhibition, make it for users to experience psychological release and evacuation.

Joinson A. N. (2003) noted the anonymity as a key feature of the internet in relation to disinhibition.

This anonymity brings another unique experience on the internet that can characterize it by disinhibition. Disinhibition stems from the ability to express oneself in ways that may not be possible in face-to-face interactions.

In his discussion of unblocking on the internet, Greenfield (1999) states:

Due to the accessibility and anonymity afforded by the internet, around 80% of internet addicts experience disinhibition. Additionally, nearly 45% of all users encounter this phenomenon while online. These users express that the lack of external constraints on the internet provides them with a bigger sense of freedom, allowing them to behave in ways that may not be acceptable in offline social contexts. For instance, some individuals disclose their personal information to strangers on the internet that they haven't even shared with their partners.

Thus, the phenomenon of disinhibition is perceived as an enticing and liberating aspect facilitated by the Internet.

When individuals encounter psychological pressures that are inevitable in personal and social life, they often experience tension. This tension can be distressing and detrimental to their well-being. Therefore, it is important to address, alleviate, or eliminate it in order to promote psychological and emotional health.

Outstanding individuals seek to alleviate their mental tension in a constructive manner. For instance, when faced with adversity, they actively strive to cultivate a new world and foster empathetic relationships through their actions.

Common individuals seeking to relieve their tension may seek companionship, confide in someone, or find a private space to express their emotions and relieve the overwhelming tension they are experiencing.

However, individuals who lack a foundation in morality and spirituality may resort to releasing their internal pressures by attacking and offending others. In this scenario, the targeted person may bear the brunt of their harm and hostility.

Surveys conducted among the population under study reveal that individuals often engage in psychological release by venting their frustrations and failures in ways that involve harassment and harm towards others.

In an interview, 18-year-old Pooneh mentions that listening to BTS songs and shedding tears helps her alleviate tension to some extent:

- "So their songs evokes both feelings of happiness and sadness in you?

Yes, it depends on my mood. If I'm feeling down, I listen to their more sad songs, and when I'm in a good mood I opt for their more upbeat tracks.

- Do their sad songs can deepen your emotional state?

Yes, it does.

- So why do you listen to such a songs? Shouldn't you do something to get rid of that emotions?

It could be that the sad song resonates with my emotions and captures my mood, creating a sense of identification and connection. As I listen to it, allow myself to release those pent-up feelings, and afterwards, I usually feel at ease."

The psychological releases in BTS fans are often perceived as traumatic, due to factors such as psychological imbalances among certain fans, feelings of a long distance between themselves and the idols, fan overwhelmed by lust, and other related issues.

13-year-old Negin highlights the fanfiction created by some fans which includes defamatory content against their idols. Similarly, 21-year-old Narges expresses the mental exhaustion experienced by fans who engage in creating elaborate stories:

- "In your opinion, do you believe that every fanfiction holds value?

I think it depend on the fanfiction I read. There are uplifting and joyful fanfictions that pose no issue for idols, while there are also emotionally distressing fanfictions that have the potential of psychological truma for individuals. If someone produce such a story, even if fictional, it has the power to profoundly impact one's emotional well-being."

- "How did you feel about Suga and what was his influence on you?

Many people were aware of Suga being my boyfriend. No one had the right to talk unproper about him, they even had no right to like him. In school, I would physically confront who showed interest in becoming an ARMY, to ensure they wouldn't choose Suga as their bias. I even went to the extent of getting Suga's tattooed on my chest, although I recently, two months ago decided to have it covered up. I also made multiple attempts to find his contact informations. some channels disclose contact details of Korean artists but also some of them are fake. In one occasion I managed to find his Snapchat ID. I would send him messages daily, at that time there was no

personal Instagram and only there was a BTS group's account. In the early months of being a fan, I created a blog dedicated to Suga, humorously naming it "Yoongi's secret lover." (laughs).

I used to write about my feelings and experiences, and some individuals would visit my blog to read my posts. During that time, before the popularity of Telegram and Instagram, blogs and websites were more popular among fans. Eventually, started crafting stories about Suga and myself, portraying us as a couple in a relationship. This attracted more followers to my blog, as many readers would imagine as the girl in the story, who was actually me. They enjoyed the content would leave positive comments and messages expressing gratitude. However, some responses made me uncomfortable, especially when they involved discussions about Suga. Despite my ability to talk in front of people, I found ace in my ability to articulate my thoughts eloquently through my writing.

- How did you feel about their comments?

I didn't said anything to them, but I felt possessive. I hated it to see anyone other than me spoke about Yoongi that way. I would sink my teeth into their throats if they dared to come near me. In my mind, I believed that Yoongi was meant for me, and no one else had the right to love him as I do. I silently thought, "It's either for me or no one."

In another segment of the interview, Narges discussed fandoms, which serve as platforms for individuals to engage in mental release:

- "Have you ever considered that engaging in conflicts to be wrong?

Not really. I was alone. I was facing many challenges. I befriended individuals on Twitter, and we had daily interactions in the cyber space. It provided me with a sense of companionship. Escaping my sense of isolation the behavior of these friends had a significant impact on me. Engaging in fanatical actions, I used to release my pressures. I found myself conflicting with everything from morning till night. What was better than finding a bunch of poor fan and confronting them with slurs and degradation words to alleviate my anger? Although I wasn't fully aware of it at the time but this was unconsciously in my mind. Through quarrels, insults, ingaging in cyber fights and lastly winning those fights, I experienced a temporary sense of release and satisfaction, although there were instances where these interactions left me feeling agitated.

- So, would you say that this was the way for venting your emotions?

Yes, somehow. I didn't fully comprehend this behavior until later sought therapy and was provided with this insight. During that period, I felt to vilify BTS' rivals and ardently defend the group against any form criticism or opposition. I would immediately intercede whenever anyone, whether they were Iranian, foreign, or Korean, expressed negative sentiments towards BTS – it felt like duty to stand up for them. This defense wasn't limited to Twitter; I engage in arguments and debates in anywhere, including school, both in the public and private spheres, across platforms like Instagram and Telegram. I would hours to engaging in these disputes and was willing to go to great lengths to protect uphold the reputation of BTS."

In her interview, 18-year-old Taranom alluded to the presence of haters, some disoriented individuals who struggle to define their identity may resort to insulting others as a way to release psychological pressure and assert a sense of control. These individuals often target the BTS members, upon any minor excuse to ridicule them as a means of justifying their actions:

"In terms of the criticism targeted towards the BTS members, for instance, Namjoon was subject to critique about his appearance during the debut days, with comments insinuating that he lacked idol-like face, being an underground rapper, also they told that you lack leadership capabilities; you can write a plain sentence how you claim you have songwriting skills, you are ugly, and my other insults. Yoongi has a fair skin, I can say it is whiter than milk. First days of debut he was told that you are too white, you are white like a ghost, or you are disgusting like a cat. J-hope was told to refrain from smiling, your smile doesn't suit your face; your teeth are too big for your mouth. Do you want to be an idol with this ugly appearance? Or, Jin was criticized to be too slim, he is too tall, he is too old to be an idol, as he was then 18 or 19 years old. Jimin was body-shamed for being slightly overweight, he was told that your lips are too big, you have no talent, or you are like girls, while Taehyung encountered accusations like these: you have sold out your girlfriend to become an idol, you are an insensitive person, you're inherent to a rural upbringing, and you are only suitable for rustic chores for the rest of your life; And Jungkook was told you are too young to be an idol, go home and why don't you do your homework, and so many hate remarks.

There are still hate, but haters always find new things to criticize. For example, some solo stan haters may only support one member of the group, or just on ship. They give ship, in a way that for instance they make a ship between Jin and Namjoon. In a show, if Namjoon approaches Jungkook or J-

Hope, touch him in shoulder or hug him, or put his palm on his hand, they ask why J-Hope did that. Do he want to instigate a fight between Jin and Namjoon? Also there is no clue to confirm such a relation, and despite that BTS always respect every religion, belief, race, language and skin color, but they have received many hate notes based on their skin color, face shape and anything like these.

During the initial stages of debut, Namjoon and Jimin faced significant criticism and backlash. However, BTS has since grown to become the most prominent boy band worldwide with the biggest fandom in the world, making it challenging for haters to hate them as they did in the past."

In another segment of the interview, Taranom discusses Sasaeng fans who exhibit extreme instability, often forming unrealistic friendships with their idols, as seen the example of the friendship of the Auntie Bear. These individuals engage in inappropriate and obsessive behavior to support their idols which in turn allows them an avenue for catharsis:

"... the most dangerous BTS Sasaeng fan was a 25-year-old woman who harbored an obsession with Jungkook came to the extreme of stripping naked at the airport in front of him. Subsequently, she proceeded send menacing messages to him via Weverse, demanding that he marry her or she will kill him. Or she claimed having gun, and other means of violence, claiming she was willing to kill Jungkook. Additionally, as I said there is a shipping culture within BTS fandom, where individuals ship members together, some of fans make Taekook i.e. shipping Jungkook with Taehyung, this made this individual to warn Jungkook that if he was involved Taehyung, she would kill Taehyung."

2-13- Wasting time

- "Have you become accustomed to following BTS??"

Yes, that was exactly it. As soon as I woke up, my first was to check on what BTS was up to, whether they had released a new song, and any other updates (Sara, 20 years old)."

In their interviews, some fans have revealed that they dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to supporting and engaging with the BTS group.

These fans, mostly young individuals, as they undergo complex brain development processes and experience emotional, cognitive, social, and ideological changes. These fans, are mostly young individuals that face various

confusions during their complex brain developments processes from one hand and their emotional, cognitive, social, and ideological developments in the other hand.

These youth, seeking solace and support in a group like BTS, as a sanctuary from their challenging surroundings, or to express their gratitude and admiration for a group that has opened up new horizons toward them, or simply fulfilling their sensation seeking, fans invest a significant amount of time in supporting and celebrating the boy group BTS in various ways.

Fans devote their time to engage in various activities such as voting for BTS in polls, distributing BTS songs, participating in fan-voted award shows of festivals, producing content related to the band and its fanbase, listening and attending concerts, dedicating time to learning the Korean language, and more are some of activities that fans dedicate their time to in these realms.

In her interview, 16-year-old Ghazal mentions that whenever BTS releases new songs, she dedicates herself to streaming them 24 hours a day help break records and support the band's success.

- "...What is your routine like on the day BTS makes a comeback? How much time do you devote to supporting them during that day?

(Laughs) well, let me tell you about it... I plan ahead as the release date, day and time are usually announced in advance. As I have a web page, and post the updates there too, I have to dedicate significant time that day. I try to get enough sleep beforehand because it is possible, once it's time, I might stay up all day without sleeping. We focus on streaming the new releases. Informing others about it. We also share updates, if there is a new news, will post it. We share the streaming links and other things. It's a busy day filled with these tasks.

- Are all the fans like that and dedicate so much time during such events?

This does not happen all the time. If we are lucky, BTS may have two comebacks in a year. However, not all fans are like that. Those who manage their own fan pages, like myself, tend to invest time and effort.

- What do you do if you have a prior commitment or need to study your lessons during the day of a comeback?

Because the release schedule is often announced in advance, I try to arrange my commitments to be completed before the release time. Well even if I can't engage more at the moment (laughs), so I just set the headphone and

continue streaming. I also if I have to study my lessons, I'll sure to at least stream a few times."

19-year-old Mahshid shares similar comments that she and her friends within the fandom have pulled all-nighters to translate live content from BTS to provide early access to fans compared to other groups.

In her interview, 19-year-old Tina shared that her life came to a standstill whenever she attended BTS concerts, during it, she completely immersing herself in the watching concert and its related events:

"There was a time when a concert was taking place, and despite efforts to shut down illegal streams, I diligently sought out reliable links to watch the concert without any interruptions. I would spend three hours watching these concerts, I would stop all my life and just sit and watch the concert."

Likewise, 16-year-old Saba expresses that after engaging with BTS concerts, becomes so engrossed in the group's content that completely loses track of time.

- "How long do you spend each day watching BTS videos or content?"

On regular days, I have to be at school until noon, but some classmates bring their phones to the class, so we watch BTS during that time as well. Once I am home, I typically spend about 2 to 3 hours watching their videos. Once One gets drowned into it, time passes without you notice It (loughs). You find sometimes you can't do you homework's, you can't study, I mean you have no extra time!"

In their respective interviews, 13-year-old Sarina and 15-year-old Shadi and Reihaneh all acknowledged dedicating substantial hours each day to following the boy group BTS.

- "Can you provide an estimate of the amount of time you dedicate to these support activities?"

At least 3 to 4 hours a day.

- Could you describe do you do during these 3 to 4 hours?

I watch their shows and videos. I watch "BTS Run," and music videos, and listen to their music."

- "How many hours do you typically spend watching their content?"

About 5 to 6 hours each day."

- "By doing this, aren't you falling behind in your studies?"

I sometimes postpone my schoolwork to later in the day, but there are times when I get so engrossed in watching BTS content that I lose track time, and it's already late at night. I find myself scrolling Instagram explorer watching posts and videos of BTS. It's only after some time that I realize I neglected my studies. My mom also expresses her disapproval about this.

- How many hours a day do you typically devote to engaging with BTS content?

After school, I typically watch for around four to five hours in the evening, and then before going to bed, I watch for another two hours until I fall asleep."

In 15-year-old Niko's interview, she expressed her desire to meet BTS and shared that she is learning the Korean language (although this skill except for people seeking to travel/immigrate to Korea has limited usefulness outside of scenarios.

- "How proficient have you become in learning Korean on your own?

I didn't follow it too much, my laziness doesn't allow [any progress]. It is a difficult language and also it has a complex and challenging grammar structures, which sometimes demotivated me. I also contemplated that it is not much useful in the life, the good news is that I have think about this at the first place. But one of my friends who dedicated substantial effort to learning Korean attended in classes and made a substantial efforts, she only after all these efforts realizes that this language is useful any nowhere. It had limited applicability beyond those seeking to immigrate to Korea. Albeit, my friend initially began learning the Korean language out of sheer interest. However, over time discovered its uselessness she went blue. Typically, Korean isn't a language with practical applications unless you plan to reside in Korea, which can be quite challenging due to the stringent regulations on immigration especially for Iranians. Personally, I've only grasped basic Korean terms, easy sentences, and how to introduce myself, not more. Additionally, learning Chinese or Japanese may prove more beneficial, particularly immigration to Japan is better and cost effective as it offers better economic opportunities. Moving to Japan is more viable compared to learning Korean language and immigration to Korea, as it can be difficult to integrate, work and socialize with locals¹ in Korea as they may not be as receptive to outsiders."

¹ In K-pop, ordinary people are referred to as "locals." These individuals are not part of any fandom and do not know anything about them.

2-14- Affective Dilution

Field surveys on Iranian fans of BTS suggest that a portion of the fanbase exhibits delusional behavior.

The delusional behavior of certain fans can be attributed to a variety of factors. Some of these may include:

- The lack of experience and delusionism exhibited by teenagers in the initial stages of their fandom journey,
- Influences from societal norms and role models that have shaped their perceptions,
- The deliberate efforts by Big Hit Entertainment to cultivate and sustain a sense of illusion among teenage and young fans,
- And other causes (For example, exposure to a vitrine people's lives on social media, such as Instagram, the increasing prominence and evolution of feminism within society, and the mental exhaustion as a result of the overwhelming amount of information in the cyber space)

The lack of experience and illusionism exhibited by teenagers in the initial stages refers to this issue that adolescents due to limited social experiences may approach challenges with unrealistic and delusional perspectives. For example, 18-year-old Maryam shared in an interview an example of such situation. She once believed she was homosexual solely based on her attractions to some classmates during adolescence. However, as she gained more social experience and interacted with individuals of the opposite gender, she was able to overcome this illusion.

- "Did your fascination with BTS influence your understanding or exploration of topics like homosexuality?"

Look, nowadays generally homosexuality is prevalent among adolescents. It is because of the lack of interaction between genders, in schools, students are separated, and due to the needs they feel during puberty, this can lead to delusion of homosexuality. Additionally, the significant presence of ARMYs are adolescent and this age cohort is more engaged with K-pop, this can intersect with narratives and themes surrounding homosexuality in popular culture; but it shows itself in a way that many may believe that K-pop has initiated it. It's typical for teenagers to engage in self-discovery and explore their identity during this period, and they may experiment with various facets of themselves to determine what aligns their true self and is closer to their personality. This process may involve fleeting attractions to individuals of

the same sex, but if this feeling persist as person grows up, one can believe it as a real tendency. Personally, I had a crush on a female classmate during high school, and despite feeling inclined to disclose my feelings to her, I never did. However, a little after that, during my language class for two semesters, boys and girls had to be together in a same class setting. They were changing the building allocated to the boys, so, they moved the boys to our classrooms during the relocation. During those two semesters I realized my misunderstanding about my orientation. When you're limited, you tend seek satisfaction with whatever is available. That's why a lot of teens end up making this kind of mistake."

The trend of impulsive emulating role models suggests that teenagers and young individuals may adopt certain behavioral traits and characteristics of the individuals they admire. By observing just one or two positive attributes of a person, they might strive to replicate and idolize them, often without considering necessity of balanced judgment and discretion when following someone's example. It's important to exercise caution and not blindly emulate others based solely on a few perceived virtues.

For instance, 15-year-old Niko talked about her friend's actions as follows: Since she was a huge fan of BTS, she started acting like one of the BTS members when showing affection to her close friend. Just like how one of the BTS idols would give a ring to their beloved friend (of the same gender) and gently caressed their hair, she did the same by running her fingers through her friend's hair in the style of her favorite idol and offered her friend a ring.

- "Dear Nikoo, have you or your friends felt inspired by BTS to explore homosexuality?"

In Iran, the societal norms and cultural environment make it challenging for individuals openly express their homosexuality. In our age, I mean especially among young people many may have such a desire but have felt the need to keep their sexual orientation hidden due to fear of being ridicule or humiliation. This can create a climate secrecy and limited disclosure, with individuals only confiding in very trusted individuals, such as close friends or family members. However, there may be instances where individuals are not actually homosexual but are impressionable and influenced by the K-pop culture atmosphere may display behaviors that suggest they are under the sway of external narratives.

For example, a friend who I think she is strongly influenced by the group and all the time ships its members. She once told me that she has kissed one

of her friends, and felt inclined towards girls. I think she is strongly influenced by the close moments between BTS members and their ships. Also her social media avatar is a picture of an intimate moment between two of members. She felt crushed toward one of her friends, she was kind toward her in a way that Jungkook and Taehyung may show their affections toward each other, and is not real but just pretending to be so. But ARMYs raised their voice and side that there is a feeling between these two that exchange a ring and caressing their hairs. My friend and her crush duplicated these things and I believe it was just an imitation nothing more."

Big Hit Company's strategic decision to keep the fans engaged in illusions has led them to instruct the BTS members to focus on creating a strong bond with their fans and providing them with more services in order to attract and retain a larger following.

A key aspect of attending to fans involves the expression of emotional support and affirmation. For example, during interviews, 17-year-old Reihaneh and 16-year-old Rokhsareh shared that the BTS members have offered sentiments to their fans, such as, "We love you" and "Whenever you feel down, remember that someone in Seoul cares about you and loves you." It is important to note that, while being cherished and appreciated by celebrities who they not personally know can be comforting, these are ultimately symbolic gestures.

- "Are you familiar with the term "BU"?¹

I don't have extensive knowledge about it. Based on what I'm aware of, there's a concept known as the "Magic Shop" which inspired a song too. It's a space where fans can be authentic and themselves, existing alongside BTS members in their dreams, who are supposedly waiting for them there.

- So, it's like a fantastical or dreamlike realm?

Yes, by reading the translated text, you may gain a better understanding of this concept.

- Honey, what do you mean when you say "they are awaiting your presence"?

When you're feeling down, there are seven individuals who are ready to listen and open their arms toward you.

¹ The world of BTS known as Bangtan Universe or BU, is a fictional universe created by Big Hit Entertainment that serves as the backdrop for the group's creative works.

- How do you think they are able to show support and listen to you without being physically there?

The bond and love we share with them is so deep that makes me believe that their support is felt continuously through our connection.

- Is this akin to having mental conversations with them and feeling a sense of communication?

I feel this connection through my heart and by listening to their music.

- Could you please elaborate on how you perceive this heart connection and the role of their music in fostering it?

Their music serves as a source of solace for me during difficult times.

- You means this is the talking and the positive feelings that they offer to you?

This connection is made through the heart, not just words.

- When you mentioned that they listen to you, I imagined you having conversations with them in your mind.

It can be so.

- Have you ever experienced it?

Yes.

- Have you ever shared something with them that you wouldn't necessarily share with others?

Aha.

- When you mention that they constantly show their love, does that mean you always sense their affection towards you?

Yes. For example they share a post in Weverse that "we love you" or everywhere they go or in their live streams first of all they mention ARMYs."

- "My dear, how did you managed to trust your followers, despite your limited knowledge of them in the beginning?

I initially didn't feel inclined to talk to my followers too intimately, but something changed, and I began to open up more and more. I realized how this relationship could be beautiful if nurtured, and so I started sharing more with them each day. I always share details about my day, the events that

transpired, and conversations that took place - something I don't typically do with my friends. They are like this too. When something happens they quickly come to me and start chats about what's currently happening.

- So, does that imply that you have started to create more distance from the people around you?

Yes, because I got to know their true personality.

- I mean, did BTS influenced your perspective or feelings towards them in any way??

Yeah.

- Can you tell me how it left an effect on you?

I think it is through their acts. You know, the guys from BTS sometimes express their affection for us by saying "we love you" or "we are in love with you". How many of our friends actually say that to us? They only seem to reach out when they need, but when they are done, when it's time to appreciate you, they don't even bother to say thank you."

In the subsequent part of her interview, 17-year-old Reihaneh mentions that idols show them love, so she and fellow fans feel compelled to reciprocate the love and care for them

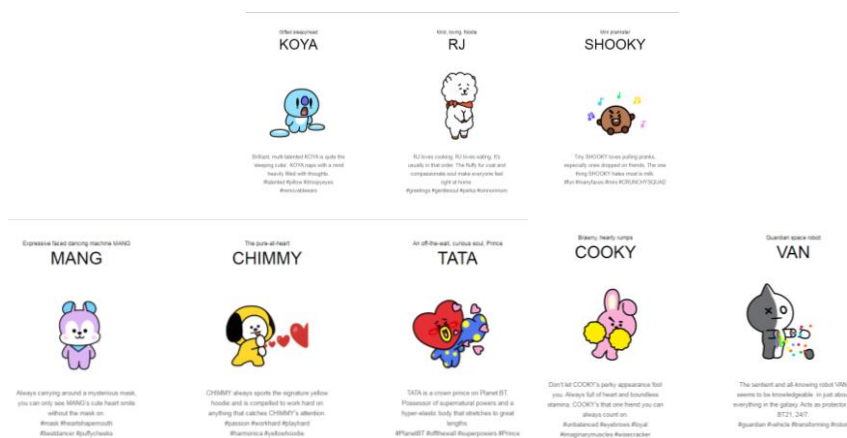
- "My dear, I took a peek at your profile and it seems like you have a soft spot for J-Hope. I'm curious, could you share a bit about that?"

I care about all of them (laughs). I don't any special bias, I am an OT7¹ and don't like to discriminate between them because I believe BTS is made up of 7 members, no more, less, each bringing something special to the group. Namjoon, Leader, with his mischief, hard work, and songwriting skills; Jin, with his handsome looks, humor, and his fantastic belting notes; Suga, with his drowsiness, charming gummy smile, and impressive production and composition abilities; J-Hope, our dance leader, known for his cleanliness, fears, and the hope he brings even in the darkest times; Jimin, with his modern ballet dance moves, captivating voice, infectious laughter –when he do it closes his eyes and fell off his chair- and his comforting presence when we feel no one else loves us; Taehy, with his kindness, his tatamikeness²,

¹ Someone who likes all the members of BTS equally.

² The BT21 characters were created in late September and the name is a combination of BTS and 21st Century. When the BTS group first joined the Line Friends messaging platform, they worked on a project to design characters and new products related to the boys. This project included 8 characters inspired by each member of the BTS group. Koya (inspired by Namjoon), RJ (inspired by Jin), Shooki (inspired by Suga), Mang (inspired by J-hope), Chimi (inspired by Jimin), Tata (a character with who rarely smiles. A curious and shape-shifting

signature rectangular smile, strength in the face of all the hits, and ability to win hearts effortlessly; and muscular Jungkook, our Golden Maknae¹ with his brightening eyes, unique voice, close bond with all the members, especially with Jim. Each member has shown us the beauty in the world, reminding us that there's still good out there. They always think of us, ARMY, and love us, so I believe it's only fair for us to reciprocate that love. We should give them love too"



BTS characters (retrieved from <https://www.bt21.com/character>)

16-year-old Rokhsareh also shares her illusionism in an interview:

- "Um, so in what conditions were you when you finally got to follow them?

When I was with my parents, my time was spent mostly with friends, not glued to my phone. But after their divorce, I was always alone in my room, the phone became a constant companion, leading me seek out that connection [with BTS] even more.

- Which one do you reside with?

I am under the legal custody of my dad, but I mainly live with my mom.

prince from the planet BT with a heart-shaped head and a blue body with yellow spots, created by Taehyung), and Cooki (Jungkook) and Van (a space robot created by RM (Namjoon) is the guardian of the BTS. Each of these characters introduces fans to the world of BTS.

¹ The nickname of Golden maknae has given to Jungkook because of his talents in many fields. Maknae refers to being smallest members of the group.

- Does being with one of them affect the amount of time you spend on your phone?

When I'm with my dad, I'm usually alone in my room listening to music on my phone. But, with my mom, and especially when my cousin visits us, we end up doing a lot of fun things together. My phone takes a back seat during these enjoyable moments.

- Hmm. So, how do you feel BTS presence has helped you?

Their words and actions never fail to bring a smile to ARMYs.

- Can you recall any of their nice words, which they've impressed you?

For instance, when they say, "ARMY, life goes on, so live on," or remind us that "when you are feeling down and think no one cares, there's someone in Korea, in Seoul, thinking about us and loving you" It means a lot."

Another tactic the company employs to draw in more fans is discouraging idols from getting married. As a result, fans from the opposite gender who harbor intense emotions might cultivate fantasies romantic relationships with idols, envisioning them as potential partners or future spouses. Consequently they continue living their lives filled with these illusions and dreams:

"... Individuals with such behavior are often simply stans an idol with the idea of marrying their idol, and upon hearing about their idol entering a romantic relationship, she start giving hits to him. This kind of behavior typically stems from emotional deficiencies, where daydream of being in a relationship with their idol. The prevalence of such thoughts and fantasies is quite common in the realm of K-pop. Due to such behaviors, companies impose restrictions on their idols from marrying until they are in their 30 or 40s, or even never. This is because if an idol all the time receive hits, it could potentially impact their popularity and, subsequently could be detrimental to the company incomes."

Teenagers engaging in virtual spaces and social media may confront idealized versions of people's lives on platforms like Instagram, experience mental exhaustion. This exhaustion can also be a result of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to flood users in cyberspace with overwhelming amount of content, usually for the purpose of influencing their behavior or opinions, or due to the influence of radical feminist (advocating for extreme actions such as an Iranian woman would be better off cutting off her hand than agreeing to live with an Iranian man) thoughts that can trap youth in illusions. This issue should be studied later with more scrutiny.

The illusion of BTS group fans can lead to negative consequences. This consequences can include extreme possessiveness toward an idol, where fans may claim an idol as their future husband and others has no right to have an eye on him. In some instances, obsession can escalate to the point of arguments on how to ship BTS members and also can cause marital issues and the dissolution of families, as individuals may harbor unrealistic hopes of finding and marrying their idol.

12-year-old Elnaz and 15-year-old Nikoo candidly shared their illusions during their interviews, revealing:

- "How about elaborating on the concept of fanatic ARMYs?

They tend to strongly believe that the group they support is superior or they say that you shouldn't have a bias for my idol. Additionally, they engage in lengthy arguments against haters¹, although I personally don't exhibit these behaviors, there are many passionate ARMYs who do.

- Could you provide an example of how these fervent ARMYs behave?

One of my classmates went as far as claiming that Taehyung exclusively belongs to her. She would vehemently argue with anyone who suggested otherwise, and would continue to her argue with aggression."

- "Do you have any friends who would react strongly and get upset if she learn about the members' relationships?

I have a friend who is highly emotional and sensitive to these matters. For instance, when a girl posted a video claiming that she would be marrying Taehyung soon and shared it with our chatroom. This friend of mine was deeply preoccupied and was very nervous for a while. She holds Taehyung close to his heart, being a dedicated fan who harbors romantic feelings for him. Despite our attempts to reason with and explain that the girl's claims were baseless, she remained adamant and all the time she was angry, asking if Taehyung want to really date someone, what happens to me? She often daydreams about moving to Korea and eventually marrying Taehyung there, although no one is certain about whom will attract the eyes of BTS members as their loves. In the 2103, a while after BTS Debut they published music video of "The Boy in Luv". This music is about girls, where it implies that what an amazing creatures are girls. It portrays a girl who should take one of the members and ultimately jumps into Taehyung arms as a sing of her

¹ Hate means to have a strong dislike or aversion, and "hater" refers to a person who hates someone or something, being the opposite of a supporter (fan)

selection. Taehyung hugs her too. This video although was old and even though my friend knew it was scripted out of any real feeling left her disheartened and angry. She fundamentally believed that Taehyung had genuine feelings for actress in the video."

19-year-old Marzieh recounted the rivalry among shippers over their illusions, as follows:

- "Can you share an instance where you or your friends engaged in a dispute with passionate fans, and if so, what was the reason and topic of the argument?

I personally haven't experienced this with my friends, but I have witnessed where fans passionately declare that one of the BTS members, Taehyung, is my future husband and someday I will travel to Korea to marry him. In where another fan makes akin claim, it has sparked arguments about who holds the right to him as a future spouse one the other side of the earth.

Alternatively, biased shippers who hate other ships while staning their own, dismissing any other viewpoints. And otherwise, there can be hate words, verbal attacks, accusations of being inferior, ...Within specific ship communities such as ViMin shippers or Taekook shippers, there is often conflict between them."

16-year-old Rokhsareh also highlighted how some fans resort to drastic measures, including breakups, in a bid to pursue their idol and potentially marry them, as follows:

- "So, how do they justify divorcing their spouses, and what reasons do they give for doing so?

Yes, sometimes even divorced individuals turn to lyrical performances for BTS, singing songs in English such as, "I wish I were Jungkook" or "Jungkook is the greatest." Some claim that their wife decided to breakup particularly because of Jungkook. Naturally, such occurrences tend to generate significant attention and spark widespread discussion."

2-15- remaining in the concrete operational stage

"Look, some fans are just close-minded, thinking in such a juvenile way. Like, they say I will go on and marrying this or that idol, being a fanatic fan means having a bias toward someone," (Gelareh, a 14-year-old).

Upon analyzing the field data, it becomes apparent that there are fans who struggle with concrete operational stage and have a latency in developing to the abstract thinking and tend to oversimplify complex concepts. This is evident in where some young fans approach matters in a childish manner with an objective and tangible stance. Surprisingly, even among fans who should have developed their abstract thinking skills, there are instances where they fail to critically analyze situations and rather adopt a one-sided or superficial perspective. This lack of depth in their analysis highlights a deficiency in theoretical thinking or remaining in the concrete stages among some fans.

Fans often emulate their favorite idols by imitating them in three aspects of appearance (through dressing style and makeup), behaviors and lastly following their values. These are main themes for fan to choose them as role models.

Imitating their idols primarily focuses on objective aspects concerning appearance and behavior.

The emphasis on embodying values in BTS role modelling often translates into more tangible and concrete examples. As part of their responsibility to promote various brands and appeal to a wide range of fans, BTS members showcase diverse and varied appearances. Also their responsibility to promote diverse brands, brings forth concrete and tangible demission of idols activities. Their deliberate emphasize on desexualize clothing, makeup, and love demonstrates their commitment to breaking traditional gender norms. This is evident in their willingness to wear attire typically associated with opposite gender, utilize makeup usually worn by women, and openly display close relationships other group members during performances. While this approach showcases the intellectual and cultural ethos of Big Hit Company, it also results in a more grounded and practical expression of their, which may limit their exploration of abstract ideas in their work.

The abundance of emotional displays within the BTS group, combined with the perpetuation of these emotional expressions among the group's fans, generates an electrifying atmosphere often leads fans away from logical and theoretical analysis of issues. This can be seen instances where fans engage in stubborn confrontations with fans of other groups, indicating that emotional reactions tend to result in more concrete and subjective behaviors.

The excitement laden K-pop atmosphere, coupled with the enthusiastic and younger fan base attracts profit-driven individuals who capitalize by creating websites or fan pages to amass and advertisement revenues. A cursory glance at

the content featured on these platforms reveals they often offer simplistic and trivial topics, at times even created by overly young fans themselves.

As a consequence of the aforementioned trends, fans are increasingly drawn to the concrete and material aspects of their idol's personas. As one end of the scale of a person's life becomes burdened with material concerns, the opposite end, encompassing theoretical, abstract, and value dimensions, naturally lightens in comparison.

In the subsequent sections, there are illustrations on the absence of certain segments of fans in relation to concrete and tangible dimensions through relevant examples.

Elnaz, 12-year-old, shared her childish dreams in the interview. She mentioned that if she ever had the opportunity to attend a BTS Fan-meeting, her plan would be to buy banana milk for her favorite idol and check on his well-being:

- "How much do you love the members of BTS?"

Well, for me, idols are like crushes that I really admire and enjoy.

- Well, you mentioned that you like it to attend a fan meeting. What do you envision doing there and what are you expecting?

Typically, you only have a limited time during these events, maybe fifteen minutes or even less, due to the large number of attendees. If I were able to go, I would bring their favorite snacks, like banana milk for Jungkook, to show my appreciation and get to know their preferences. It would be a great opportunity to have a conversation and connect with them.

- Well, if you buy him banana milk, won't that go against their dietary restrictions or preferences?

Well, based on the videos from the fan meetings that are shared, the members are often seen opening and eating the snacks and food provided by the fans right on the spot."

Aside from the concrete and tangible matters such as those mentioned by Elnaz, who is in a phase of concrete thinking, if one pays attention to the conversations of older individuals who have surpassed this phase and attained abstract thinking, it would be obvious that given the ongoing excitement surrounding the BTS group and its influence on fans, idol imitation predominantly revolves around tangible and concrete dimensions, with abstract issues taking a back seat. In their interviews, 15-year-olds Reihaneh and Sahar predominantly spoke upon concrete dimensions and even when discussing value-based issues like

BTS's support for the sexual minority community, they still tended to offer concrete examples. As a result, they may not have the opportunity to delve into abstract and value-based dimensions independently.

- "Why do you think fans are so persistent in purchasing these items?

I believe there is a sense of bias and deep admiration towards idols.

- Are you suggesting that fans acquire these items for personal reasons or are they influenced by external pressures?

Well, I think when someone is a fan of a particular person or group, such as BTS, they tend to adopt their style and preferences subconsciously. It's almost like dressing up like them or acquiring similar items. This is a way to express their admiration and to show their good feeling.

- So, are you saying that if someone is a fan of a person but doesn't express it through their appearance, does that make their fandom less genuine?

No, I mean, what truly matters is the love and admiration one feels in their heart. But it's natural for fans to want to emulate their idols surround themselves with items that represent them, like merchandise or clothing with their idol image or logo. It's almost like you want to keep a part of them close to you at all times. You may not believe, sometimes, I even dream about going to Korea and seeing BTS in person!

- What, specifically, do you like about them, Reihaneh?"

Well, generally they have a unique style, both individually and when they perform as a group. You know, their appearance, movements, everything complements their music perfectly. Their music videos of top-notch quality, flawless in every aspect. They leave no detail untouched, from appearance to their performances, and stage, everything.

- Could you provide an example?

Whether it's their hair color, hairstyles, or the unique and trendy outfits they wear, everything about them is just so cool and special. For example, really love their music video called "Idol." Their choreography is mind blowing, and if you watch the behind-the-scenes clips, you'll be mesmerized. One particular scene with Jimin open his mouth, it is a computer made scene, instantly go through his mouth to another scene. Do you like to show it to you? You will love it. I watched it more than 20 times on the first encounter. There are many other amazing visuals in their videos. In their songs, expresses I love my fans, they always looking trim and maintaining flawless,

their skin is fair and beautiful. It's remarkable how they take care of themselves, despite being boy, they exhibit superior skincare maintenance compared to girls, they do care about themselves, overall they are just fantastic."

- "Dear Sahar, you mentioned earlier that the company is currently under the leadership of an American individual. May I ask where you obtained this information from?

I came across the information on an Instagram page, and it stated that they had recently signed a deal with an American individual who now manages everything, but I can't recall his name.

- Could you provide an example of the symbols present in their music videos?

In the music video for "Dynamite," there's a scene where they are posed in front of a rainbow background, and there's a moment where Jimin playfully jumps into Jungkook's arms. While some may view as a form of promotion, I believe it doesn't convey any special meaning, I see it more as a friendly gesture. YJ Company has a contractual partnership with American entities, which appears to have sparked a on this theme. It could be interpreted that all the idols associated with Y Company are promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity."

In her interview, 18-year-old Mahtab underlines the significant influence of emotional relationships within the fan community. She suggests that when fans engage disputes with followers of other K-pop groups, the focus on logic and rationale fans automatically diminishes, particularly in the case of BTS.

- "I've heard there are fans who hold strong bias in favor of the group or certain member, resulting in conflicts among fans of the same group. Is this accurate?

(Laughs) Oh, yes, it definitely happens.

- What kind of activities do fanatic BTS fans engage in to show support for them?

Interestingly, upon initial observation, BTS fanatics don't appear vastly different from regular fans. They engage in streaming, twitting, and voting, as same as others fans do. However, they go a step further. If they encounter a negative comment they are quick to vehemently defend BTS, often rely on obscenities and insults to prove their point. Even if valid criticism is raised, they tend to not accept it because they perceive their idol and group as

flawless. This behavior, their interpretation, presents itself as a form of aggressive support for their idol. Regardless of the source of criticism, whether from within the fandom, other fandoms or even local¹ outsiders, they are driven to invalidate and devalue any opposing perspectives."

Amidst the fervent atmosphere of support for BTS and the tendency to dismiss other K-pop groups, conflicts occasionally arise even among fans who slightly differ in their stance such as supporting one idol over another – ones who make ships between A & B and those who make the ship between A & C. This discord often leads to disputes inadvertently. Consequently, there are individuals who seek to capitalize on these turbulent waters.

The proliferation of numerous fan sites and pages that repurpose fan-generated content, regardless of its quality or relevance, is a concerning trend. These platforms just want to attract more visitors and generate higher financial gains. This also plays a role in keeping certain segments of fans solely on the concrete and tangible aspects of thinking, hindering their ability to engage with more abstract thinking or to have progress in this aspect. 14-year-old Golnoosh, in discussing the prevalence of websites that offer trivial and nonsensical topics to fans for financial gain or to have higher view rates, underscores this issue.

- "So, what did you learn about your character from those tests?"

I got Namjoon as my bias, which I think is fitting because I strive to be kind and help everyone, I enjoy cracking jokes and laughing, I take myself to be intelligent but also prone to confusion and mischief, and tend to be forgetful at times. Interestingly, I see Namjoon's hollow cheek as my weak point.

- What would you say your weak point is Namjoon's hollow cheek?

It means I like his hollow cheek to the extent that I am dreaming about it.

- Do you mean you are dreaming to have a hollow cheek similar to his?

No, I can't resemble him. I just wish to see him up close, maybe even touch or kiss his cheek hollows...

- What do you think it signifies that BTS members have their own personality types? Are you familiar with the concept of personality types?"

¹ Local in K-pop refers to regular persons. They are not members of any fandom or have a limited or no knowledge about them.

Yes, it refers to a specific set of traits and behaviors. Each BTS member are considered as a personality type¹, and fans who share those similarities tend have the same personality type.

- How can you tell that a certain member has a particular personality type?

It can be gauged from fan's level of interest in a specific member and the extent of their fandom towards that member. Each fan has a bias and this preference toward a member can signal what kind of personality. Based on who you are drawn to, you can infer your own personality traits, as people don't pick their based on a whim; it's often due to personality compatibility.

- In your view, how accurate and relevant do you consider this personality theory to be?

It's always been spot on in my experiences. My friends and I have found it to be remarkably accurate. I haven't come across an instance where someone has a bias toward a particular members, only to find that the personality type is not align with their own.

- Who decided on the personality types for each member?

Various online platforms offer many personality tests that provide insights into your character and traits. These tests help identify specific characteristics based on your bias. Here, for instance people who has Namjoon as their bias are sensation seeking and introverted, do not talk others about their inner pains. Or those who love JHope, are often seen as calm, patient, and well-balanced.

- Are you suggesting that you can infer the character of ARMYs from their preferences as fans?

Yes, that's exactly what I am implying."

This pattern of overemphasis on concrete and remaining in the formal and material aspects, would be at the expense of abstract thinking, obscures opportunities for fans to engage in logical and abstract reasoning. And during discussions and arguments, they often resort to simplistic and frivolous arguments. In their interviews, 14-year-old Gelareh and 20-year-oldan shared instances of flawed logic and poor reasoning skills, highlighting this trend.

- "Have BTS ever mentioned Iran in their speeches?

¹ It seems interviewee has no correct understanding of personality and personality types

Yes, there have been mentions of Iran and expressing a desire to perform a concert in the country.

- How did you feel when they mentioned Iran during the live broadcast?

It's a greeeeeat feeling, and it's heartwarming to know they think about us and value our support."

"...And another reason I admire BTS is their humility and respect for others. For instance, when Kookie went to Qatar to do some thing, fans went to see him and despite the scorching weather, Kookie made sure to buy them water and other things.

He's even spoken at the United Nations twice now, and the auditorium was full of attentive listeners. In contrast, when our president attended UN, the auditor was half-empty. Plus, they (BTS) had a meeting with Biden at the White house, which speaks to their political influence and supremacy.

Just take a look at these photos I'm sending you."



2-16- Gradual desensitization of sensitivities

Repetitive exposure to a stimulus results in a gradual decline in the recipient's sensitivity towards that specific stimulus. Over time, they respond to it with less emotional intensity. This is called here as desensitization.

Imam Muhammad Ghazali discusses the topic of backbiting, highlighting that both backbite and men wearing gold rings are prohibited in religion. However the gravity of backbiting (considered equivalent to consuming the flesh of the dead brother) far surpasses that of a man wearing a gold ring. Interestingly, despite the severe consequences of backbiting, it is societal norm for men be wary of wearing gold rings, but not as cautious about engaging in backbite.

Imam Mohammad Ghazali tackled this apparent contradiction by addressing the desensitization of men in society. He noted that continuous exposure to the act of backbiting has desensitized men to this abhorrent behavior. While have been

desensitized to this grave sin, the rarity of observing people wearing gold rings has led them to avoid this lesser offense.

Modern psychological theories have also recognized desensitization over time as an effective therapeutic intervention.

Analyzing the responses of fans interviewed in the study reveals that their continuous and plethora contact with BTS members has resulted in a shift towards a more gender-neutral of clothing and makeup. Additionally, their exposure to a message of love without regard gender, a core value advocated by BTS, has influenced their attitudes. Despite cultural differences and societal norms, some fans have embraced it and have even taken actions advocate for gender neutrality and inclusivity.

Certain fans expressed that prior to becoming fans of BTS, they were hesitant to embrace a gender-neutral approach in attire and wearing cloths. However, due to BTS's influence in promoting inclusivity in this regard, these fans have relinquished their prior views and now view this perspective with acceptance.

Others have mentioned that prior to becoming fans of BTS, they were not supportive of men wearing makeup, or at the most had limited acceptance of it. However upon becoming a fans of BTS and being exposed to the group's stance on matter, they have become more open to and accepting of men wearing makeup.

In alignment with the desensitization seen clothing and makeup choices of BTS fans, the idea of gender-neutral love has been advocated within the fan base, particularly embraced by a significant part of fans. Unlike in the past, where they purportedly held a negative perception of homosexuals, they now regard the sexual minority and their behaviors with acceptance.

In her interview, 12-year-old Elnaz straightforwardly expresses that if her favorite celebrity happens to be gay, she would still support and admire them. 14-year-old Gelareh shared in the interview that getting to know the BTS boys has positively influenced her views towards homosexuals. Similarly 15-year-old Sahar and 16-year-old Ghazal acknowledged that BTS boys have made them recognize and respect individuals within the LGBTQ+ community.

- "So, in your view, do you think there are more male ARMY or female ARMYs?

I personally believe that female ARMYs outnumber male ARMYs, because BTS members are from opposite gender. However, there are male fans as well this is what we see in concerts. Also, Taehyung even tried to find out

most of the attendees are girls or boys. To gauge the attendance he would ask girls to make noise and then would ask boys to make noise to see which one outnumbers the other one.

- What do you mean when you say they are of the opposite gender?

Well, boys cannot find a feeling toward each other, I mean they are too few.

- Do you believe that the BTS members have closer emotional ties with girls or boys?"

It is hard to determine as we are not privy to the BTS members' personal orientations.

- So, would you prefer if all of them be gay?

No.

- So, what do you prefer?

I prefer them to be interested in girls.

- If your bias or crush were gay, would that also be acceptable to you?

No, that would not bother me."

- "Did your views on homosexuality align with your current stance prior to becoming a fan of BTS?

I wasn't aware of this concept before. When I discovered I idolize fantasies of marrying my favorite cookie¹ and others opined that there are such thin abroad. And also I have heard some hate things about it. In general, I didn't have a particular stance on this matter before. However, now I identify myself as a Kook-sexual and feel a strong attraction towards Jungkook (Loughs). Well, right now, I respect everyone's beliefs and don't judge others based on preferences. I tend to avoid discussing this topic when others open up about it, because isn't something I enjoy delving into.

- So, it's safe to say that BTS played a role in shaping your more accepting views towards homosexuality?

Yes, somehow. "

- "In which way does this benefit the Illuminati?

The Illuminati's prime objective is to decrease the world's population, and by erasing traditional gender norms, they aim to popularize homosexuality, so

¹ Referring to Gungkook

that girls wouldn't feel any attraction toward boys, this will lead to a decline in birth rates. Additionally, they seek to create social disparities that drive to extraordinary lengths to achieve fame and wealth. I don't pass judgment on tomboys¹ or homosexuals, I am not one of them, to feel the right to have an stance about them, it seems to be a necessity for some individuals, such as when a female character exhibits predominantly masculine traits and emotions, for the character to embody a Tomboy persona or even undergo a gender transformation, reflecting a natural progression and it is her right. However, this situation that most of youth consider themselves and homosexual, and the also in the all-girls schools all the girls choose a tomboys phase , indicates a deliberate scheme, it is a sing influence of subliminal messaging in media to shape these perceptions.

- Dear Sahar, have your views on homosexuality shifted towards seeing it as a natural occurrence since becoming a fan of BTS, or did you already hold the same perspective on this issue before getting into the K-pop scene?

Prior to joining the K-pop fandom, I was still young and hadn't been exposed to these concepts. As I delved into K-pop, I also matured, which naturally led me to explore and learn more about this topic. Even if hadn't discovered BTS, I would've eventually been introduced to homosexuality given the prevalence of these conversations in all-girls high schools. BTS helped me realize that individuals who are homosexual are deserving of complete respect and acceptance. "

- "Ghazal, were you familiar with homosexuality and in general queers² before getting into the K-pop genre?

To the best of my knowledge, I was aware that it means boys liking boys and liking girls. I have heard about it in school but my understanding of the concept was limited. I didn't have comprehensive grasp on the topic. It wasn't until I exposed to the world K-pop that I could better comprehend [LGBTQ+] matters and their relationships.

- What was your perception of it like prior to that?

I didn't harbor any negativity towards it, but I remember feeling perplexed, wondering how it could be a boy and be with another boy, or a girl with

¹ Tomboy is a term used for girls or young women with masculine traits. It can include wearing androgynous or unfeminine clothing and engaging in physical sports or other activities and behaviors usually associated with boys or men.

² Queer" is a term used for sexual minorities that embraces same-sex and non-heterosexual relationships

another girl. At the time, I was still too young and hadn't been exposed to in relationships, which might have influenced my perception.

- How did K-pop shape your understanding of queer individuals?

It offered me a well-rounded perspective. Now, I feel a sense understanding and acceptance. It simply seems normal to me to see two boys or two girls together a relationship. To me, they are just like everyone else. "

2-17- Occurrence of significant cognitive distortions

Upon reviewing the statements of BTS fans, notable cognitive distortions were observed in their discussions. Although their reasoning appeared to be lacking or flawed at times, their averring support for idol and in general BTS remained constant. The cognitive distortions identified in interviews with both and female fans of BTS included:

Reluctance to seek out new information, a lack of critical engagement with available information, tendency to exaggerate, relying on emotional reasoning, justification without addressing contradictions, conflicting views, using weak logic, citing conflicting sources, mindreading, shifting blame to third parties, extreme approaches, self-deception, self-denial, forming illusions dreaming, resorting to falsehoods, being hypocritical reacting irrationally, and developing biased perceptions. Examples of these topics will be included in the subsequent discussions.

Failure to seek out new information

As the title suggests, avoiding acquiring new information involves a reluctance or refusal to seek out fresh information within one's areas of interest. This behavior stems from fear that acquiring new information could disrupt one's existing knowledge base and mental framework, causing it to crumble.

In an interview, 15-year-old Sahar provides an example that exemplifies this cognitive error:

"... BTS songs do not contain any negative reverses messages.

- What does negative reverse mean?

It refers to hidden negative messages that can be perceived when a song is played in reverse. For instance, many songs by Billie Eilish have a plenty of negative reverses when played in reverse.

- Why do you think they include negative reverses in songs?

Certain singers sign contracts with the Illuminati to attain fame, not aware of complications they are accountable for. Subsequently, the Illuminati mandates these singers include messages in their songs to influence people's thoughts. Singers who refuse to comply these directives may face a myriad of threats.

- Does BTS also incorporate these messages into their songs?

I've heard a few times that they are present in some of their songs, but I deliberately avoided looking into it further, so I can't speak to or which songs they might be in.

- Why did you choose not to find out?

I prefer to preserve the positive image I have of BTS and their music. Even if they are in some form of collaboration with the Illuminati, I believe they are being coerced rather than acting willingly. Their music brings me joy, I would rather not recall that there may be a secret message then tarnish enjoyment of their songs and bring negativity into the experience. "

Lack of critical engagement with own information

In certain instances, individuals possess information that is evidently false, yet they are unwilling to question or interrogate their own knowledge critically. Instead, they proceed make statements or undertake actions on the basis of their distorted initial information.

In an illustration of this cognitive distortion, 12-year-old Elnaz mentions in her interview that there are BTS concerts with a crowd size of 750,000,000 people, and she asserts that if BTS members were to join the military service, the Korean economy would be severely impacted!

- "What is the price of a single concert ticket?

In Iranian currency, the priciest concert ticket costs 400 million tomans (~7000\$), while the least expensive ticket is priced at 15 million tomans (~300\$).

- In your view, how large is the concert audience?

750 million people (!).

- Really?

Hell yes, that's a huge number.

- What about financial aid; has ever the Korean government supported BTS financially up to this point?

No, BTS is actually a source of financial revenue for the South Korean government. They argue that once the members attend military service, South Korea face economic and financial challenges (!)."

In an interview, 20-year-old Sheida, who professionally is engaged in the music industry, acknowledges that K-pop companies often exploit their idols like slaves, she remains determined to immigrate to Korea and work in the K-Pop. She aspires to break away from the constraints of K-pop companies with their vast resources to achieve her personal goals independently - a feat she believes to be nearly impractical in the current context.

- "Despite discovering these insights, are you still contemplating immigrating to Korea?

I reconsidered the idea of immigrating to Korea under the traditional K-pop model. However, should I choose to go there as an independent artist, I I can avoid these issues."

Egxaggeration

As evident from the word of magnification, it is an exaggeration in the reality. Some fans, by resorting to exaggeration, seek to display greater magnificence than ever before for the BTS boys.

In an interview, 20-year-old Mahdia provided a prime example of exaggeration pertaining to BTS members:

"There are multiple shows in which members of the group have shared details about their previous daily schedules. For instance, Jimmy mentioned that he woke up at 6 a.m., went to school, then went to the company, worked until 4 a.m., only get 2 hours of sleep (!)."

Engaging in sensation and emotional behaviors

When it comes to their favorite group, individuals might choose to approach interactions in an overly emotional and sensational manner. For example, 14-year-old Gelareh mentions in her interview that she loves the BTS group wholeheartedly. She explains that love doesn't follow a logical path, and continues that the adoration she feels for the BTS encompasses their in every facet. Gelareh goes on to say that, in her view, even if the group were to perform the world's ugliest song, would still be beautiful simply because they are the ones who performing it.

- "I once watched a video where a BTS member left the stage after a performance feeling unwell, needing an oxygen mask and medical assistance. Do you believe the strenuous efforts idols put in, leave them

feeling unwell is acceptable? Is this level of exertion an expression of self-love?

I'm not sure. However, one thing I do know is that fans, such as ARMYs, and all others, are hating K-pop companies for their treatment of idols.

- You mentioned that a significant aspect of idols' dedication is a result of pressures imposed by companies, do believe that supporting K-pop groups may inadvertently lead Kpop companies to enforce stricter rules and put additional pressure on their idols?

We have seen adverse incidents involving Kpop companies in the past, which makes us reluctant to see members pushed to the point of fainting. But companies bother them to get more money, because my affection for the group is heartfelt. Love does not align with logic, and love transcends rationality. I continue to support them in light of these situations... .

- My dear, have you ever listened to a BTS song or watched a BTS video that you didn't particularly enjoy, but you do so simply because you are a fan of the group?

Yes, it has happened on occasion, although it's not that I hate the song, it simply didn't align closely with my personal taste.

It's a rare occurrence for me because I typically focus on anything from BTS. Mostly their sounds and style, as well as the parts of my bias or bias-wrecker. The rhythm or musical mode of the song doesn't usually concern me, but there have been one or two exceptions.

In such instances, I don't replay my MVs (music videos) like 50 times, maybe a couple of times at most, either to learn the lyrics or grasp the of the song, or simply to see the luxury of their new looks.

Look, when you are a devoted fan of a group, you love them with your whole heart. If your are an ARMY, the love for the seven BTS member runs deep in your soul. So if they release ugliest song of the world, you still find it beautiful. This is why it's been a long since I've disliked any of their songs."

25-year-old Shabnam express her love for Korea without providing any reasoning for her love, 18-year-old Parineaz shares she experiences a deep sense of emotion, she will be happy with their happiness and will be sad with their sadness. She stresses that her fascination with Korean culture is largely because if her admire for the BTS group.

- "Is Korea and life in Korea something to envy?

I have always admired [Korea for] its nature, rural areas and its green fields beauty, often daydream about living in such a serene environment.

- I mean, for instance, what distinguishes it from our own northern region?

I'm not quite sure (laughs), but sometimes you feel a strange of familiarity with certain places. Personally, I've always felt a deep connection to a feeling that I may have had a past life there. It's a odd belief, I know. I have a strong desire to visit it and immerse myself in the culture and be among its people.

- My dear, how much of an impact has BTS had on you?

Their influence goes further than you would expect. After BTS, my music playlist is filled with K-pop tracks and Korean songs, my phone's wallpaper is BTS and surly can say that even my dreams are tinged by their presence. The moment I became fan, I aspired to become an idol myself-like them. May be such a dream is not as bold as before, I still have the idea being an idol.

I have the [address of] BTS fan pages and dutifully follow their updates. I am happy with their happiness and will go down with their sadness. I always stick their uplifting phrases on the mirror of my room, read books they recommend such as *The Midnight Library* or the book of Almond¹. both were fantastic. Or I watch the movies they recommend. Their influence has penetrated deep into my soul, motivates me explore Korean culture further, learn to attire like them, learn their language, and it has had positive effects on me overall. "

Justification

Sometimes, when individuals face with cognitive information that goes against what they know, they try to find a justification to justify answers and avoid cognitive conflict. Take 16-year-old Rukhsare, for instance. When asked about why BTS members choose a style for their dressing in some situations and promote pricey brands, she tries to explain and justify their actions. While displaying gender identity disorder and forgetting the human responsibility of humans and regretting other humans are not things that can be brushed off easily.

- "Do you think their style is similar to that of girls?

¹ Recommended by RM

No! I think people must be blind if they can't see the difference between them and girls (expressing surprise and frustration). They definitely don't look like girls at all. They're super attractive and, like, uniquely cool and cute. You know, they can be really cute one moment and then totally special the next, which just makes them even more awesome

- Do they do any advertisements?

Yeah, they do tons of ads. They're like ambassadors for really big brands and rake in loads of cash from it.

- Which countries' brands [do they promote]?

They promote brands from all over, like Paris, America, and even brands from Korea itself.

- What kind of stuff do they promote?

Whatever that is super popular at the time.

- I noticed they also do ads for McDonald's?

Yeah, they promote food, home stuff like appliances, fridges, TVs, and a bunch of other things. There's so much they advertise, it's hard to remember everything, but they promote all stuff that's really famous and in-demand.

- Don't their fans who don't have a lot of money feel upset when they promote really expensive stuff?

No (surprised)! Why would they be upset? I mean, if someone can afford it, will buy it, and if someone can't, then they just won't buy it, simple as that.

- I've heard that some people did get upset about it.

I don't really have any strong feelings about this because it doesn't affect me personally. None of my friends have mentioned being upset about it either. We're fortunate to have what we need and we have as much as we need, we're content with that. Well, if they have more, that's their thing, it is none of our business and if they're asked to advertise, it's just their job. They should do their job. They can't stop working just to avoid upsetting others, right? As you are saying, maybe there are a few fans who feel that way, but I haven't come across any ARMY like that."

In her interview, 16-year-old Sana openly admits that she and her friend justified the extreme dieting of BTS member:

- "Have you ever heard about BTS doing something wrong and found yourself trying to justify it?"

Yes.

- So, what was the specific thing that BTS did wrong that you found yourself trying to justify?

It's more like we were justifying both of us and we both will do it again. They're both really slim. The thing BTS did wrong is they diet too much. I used to be overweight too, so I understand how hard it is to maintain weight like this and stick to a healthy diet.

- Do you know how much Jimin weighs?

Around 60kg

- In your ideas why this is not proper for him?

Well, he is thin and taller than me, I guess around 175-176 cm.

- How do you know this things?

I have read them somewhere.

- Even though you know Jimin and RM are slim, but you and your friend still defend your idols and claim they're not thin?

Yeah, I know, it does sound kind of silly. "

Overlooking inconsistencies

Some BTS fans try to deal with inconsistencies around BTS members by ignoring or justifying them go round such contradictions. For instance, 12-year-old Elnaz denied that idols kissing each other on stage was real, even though it's happened multiple times, and labeled it as fan art. By dismissing the strict diets of idols and attributing the members' slimness to Korean genetics, try to explain away the group's appearance:

- "Do you know anything about sexual orientation of members?"

Well, not about all of them. But Jimin has announced that he is bisexual.

- Has he officially announced this himself, or is it just a rumor?

No, it is an official statement.

- What does bisexual mean?

Well, it means a person is attracted to both girls and boys.

- Do you know anything about sexual orientation of other members?

I don't know, no one knows.

- What is the picture on the internet showing all the members kissing each other?

Ummm, ah, are you referring to that fan art? It's a creation from the minds of ARMYs.

- How would you react if that was real?

Well, as ARMYs enjoy seeing them together, they create such fan arts, they like to see they have an attraction toward each other.. .

- The members and singers of this group have a certain look that fans admire and want to make up themselves similarly. But don't you think trying to look like them could be harmful? For instance, how much should a fan who is fat or has overweight have stress about trying to emulate their appearance?

It can be harmful, but for the fat ones, the members have actually mentioned that fans don't need to try to be like them and encourage self-love. Their motto is "Love Yourself."

- Why do you think there isn't anyone overweight among the idols and members of BTS, so that fans can feel good about themselves too?

I agree, it shouldn't be that way.

- For instance, during the Barbie craze, many people tried to emulate Barbie's look, and the same happened with Disney cartoons, although that trend later shifted. Do you think they should reconsider this to make their message more authentic?

Yeah, I think it would be good if they show that not everyone is the same. But being slim is part of their genetics, both for Koreans and Chinese. "

25-year-old Kowsar, overlooking issues like holding a LGBTQ flag and physical interactions among idols on stage, acknowledges that the K-pop industry can be quite homophobic than others, and that the recent behavior of idols isn't necessarily homosexual:

- "So, for example, in some videos I've seen from their concerts, it's quite common to see same-sex individuals kissing each other. How do you view that?"

Right, I wanted to talk about this. It's common for people outside of the K-pop culture, like in Iran, to misinterpret gestures within K-pop as promoting homosexuality. For example, when boys hug or exchange affectionate words, some may see it as promoting homosexuality. However, in Korean culture, it's normal for boys to show physical affection, like hugging or holding hands, and even for boys to use cosmetics more than girls. This is just part of their culture and doesn't necessarily promote homosexuality. In reality, Korean culture is known to be quite homophobic and doesn't endorse homosexuality. These actions within K-pop are not seen as promoting homosexuality within their society.

I wanted to mention that in some cultures, like in Iran, individuals viewing K-pop from an external perspective may misinterpret certain gestures as promoting homosexuality. For instance, when boys in K-pop groups hug or exchange kisses on their cheeks or on the lips, or exchange love words, it can be misunderstood as promoting homosexuality. However, in Korean culture, such displays of affection among boys are not necessarily linked to promoting homosexuality. Boys hugging each other is an accepted norm. It is common for boys to take each other's hands. I have read an article explaining that in their social context boys use more cosmetics than girls. This is a part of their culture. It is not meant to promote homosexuality. Not at all. In fact, Korean culture is known to be quite homophobic and does not endorse homosexuality. These acts, [such as boys hugging or using cosmetics] are not viewed as homosexual acts within Korean society."

- Does this mean that men care a lot about their appearance?"

Yeah, they all seem clean and cute. Being cute is a big deal in their culture. It's like, girls in Korea dig guys who are sweet and cool. So, when K-pop fans hear stuff like BTS promoting homosexuality, they're like, "What's this dude on about?" 'Cause, let's be real, no one is more homophobic than the K-pop industry."

Maryam, 18-year-old, gets that BTS can be a bit contradictory sometimes. She believes, people should listen to what others say (and learn from it), rather than just watching what they do. But, literature review shows that when there's a clash between words and actions of a role model, the impact will be pretty

small. To really make a difference, the role model needs to walk the talk, not just talk the talk.

- "What's your take on the company having a tight grip on everything BTS does? Despite all that control and meddling, do you think the members still have the freedom to do their thing?"

One thing that's always puzzled me during my years as a K-Pop fan is why these companies are so over-the-top and unreasonable with their idols. They want them to be perfect, do not turn left or right, like they can't make a single misstep, have no personal life, and yet still be mentally and physically on point. It's like, do they even realize what they're asking for? And if the idols don't meet these crazy expectations, the companies come down hard on them, pointing fingers and pushing them down. It's like, in all my time following K-Pop, I've never seen these companies really have their idols' backs or fight for their rights. Makes you wonder how much say the members really have freedom in what they do...

- Do you reckon the whole 'love yourself' message clashes with BTS's beauty surgeries and strict diets?

It's true that BTS doesn't always practice what they preach, and there's a lot of extreme stuff in K-pop driven by the companies' decisions. But, if that 'love yourself' message manages to touch even one fan, it's a win. What really counts is the message itself and the positive impact it can have on some ARMYs. As long as it has a positive impact, it doesn't matter how much they can behave align to their motto. It's about the message, not the messenger."

Conflicting behavior

Another cognitive conflict common among BTS fan base, is that they often find themselves in a bit of a mental tug-of-war with conflicting attitudes and behaviors. It's like they'll vibe with something emotionally but then shut it down when they try to make sense of it logically, or they'll take up conflicting stances that just don't add up. It's a bit of a head-scratcher, really.

Masoud, 20-years-old, in his interview on one hand, he's all logical and critical about some of BTS's views, but then he turns around and pours his heart out, calling BTS his love and dreaming of heading to Korea just to meet his idols.

- "Do all these intellectual clashes with BTS ever make you second-guess being a fan?"

Yeah, I have my moments of doubt, but honestly, I haven't come across anything as awesome as BTS. So, I'm sticking with them and showing my support.

- Would you ditch BTS unconditionally if you found a group better than them?

Yeah, I would. There are things about BTS I don't vibe with, like the guys wearing makeup...

- If BTS group turned out to be gay, would you still support them?

No way, I'd drop my support in a heartbeat and try to forget about them.

- Are you thinking about getting married?

Definitely, I'm planning and saving up for that big day so that when I am going to do that have enough to cover spendings. And when it happens, I won't be copying BTS...

- So, you're so into BTS that you'd move to Korea to see them?

Yeah, BTS is my top favorite. They're my love. "

Shabnam, 25-year-old, kind of stepped back from the whole BTS dilemma. She pointed out the conflict between BTS's song lyrics and how the group actually acts, but she's like, 'Screw the conflict, I'm just here for the song lyrics':

- "Shabnam, you also mentioned how BTS members seems to go against their company's rules and do their own thing. But I've heard their contracts are super strict, like they can't even pick their own hair color, and the company decides which part of their body needs surgeries. They can't really speak up or refuse. And they can't even make personal decisions like expressing themselves freely or getting married without the company's agreement!

I have heard too, I don't really buy into that idea. Sure, sometimes they seem to go against the company, but, it's like a trade-off between fame, success, and cash, right? That's the price they pay.

- So, how can we really take their slogans like 'Love yourself' and 'Be yourself, don't care what others think' seriously when they seem to bend to these strict rules?

Well ... I don't know. The way you put it, their slogans do sound a bit off (laughs). But come on, when I'm listening to their songs, all those thoughts kind of fade away, and it's mostly the lyrics that hit me."

Relying on very weak logic

Some of the interviewed fans, in the course of presenting their arguments, clearly show that they have a simplistic and weak logic, and with the same simplistic logic, they try to do things and respond to others.

Dealing based on zero and one approach is one of the manifestations of this simplistic and weak logic. This means that sometimes BTS fans deal with their problems by relying on zero and one logic, which only has two options of negation or confirmation, while in human issues, it is not possible to solve problems by only relying on two options, positive and negative and find a correct classification of facts.

In the recent case, the fans, after being attached to the BTS group, seeing the group as absolute, due to their simplistic logic and following the zero and one view of issues. Fans simply think because the BTS group has positive characteristics in several fields using a false generalization, they evaluate all that group positively.

In an interview, 15-year-old Reihaneh exposes her zero and one logic as follows.

- "Well, now do you think makeup is a good thing or not?

If it was bad, BTS wouldn't do it.

- Is everything BTS doing right?

BTS supports people, is it possible for such a group to want bad things for people?"

Another manifestation of the weak logic of some sections of BTS fans is to ignore the problems ahead. In her interview, 17-year-old Reihaneh exposes her simplistic logic by referring to ignoring problems instead of solving them:

- "My dear, in relation to the problem you said you had, did BTS actually helped you to try to solve the problem or to ignore the problem?

Somehow both.

- In what way exactly?

Somehow, it made me care more about myself so that I don't let any sadness into my heart anymore, and everything is not worth to feel like that for it.

- Does that mean ignore the problem and pay more attention to yourself?

Yeah.

- What aspects of yourself did you focus on the most?

I tried to improve myself, even though I didn't take problems too seriously, now I have become more and more relaxed."

12-year-old Elnaz also in her interview by stating things like that she started learning Korean just to go to Korea to see the BTS group, or without using Korean food or their traditional clothes, she claim to be fascinated by these things. She exposes the weakness of her reasoning and logic:

- "Out of all South Korea, only BTS attracted you?

Yes, of course, I also like their culture, food and clothes.

- Well, why do you like their food?

Their food looks interesting and delicious.

- Have you ever tried Korean food?

No.

- So how do you say you like their food?

I like their food appearance and combination. And of course the models who eat in their movies and Mukbang videos.

- Well, you said that you like their clothes, what did you mean by that?

Well, model their clothes is so beautiful that the name of their clothes is Humbug [Hanbok is correct].

- Have you ever worn this model of clothes that you are talking about?

No, I have not tried yet.

- Why didn't you try?

Because it is not in Iran and if it is, it is very expensive.

- Well, how do you like their clothes when you haven't tried them on?

I saw Korean people wearing those clothes and I thought it was beautiful...

- Do you like to go to BTS concert?

Yes, and that's why I'm studying Korean.

- So you are learning Korean so hard because of a concert that you don't know if you can go or not?

Yeah.

- Can you explain more about the fact that you are studying Korean because of BTS?

Well, one wants to learn Korean and go to Korea, and when he goes to their country, he can communicate with them more.

- Well, what happens when there is no BTS group?

If they are not there, I have no more motivation to study Korean, and my biggest motivation to study Korean is to go to Korea and see them.

- Now are you sure you will see them?

Yes, I will try my best to go and participate if I post a fan sign.

- What exactly is Fansign?

Fan sign means that you can go see your favorite band and have a few minutes to see them up close and talk to them.

- And don't you think that if they are not there, you have no interest and desire to continue the Korean language?

Well, if they can't sign anymore, there are still their fans, for example, there may still be fans on Instagram.

- Well, you are spending money and time and when this happens, you will say that I will not learn anymore, so your efforts, time and money will not be wasted?

Correct, but I accepted the risk."

Resorting to weak and conflicting references

Along with the weak logic used by some BTS fans, some other fans try to argue on various issues by citing conflicting topics, which of course, this weak and ineffective argument will not be a way forward for them.

For example, 19-year-old Marzieh states that she is proud of her religiousness for recent reasons, citing simple things such as congratulating the beginning of Ramadan or stopping the concert when the members of the BTS group called the call to prayer. However, at the same time the members of the BTS group, with their behaviors, in many cases, display behaviors that are contrary to Marzieh's religious beliefs, and in general, this set of behaviors cannot be considered as a confirmation of Marzieh's religious beliefs:

- "What does idol really mean to you?!"

(Thinks) For me, an idol is a complete meaning of an artist who loves his art so much that he worked hard for it to reach this position, a real artist who I can learn from and become my role model and try to be like him in my life. To be influential and to learn from them and that we do not worship them and only learn from them. Idol may mean idol in English, something that the companies chose, not us, they expect this to happen, I proudly say that I am Muslim and adhere to my beliefs, but I am a fan of this group and that even being proud of my religion is under the influence of BTS.

- How to make you proud of your religion?

The fact that they care so much about their Muslim armies and congratulate them on the month of Ramadan, and they are careful not to touch the Muslim armies and tell them their opinion about the hijab, which made me more interested in the hijab, or when the call to prayer (Adhan) was played, they stopped their concert. "

Intention reading

People who do not have the benefit of the strength of reasoning and logic, may engage in mind-reading and intention-reading about the issues raised in explaining their statements and comment with their own favorable interpretation of the incident that took place. Mind-reading is not an accepted thing, and the fact that anyone becomes someone's friend with his own suspicions, does not lead to a person's path and guide, and another person may make statements opposite to the first person's statements in the process of reading the intentions of the first person.

12-year-old Elnaz and 16-year-old Rokhsareh, in their separate interviews, in response to the political positions of the BTS members regarding the popular protests of the Iranian people in 2022, both of them resorting to mind-reading and intention-reading pointed out that the word "freedom" was placed on the hat worn by one of the BTS members, made this issue synonymous with the Namjoon's desire to support the popular protests of the Iranian people (in 2022), while in principle, in pop music, which is not devoid of protest tradition, it is very common to use words like freedom:

"Boys cannot publish political things at all, either for their own country or for other countries.

- Well, these do not contradict or contradict their slogans?

Well, with the things they do daily, they tell their ARMYs who are in turbulent country that they understand you and we are with you.

- So, can you give an example of these supports?

For example, R.M when Palestine was in a state of war, he bought a tableau about the Palestinian people to be strong and shared a post in Wevers saying that we stand with you.

- So what about the rest of the members, what did they do?

Well, in one of the photos he posted, Namjoon had a hat on his head that he wrote in English: freedom, freedom.

- So what purpose did he do this for?

He had notified Iran indirectly.

- Why did he do this?

To show that he supports people of Iran.

- So how did you know he meant Iranian people?

Well, the army guessed that Namjoon was telling us the Iranian army indirectly that we support you.

- Does that mean they support indirectly because of their limitations?

Yes, that's right."

- "Look, you said something like you are happy to be an ARMY, I felt that you are proud of something? What are you proud of BTS?

You got it right, I'm really proud of BTS: their fame, the things they do, the material help they give to others, all these things make me much more impressed. Even in their songs, there are things to show to the army. Or for the freedom of Iran, their company usually does not allow them to get involved in political issues, they do not even allow them to get involved in the political issues of their own country. But some of them sent an indirect signal for the freedom of Iran.

- What do you mean send?

For example, Namjoon shared a photo and wrote that freedom is near. "

Referring to a third party

Sometimes, people who suffer from weak reasoning, instead of providing appropriate reasoning in explaining the issues and positions they raise, may feel weak and to avoid reasoning, by referring the issues to a third person or institution, they may run away from providing necessary reasoning or showing responsibility.

Based on what has been noted by many fans of the BTS group it can be inferred that when they witness behaviors conflicting with the group's slogans, they tend to refer instances of contrary behavior by BTS members to the company to resolve the issue. Essentially, they hold the company responsible for the actions of the group members that are conflicting with their slogans, thus absolving themselves of the duty to explain the arising conflicts. However, under no circumstances can the human responsibility of individuals be denied or dismissed using any excuses.

The comments of 16-year-old Rakhsarh and 14-year-old Gelareh in their separate interviews contain examples in this direction:

- "Then when you see their makeup, what does it mean to you?

It doesn't mean anything to me, many people are the same, I don't think it makes any difference, of course, because I'm an ARMY, I don't see any difference and it's become normal for me. Maybe for some people who see it for the first time, for example, they say yes, isn't this a boy, why he wear makeup and say something like this. After all, these are idols and they have to wear makeup. They should change their skin a little.

- Why do idols have to wear makeup?

In order to make them look more attractive and be more coordinated with their dressing style. Of course, they are really attractive, but those things are because of the company.

- Are they trying to make their face whiter?

No. All of that is done by their make-up artist, which they all accept, they accept this things. "

- "Is it possible that one day something happen to BTS that you will no longer like them and not want to support them?

Since I love them very much, I don't think they are the kind of people who would do something against my will, i.e. do something that I dislike, that's why I never hate them and I might forget.

- You might forget about BTS or that bad job that you hate?

I said this because I love them so much, they are 100% people who are approved by me and my conditions, and then in my opinion, one day, they will not change so much as to disturb the expression of all those conditions, because it is not only me, but there are many others who might hate it. That's why, in my opinion, they never do such a thing and I never hate them, and I might not support them or forget them, but I don't hate them.

- Can you give an instance where if BTS were to do something, it would cause you to stop supporting them and forget them?

I didn't think about it until now, but for example, maybe if they don't respect my opinions, or if they disrespect my religion and persuasion, or if they lead me down a bad path.

- According to your own words, in their songs, BTS refers to topics such as loving yourself, but not having the freedom to choose even for the simplest issues, such as hair color, etc., is in a way contrary to loving oneself. Do you think BTS's words and actions are not contradictory?

Look, they take these hardships and it has a thousand benefits for them, for example, their bodies become strong, they earn money, and they also make these efforts so that we love ourselves, and of course I must say that half of it is because of the strictness of the company, but if they don't try so hard they wouldn't be the best k-pop group.

- I saw a video where one of the BTS members came down from the stage after the performance in a very bad mood and they gave him an oxygen mask and did rescue work. Do you think this level of hard work that makes the idols so tired that they even feel sick, is a right thing to do and does it show that you love yourself?

I do not know. I only know that by the way, ARMYs and all the fans hate the company because of what they do with the idols. "

Resorting to extreme behaviors

Some of the fans interviewed, in response to the interview questions, tended to exaggerate in their answers. This exaggeration can sometimes make their responses less credible. For instance, Negin, 17-year-old, when discussing the rumors about BTS disbanding, linked it to a drop in Samsung's stock price, suggesting the impact of the group on the brand's reputation.

- "What role does the company play in all of this?

They bring in advertisement contracts for them, like how BTS promoted Samsung. There was a rumor going around that BTS might disband, and suddenly Samsung's stock plummeted in a second (!), resulting in a significant loss for it. "

During his interview, 20-year-old Sheida, due to tendency of two of her students to a gender affirming surgery disagreed with a research report about individuals transitioning genders. Additionally, 19-year-old Nastaran pointed out that some fans who support certain idols feel they have the right to pass judgment on and make decisions about every minutes of the personal lives of those idols.

- "Do you believe there aren't significant consequences for going against societal norms and making life-altering decisions? For instance, I watched a documentary about sex reassignment surgery, and it showed that some individuals who underwent gender reassignment later experienced regret, depression, and in some tragic cases, even took their own lives due to the irreversible nature of their decision.

Was this documentary you mentioned produced in Iran?

- No, it was about Iranian transgender; but it wasn't a government funded documentary. Interestingly, it was even aired on the BBC.

Regarding the information you said it was provided, it seems all of it is incorrect. I personally know two friends and two of my students who are undergoing gender transition and are content with their choices."

- "Have you witnessed fans getting overly emotional and reacting strongly?

Yeah, like when they hear about their dates.

- So, what do you think leads to this intense emotional reaction and potential criticism on this matter?

I'm not entirely sure. Some fans, and there are pretty much of them, believe they have a say in their idol's personal life. They feel that because they support their idol by buying albums or attending concerts, they have the right to dictate whether their idol should date or get married. They argue that since they've invested their money in supporting their idol, they should have a say in their personal decisions. However, this is wrong. The idol has put in the hard work to earn their money in this or that way, anyway, he has worked like a dog. And now that he want to get married, how dare you think you have the right to make decisions about someone else's personal life?

Regardless of how much you may adore someone, buying him material possessions like a house or a car doesn't grant you the authority to meddle in their personal affairs. Korean fans themselves have the most reactions and receive too much of criticism too. Anyway, unfortunately, these kinds of situations do occur anytime."

Self-Deception

When examining the responses of certain BTS fans to questions regarding the group, it becomes apparent that some fans tend to justify their preferred stances through self-deception rather than presenting sound arguments. This approach is not conducive to constructive discourse.

In his interview, 21-year-old Narges acknowledges that initially, he idolized the group and viewed them without any flaws. However, as her perspectives evolved over time, her opinions about the group have shifted somewhat.

13-year-old Negin, while discussing the challenges faced by the BTS group and attributing them to the company, mentioned that she and her friends have chosen to focus only on the positive aspects of the group, while deliberately overlooking the company's mistreatment against the members. Negin also highlighted that although she and her friends touch upon inappropriate topics in the one-shots and fanfictions they create about idols, they do so purely for entertainment and enjoyment. And the critiques— of individuals who know as intellectuals— about insults against idols in one-shots and fanfictions is not valid.

- "What led you to view the members of the BTS group in such a way?

I don't know, maybe because I had made them as gods in my mind.

- During that time, how much did you know about the K-pop industry and the issues behind the scenes?

I was completely unaware at that time. Even if someone mentioned something, I would dismiss it. It was challenging for me to acknowledge the pressures they were under. Part of it stemmed from my own struggles in life; I sought solace in them as a means to escape my own sorrows. I was reluctant to accept that the BTS members might not align with the idealized image I had of them. I was deceiving myself because I knew that if I faced the reality of how challenging and distressing the K-pop industry could be for them, I would probably feel even worse. That's why I didn't really seek out what was happening and as long as I could, I stayed away from this news.

- Does this mean you never accepted it?

I did eventually, as I matured. Not entirely, but to a significant extent.

- How did you feel when you came to terms with it?

It was difficult for me to break free from the idealized world I had constructed in my mind, and I believe it influenced my decision to distance myself from BTS. Realizing that many of their words and actions were part of a carefully crafted image for promotion or due to external pressures was disheartening. The illusion I had built shattered."

"Many of my friends who are ARMY or fans in general, find it distressing to see their idols suffer, and they often cry for them. According to my mom, she views this emotional attachment as a form of obsession."

- When you consider ways to alleviate an idol's suffering, what ideas come to mind?

I feel powerless to make a difference.

- Why?

One reason is that the company prioritizes profits over the well-being of their idols.

- If all ARMYs were to withdraw their support, do you think it would prompt the company to reconsider their approach?

If the ARMYs withdraw their support, it could have negative consequences for the idol. They might be let go, leading to the group disbanding entirely, and their careers could come to an abrupt end.

- Does this imply that there is no way for them to continue their work independently?

It's highly unlikely. There might be a few options available, such as program manager or something like that, but if the ARMYs stop supporting them, they could face rejection from the industry.

- It seems like both idols and ARMYs are somewhat at the mercy of the company, doesn't it?

Yes.

- So, both groups are essentially being exploited. ARMYs feel compelled to witness their idols' suffering and continue supporting them without

showing any objection, while idols may feel pressured to remain silent to avoid repercussions.

Yes.

- It creates a threatening environment, doesn't it?

Indeed. We tend to contemplate these issues privately, and when we're with friends, we often steer clear of such discussions to focus on happier topics that bring us joy... .

- How do the intellectuals you mentioned perceive these situations?

Being intellectual is a sarcastic term. They think a lot about the other person, I'm not saying they are doing something wrong, I'm saying that reaching a limit should come to an end.

- What do you mean by reaching a limit?

For instance, someone writes a good one-shot for example it is about something funny, but then an intellectual might jump in the comments claiming that you are hurting the idol with such a thing.

- What is their concern with these creative works?

They believe that all one-shots and fanfictions have negative impacts.

- You mean they have a problem with your choice to write about fantasies and imaginations involving these seven individuals?

Yes.

- What do they believe causes harm?

They argue that the bond between the idols and fans is unique, characterized by deep emotional connections and intimacy between these two not that two. They have different feelings, they are intimate, and they show more intimacy than others, if they are match or not; it is none of our business, writing these things are just for fun and enjoyment."

Self-Censorship

Upon reviewing the interviews conducted with the participants, it is evident that some individuals engaged in self-censorship. This self-censorship stemmed from either avoiding of unpleasant information or preemptively shielding their interests to evade potential criticism from external observers.

In her interview, 16-year-old Sana highlighted instances of self-censorship:

- "Regarding to the Palestine-Israel conflict, which side do you believe is in the right?

Palestine is always the oppressed party, I used to believe that we hate Israel because they have indoctrinated us so much that Israel is the enemy, we also think that way, but during world cup gathering, I realized that we are not the only ones who detest Israel.

- Why was like that, what did you observe?

I used to assume that many people had positive interactions with Israelis, but last night, I witnessed individuals chanting 'Free Palestine' behind an Israeli journalist and Moroccan players showing support [for Palestine], among others."

- Have you heard about BTS showing support for Israel?

Yes, I'm aware of it.

- Has BTS's support for Israel affected your level of interest in the group?

No, I prefer not to delve into such matters to avoid losing my interest. It is important to know that It's not about BTS as a group; it's specifically about Jimin. I have a strong attachment to Jimin, and I was fearing for many years and still fear hearing something negative about him. That's why I steer clear of negative news about BTS and focus on lighthearted content or interesting updates about the group. Watching BTS Funny Moments on Aparat¹ lifts my spirits.

- How do you trust that the group members' public personas are authentic?

I can't be certain, but considering their consistency over the years, I believe if there were significant issues, they wouldn't have endured this long.

- Do you have insight into their private lives to verify this?

No, I don't have access to their private lives.

- Aren't you curious about your favorite idol's personal life?

¹ An Iranian platform like YouTube

I prefer not to know because I fear it may not align with the idealized image I have of them. I don't want to lose my admiration. For instance, if I were to discover that Jimin is in a relationship, it would deeply upset me.

- What type of relationship are you referring to?

Sexual relationship.

- Do you believe Jimin has never been in a relationship?

I prefer to believe that until proven otherwise. If evidence surfaces of a relationship, my interest might diminish....

- Let me clarify my question. The contract reportedly they have signed restricts marriage, interactions with the opposite sex, eating their food of choice, disclosure of sexual orientation, and many more. How do you feel about this? No matter what we pass by, one cannot pass by the favorite food. How can a person love themselves, yet even the food they eat is chosen by the company, not by themselves. What is your opinion on this matter?

I understand now. If I'm not free myself, why should I advocate for freedom? Still I am insisting on my respect for their perspective and didn't change my opinion, but I also believe they shouldn't promote such slogans. And I also I have my opinion about this. Young people like me, who value freedom and autonomy, want to be successful and do what they like to do and no one pick on them may resonate with these slogans. They know this clearly that they may use these slogans to attract more fans, not just by BTS, but by various entities try to promote catchy slogans. Because catchy slogans have a way of drawing in a large audience.

- Did you use catchy slogans to attract fans in the fandom you created?

Our slogan was "Love Yourself, bulletproof girls, and Stay True to Yourself."

- How closely do you adhere to these slogans?

Not very closely.

- Does this mean that as a BTS fan, you don't fully embrace BTS's slogans?

When they don't align their actions with their slogans, it can be disheartening. My reluctance to discuss certain aspects stems from the same reasons I mentioned earlier; I prefer not to dwell on these perceived shortcomings."

In her interview, 25-year-old Shabnam discussed self-censorship as a means of avoiding unpleasant information and censoring her own interests and emotions related to the BTS group. She also mentioned censoring her enthusiasm for BTS in front of individuals who oppose the group's core principles regarding desexualization of makeup, clothing, and relationships, to prevent conflict:

- "Shabnam, you mentioned your interest in moving to Korea. Have you considered the potential consequences and sacrifices involved in this decision, such as potential homelessness, challenges of being accepted as a foreigner in Korean culture, and the need to leave behind your relationships and family?

Yes, I am aware that it would be incredibly challenging. As I mentioned earlier, I believe I need to achieve independence and self-reliance before pursuing such a significant change to be successful in such a journey. Regarding Korean culture, I remain optimistic as I believe they are accepting of others.

- But statistics of immigrants to Korea, unlike many other countries, do not seem very remarkable. This may indicate that the conditions there are not so easy, otherwise it would attract a larger immigrant population.

I think conditions are not easy for immigrants anywhere. Going to anywhere can be difficult.

- What do you see in this difficulties that despite its heavy costs, like being separated from friends and loved ones and so on, you still persist in pursuing this dream?

It's a matter of love. Look at prospects in your own country, whether economically or socially, in any aspect, when you see no future, you become willing to make sacrifices to secure a better future elsewhere.

- What if you are unable to realize this goal? How would you cope with the energy and time invested if migration doesn't come to fruition?

I prefer not to think about that possibility.

- But well, this is also a possibility, and just as it hasn't happened so far, unfortunately, it may never happen!

I know, but thinking about it may drain your energy and serve no purpose...

- Shabnam, the dedication you have towards BTS, is it akin to the bond people have with their family? Do you show strong reaction to criticism

of Korea and BTS, or do you do the self-censorship due to fear of criticism, don't you think this can lead to isolation and mental strain?

Yes, you are correct. It's a sensitivity that I can control, as you said I feel a deep emotional connection that make me sensitive toward them".

Halucination

In their interviews, some BTS fans reveal tendencies towards extremes and irrationality when it comes to their devotion to the group, leading to confusion in handling certain issues related to their favorite group.

In her interview, 21-year-old Mohammad Reza shared that, like many fans, he initially harbored a delusion that listening to music from other K-pop groups or artists would be considered a betrayal of BTS and should be strictly avoided:

- "Did you explore other music alongside BTS?

For a brief period, no, I stopped doing that, about one or two months I had this irrational belief that listening to music from other artists would be a form of betrayal towards BTS (laughs). I even felt a bit guilty for listening to songs by other artists. During that time, I solely focused on BTS and didn't listen to any other music, just BTS and BTS. There were a couple of collaborations with artists like Halsey¹ and a few others, but I can't recall them now.

However, as time passed, I gradually started listening to other genres as well, such as Persian rap, Dari rap, and international songs by artists like Eminem². I continued to follow BTS alongside exploring other music genres. Still doing that. It has now become a normal part of my music consumption, and I no longer feel like I'm betraying them (laughter)."

Fantasizing

In everyday life, some individuals tend to rely on their imagination rather than solid and concrete facts, often driven by weak reasoning or overwhelming emotions. While attempting to address their issues, some may present their dreams to others instead of providing logical explanations, which may not lead to success in the real world.

¹ An American singer and songwriter

² An American Rapper, song writer and producer

As many fans are in their adolescence or experiencing heightened libido and sexual desire, romantic and sexual fantasies frequently dominate their thoughts. These fantasies may sometimes disrupt their daily lives.

In her interview, 22-year-old Shirin, who is married and has faced conflicts with her husband due to her intense support for the BTS group, mentioned that while managing her fan page, she creates fictional stories. These stories, (if revealed to her husband, could jeopardize their relationship due to their explicit content) are portraying her as the main character and despite the potential risks, Shirin focuses on entertaining other fans through these fictional tales.

A life filled with sweet dreams and fantasies for her fans are potential dangers that Shirin passes by without paying attention to, and thus continues her fandom of the BTS group.

- "Shirin, do you also write fictional stories about idols in your fan page?"

Yes, I write fictional stories that are respectful towards the idols.

- Could you provide an example?

For example, last night I had a dream where I traveled to Korea wearing a white t-shirt and linen pants, with my hair styled to one side. All the thing I needed in this travel were in a backpack. Upon landing, came down from plain, I waited inside the airport for RM to greet me, but he never showed up. Feeling lost and alone, I heard a voice calling me. When I turned, I saw Jimin, who explained that RM couldn't make it and sent me instead to take you from airport. I was delighted to see Jimin, and we shared a moment before heading to my hotel. I expressed my gratitude by offering him a souvenir, a customary gesture in Iranian culture, and spent the night resting in my room. The next morning, I was awakened by a knock on the door, and to my surprise, RM stood on the doorstep. Overwhelmed with emotion, I embraced him, at the moment I suddenly jumped out of sleep.

- How do your followers respond to your fictional stories?

They enjoy them and often request to continue this or that story, or ask for new stories. They prompting me to dedicate specific days for sharing fictional tales. "

14-year-old Gelarah expressed her desire to be Jungkook's wife in her dreams, while 18-year-old Fereshteh mentioned that many girls have romantic fantasies involving BTS members.

- "What kind of content do your friends read that you believe is not suitable for them?

Smut, one-shots, stories portraying members as mafia or vampires, and content that distorts their true personalities by depicting them as gay, cruel, violent, or are abusive toward them and change their personalities.

- Dear Gelareh, have you ever fantasized about yourself with BTS members?"

I am 100% sure that anyone may think about it (laughs), but I wouldn't share or publish such fantasies, this is a childish act. It's just a form of personal interest."

- Could you elaborate further on this?

I always think about my fantasies, like imagining that my age gap with Jungkook is small, and I can see him up close, talk to him, be his friend, go beyond just being friends, and maybe, just maybe, Jungkook could be my husband. Oh, may I do not talk about that?"

- "Have you ever imagined yourself in a romantic relationship with BTS members, especially in your fantasies or during moments of solitude?

You posed some unexpected questions, and I was a bit apprehensive about where this was leading (laughs), but to answer honestly, I haven't problem with this, but honestly in my fantasies I hadn't had any romantic relationship with them. It's not about considering myself different or trying to distance myself; it is not like that at all. Despite what many girls may prefer, it's simply not something that appeals to me romantically. However, I do engage in many, many, many imaginative scenarios, and still may have some of them, sometimes as a form of entertainment when I'm bored. But I tend to envision myself as a friend among a group, a friendly group, and this perspective has been beneficial in addressing certain challenges in my relationships with others, even in real life. "

Engaging in Lying

Lying and deceit are highly unethical behaviors, often resorted to by individuals with a low self-esteem, or one who without any sound reasoning seeking to assert their opinions without valid arguments. They fabricate falsehoods to distort reality and make their false narratives appear true.

During her interview, 16-year-old Sana resorted to lying by criticizing BTS for desexualizing makeup and clothing, and she presented photos of BTS members wearing makeup as photoshopped images.

"I have learned so much from BTS. If you look at it thoroughly BTS is like a university that truly transformed me in many ways. I have improved significantly.

- But you mentioned that your learning has declined and your focus has waned. Is that accurate?

Despite all the positive aspects, it is not a big deal to see one negative impact. The key is that my dedication and efforts have increased.

- What are the weaknesses of BTS?

They have no weaknesses.

- So, you haven't identified any weaknesses?

They don't have any particular weaknesses. Some people usually say they are look like girls, but they are wrong.

- Do you believe BTS members' use of makeup is appropriate? Do they overdo it?

No, they hardly wear any makeup; many of the photos circulating are digitally altered."

Sacralization

Sacralization is the idealistic processing of patterns, where individuals, upon encountering prominent patterns in society, follow them and make them the cornerstone of their emulation. Due to logical weaknesses, when individuals see several positive traits in a pattern, they may easily engage in idealization and perceive them as perfect and singular in all dimensions and aspects. The intensity of some people's attachment to their desired patterns is so great that they refer to them as their "Gods."

Some fans, in normal circumstances, see their idol at the pinnacle of perfection, viewing them as devoid of any errors, faults, flaws, or weaknesses. In this state, the sanctification that fans hold for their idol leads them to perceive their chosen pattern as embodying transcendental goodness, without critically assessing it, and easily overlooking any blemishes or faults that may exist.

13-year-old Negin expressed this sentiment in her interview, stating:

"Anyway, let me put it this way, some fans, particularly loyal and devoted ones, may view their idol as an angel even if they have killed someone.

- What kind of fan are you?

Yes (laughs), I would still see my favorite idol as an angel even if he kills a person.

- How can he remain an angel?

I don't know. I haven't really thought about the specifics, but if my idol were to do something like that, I wouldn't have an issue. I would simply dismiss it as rumors, lies, and not reality.

- Does this mean you prioritize preserving the idealized image?

Yes."

Engaging in Irrational Behavior

Some individuals resort to irrational actions, such as threats, to manipulate others into complying with their desires instead of presenting logical arguments to support their claims, often stemming from a lack of self-esteem.

In her interview, 17-year-old Ehsan recounted his older sister's behavior, where she pressured their parents by threatening suicide unless they agreed to fund and support her emigration to Korea. Eventually, she succeeded in obtaining their consent and financial backing for her move:

- "If the circumstances were favorable, would you consider immigrating to Korea?

No way, it's not possible. I wouldn't leave my parents alone, and I always encourage my sister to return after completing her studies.

- Are you against immigration altogether?

Yes, I am completely against immigration. I have seen how my parents are broken after my sister emigrated. And I believe that all the educational opportunities we need are available in our own country. We can continue our studies here. We just need to work hard to pass the entrance exam.

- Why didn't you try to dissuade your sister from moving to Korea?

The reality is, my sister was deeply infatuated with Korea and had become quite irrational. It was challenging to reason with her; she was solely focused on leaving. If we had pressured her not to go, she might have resorted to suicide. Consequently, my father provided financial support and sent her to

Korea. My father aged rapidly after my sister's departure, and my mother has been struggling with depression, she is often in tears.

- Do you think your sister is content in Korea now?

I genuinely don't know. She might be concealing her true feelings, pretending to be happy and fulfilled."

Formation of directional perception

Some individuals, due to their deep love and excessive interest in something or excessive contemplation, gradually lose their realistic perception. Subsequently, their perception becomes influenced by that particular issue of interest and guides the individual. In other words, just as blinders restrict the vision of a horse to what is in front of it, directional perception can limit an individual's perceptual field to the favored factor, hindering understanding, comprehension, and analysis of issues from a realistic perspective.

In her interview, 16-year-old Sana openly acknowledges her directional perception, where her attachment to her favorite idol prevents her from condemning them in any situation:

- "If Jimin were to commit a deliberate act of murder and be found guilty, would you support or condemn him?

I might not support him, but I wouldn't condemn him either because I simply can't bring myself to do so.

- So, if the BTS members, whom you are a fan of, were to make a mistake, you would defend them if possible and if not, you refrain from condemning them, is that correct?

Yes, that's not something I can do. "

Shirin, a 22-year-old, who has become a passionate fan of the BTS group and has even shaken the foundations of her marital life on the path of loving the group, in relation to the idea of desexualization of love by BTS, tries to suppress this concept and expresses that BTS should only be expected to engage in matters such as building schools, constructing hospitals, helping the needy, and similar activities, rather than promoting concepts like boundless love.

- "How do fans react to rumors about BTS being gay?

There are two types of BTS fans. The majority dismiss these rumors as slander orchestrated by adversaries, while a smaller group who are fan of this groups because they can reap some benefits from it.

- For instance, what benefits may have form them?

For example, someone who sells BTS branded cloths, and pretend to be a fan. This fandom is not genuine it is solely for financial gain. I mean such a person's loyalty to the fandom is contingent on profitability. Alternatively, there are some fake fans who if be aware that posting controversial photos will attract more followers, may manipulate images of BTS members and post them in their fan page to enhance their online presence. These individuals are not authentic fans of BTS; their allegiance is driven by monetary gain they can reap from popularity of this group. And also they may even be enemies of BTS seeking to tarnish the group's reputation.

- What authentic fans do to defend idols against accusations?

Some, like myself who has fan page strive to showcase the true face of the idols to the public and followers. They debunk false allegations and highlight BTS's philanthropic endeavors, such as constructing schools, hospitals, aiding refugees, the needy, the homeless, and individuals with special needs. They also share stories about BTS's values and messages on fan pages.

- What effects has rumors about BTS being homosexual on their fans?

Such rumors has a detrimental impact on fans. While dedicated fans reject and denounce such rumors, others, including new fans, may believe them and become very upset. Their families may also get involved and become strict, causing turmoil. Some individuals may even experience various moral deviations, and some may even stop being fans. "

Therefore, based on what has been mentioned, in a general summary, it can be stated that interviews with BTS fans indicate that a considerable portion of them, at times in their interactions and arguments, have not acted based on accurate knowledge. Also, due to the emotional formation of their relationship with the group and immersion in the excitement of its performances they sometimes fall into serious cognitive errors, and these errors can influence their social relationships, and in a higher level can impact their lifestyle, and value system.

2-18- Occurrence of some mental disorders

During their conversations, the fans interviewed have shared instances where some of them have experienced what could be described as mental disorders stemming from their devotion to the K-Pop group BTS.

These struggles include feelings of anxiety, preoccupation, feeling regret and humiliated, embarrassment, frustration, envy, depression, nervousness, body image issues, and a sense of isolation, as highlighted by the research participants, which will be touched upon in the following paragraphs.

Anxiety

In the realm of K-Pop culture, it is a common practice for idols to begin their careers at a young age. However, in line with psychological principles of saturation, where a constant stimulus can lead to audience saturation, there arises a need for companies to replace their K-Pop. A pivotal moment for this evolution in K-pop groups and the passing of one generation in favor of another generation is the mandatory military enlistment of male members in K-Pop groups. As in South Korea, men are required to enlist in military service before the age of 30. This enlistment process serves as a way for (older) members of a popular group to gradually fade from the fans' consciousness, who may have become somewhat saturated with their presence.

Delving into the anxiety experienced by fans regarding the BTS members, it can be attributed to two main sources. Firstly, there is anxiety stemming from the intense pressure exerted by the company on the idols. Secondly, there is anxiety related to the potential disbandment of the BTS group and the subsequent introduction of a new group to take their place.

13-year-old Negin, in her interview, shared her worries about the lack of attention given by the company to the physical well-being of the idols:

- "How does seeing this difference behind the scenes make you feel and what do you think about it?

You know, if you look up backstage videos on YouTube or Pinterest, it's concerning to see that many idols seem to be dealing with health issues that are really serious. For instance, one of the BTS members has a consistently high body temperature, which is quite dangerous for him and even can kill him. Despite this, he continues to dance, you know, dance and physical activity can further raise his body temperature. In backstage clips, you can see them helping him by oxygen masks and clearly not feeling well. It's heartbreaking for us fans to witness this and adds pressure on us."

In another interview, 20-year-old Masoud expressed his anxieties about the potential replacement of current BTS idols with new ones by the company:

- "Do you believe the company is considering replacing the current idols with new ones?

Absolutely, the company is grooming many young talents to eventually take the place of the current idols. As the current idols are considered as stars but their popularity naturally diminishes over time, and they risk becoming repetitive like other artists and celebrities, leading fans to lose interest and put an end to their fandom.

- Do you think fans are okay with this idea of replacement?

Fans do get upset because all of them feel a deep emotional connection with idols. Idols are not disposable items; they hold a significant place in fans' hearts, and they can feel emotional distress and depression. "

In her interview, 13-year-old Negin also opened up about her anxiety regarding the potential disbandment of the BTS group:

- "What inspires you and how do you incorporate it into your life?

Honestly, the thought of such a possibility overwhelms me, and I find myself tearing up without even realizing it.

- What do you mean by that?

This reality that ultimately -someday- they will leave. In Korea, there's a law that mandates military service by the age of 30, and now one of the BTS members who is 30, has to fulfill his military service and consider marriage. We have no problem with them wanting to start families or pursue personal endeavors. They have every right to make those choices. However, the looming reality that this group might not continue someday is deeply saddening, and I fear that day (expressed with a mix of sadness and anxiety)."

In another part of her interview, Negin highlights how she and her friends dedicate 24 hours a day to promote the BTS boys in an effort to expand their fanbase. They believe that their efforts may help prevent the potential disbandment of the BTS group by the Big Hit Company.

- "What draws you to BTS news?

All of us ARMYs have friends who are even more curious than us, there are some people who are following them 24 hours a day, constantly keeping tabs

on BTS and sharing the latest updates with us. And if we're curious too, we start our research about it.

- How many hours a day does someone who is more curious spend?

During the summer, these super fans are online 24/7.

- Does the ARMY herself make decision on this matter?

Yes, the ARMY itself, I myself have one of such very curious ARMYs. These people are active in Twitter, Instagram, every platform even YouTube, searching and sharing news round the clock. My friend and I have a WhatsApp group where we share updates. We spend around 8 hours at school, an hour commuting, and then about 10 hours engaging with BTS content. During the day, we might only study for 2 or 3 hours, maybe 13 in total, excluding sleep. Some, like my friend, sleep very little due to their dedication and search such websites.

- What activities are you involved in?

We gather information and work towards expanding the ARMY community.

- What impact does growing the ARMY community have?

It helps reduce the likelihood of the group disbanding.

- Do you find yourself preoccupied with thoughts of the group disbanding?

It's a common concern among us all.

- Do you experience anxiety?

Yes, for instance, I might say that six years from now seems like a long time to you, but when we reflect on it, it feels like just a couple of days ago we were 10 or 11 years old, and now we're 13, 14, or 15, telling that 6 years will fly by fast, and we worry it might be too late.

- What does it mean for it to be too late?

It feels like we're running out of time to fulfill our duty of expanding the ARMY to prevent their disbandment; it's a sense of duty and urgency we all share.

- Is it a matter of life and death? (Negin's tone and expression conveyed this sentiment to me completely).

Exactly."

Mental Preoccupation

When individuals grapple with intense emotions and are deeply impacted by them, this emotional turmoil can lead to mental preoccupation.

Analysis of interviews with BTS fans reveals that various factors contribute to fans experiencing mental preoccupation. These include interpreting the true messages embedded in BTS songs, creating content for the group, mental preoccupation about BTS's competition with other K-pop groups, competition in international music festivals, concerns about the potential spread of pornographic content about idols, and being preoccupied are some challenges that may lead to mental preoccupation for fans.

Fans' mental preoccupation can be categorized into two types: healthy and dynamic mental preoccupations, and unhealthy mental preoccupations. In healthy mental preoccupations, fans may engage in hypothesizing about the underlying themes in BTS songs, draw connections between past philosophical and psychological concepts with current themes in new songs, and more. In an interview, 17-year-old, Reihaneh touched on this aspect, stating:

- "Does this imply that the boys aim to convey a specific concept through their music?"

Generally, each music video is crafted with an underlying theory. Every element and accessory used holds significance, and there is always a deeper meaning embedded within. Some ARMYs have developed their own interpretations, I mean there are a diverse range of theories. For instance, in the music of 'Film Out,' there are speculations that kids are in a parallel world, with Jin is doing something, say searching for them and so on. Anyway, everything has a meaning behind it, and perhaps we don't understand it correctly, we just make guesses. "

In unhealthy mental conflicts, individuals may first pay attention to the group and its controversies for any excuse, and secondly, the resulting mental preoccupation may lead to a waste of the individual's time or even beyond that, to a mental stop.

18-year-old Taranom and 12-year-old Elnaz have shared instances where mental preoccupations have resulted in significant time wastage and mental stagnation:

- "How many hours a day do you dedicate to BTS, news, music, and managing your page?"

Honestly, I practically spend every waking moment immersed in music; it's not just BTS but various songs that bring life to my days. Music is my escape, my solace; without it, life feels like a prison. I make a conscious effort to stay active on my page throughout the day. As I have a news page, I have to ensure there are constant updates and stories. When it comes to BTS, my thoughts are consumed by them every moment. Whether it's pondering their schedules and programs; when I drink a cup of milk, it triggers memories of Jungkook, my clumsiness remind me Namjoon, when I have a sense of humor it brings Jin to my mind, or when I feel someone needs my help it invokes thoughts of J-Hope. When I am mistreated by others I recall Suga, and there are times when I feel my soul needs peace, and I think of Taehyung. There are also times when I feel I am very beautiful, and I think of Jimin. There are even many other things that if I tried to explain, it would take until tomorrow. In general, all the time in my life passes with thinking about them. I don't have any control on it. When I experience the things and events that have happened to them every day, I constantly think about them. Thinking about them has become a normal routine in my life, and my days don't pass without them. "

- "Have you ever been hurt or damaged in this journey?"

Yes, I have experienced psychological strain; it has affected my studies, in this aspect leaving me under pressure. Or there are times when I should be focusing on my academic responsibilities, yet I like to look at other way, my mind drifts to BTS, craving updates this is how I can't fulfill any of my responsibilities.

- In terms of physical health, have you been injured or harmed in any way so far?

There was not much physical harms but as I said before the toll has been more on my mental well-being. "

In the realm of K-pop tradition, the practice of creating one-shots or stories about idols is a common and well-liked activity among fans. However, some fans have shared that reading one-shots or fanfics, particularly those with sexual or explicit content centered on BTS, has led them to new mental preoccupations. 15-year-old Nikoy shared her perspective on this matter:

- "Why do fanfictions not appeal to you, while many ARMYs are enthusiastic about them?"

I find most fanfictions to be overly sexual, exaggerated, and at times, even violent. Beyond the genera, when I used to read fanfictions in my first days

of being ARMY, it started to alter my perception and impact my mental state. Every time I was seeing those two person together, their relationship would appear on my mind. It planted seeds of doubt in my mind, I was asking myself if is this real, even though I knew that it wasn't real and company ywould never allow them to engage in a relationship. And if there was such a relation between them it would remain as a secret. This realization prompted me to step back from reading fanfictions. Despite my reluctance, my friends persisted, and they posted in their page, like this: If you know of any good fanfiction about, please share it with us so that we can read it.

Feelings of regret and humiliation

"... It hasn't even been two months since my father covered my tuition fees, and now I have to rely on him to buy each and every one of my textbooks. I've always strived for independence since I was young, saving up to purchase things with my own hard-earned money. However, as I entered high school and the financial burden of school fees and study materials of entrance exam increased, I began to feel a sense of weakness. My self-esteem has taken a hit. Who am I compared to them? Which one of them gets pocket money? Jin is going to join military service, but look how much wealth he has.

- "Do you regret not being in the position of BTS members?

Yes, I do regret not having the financial means they possess" (Mohsen, 22-years-old).

When BTS fans interact with their beloved idols, they are exposed to the values and qualities embodied by the members, both directly and indirectly.

However, due to the differences between Korean and Iranian cultures, attempting to adopt Korean cultural norms and applying them in an Iranian context can sometimes be challenging. This cultural disparity may lead fans, especially those new to the fandom, to experience feelings of regret and humiliation.

In her interview, 13-year-old Sarina shared her thoughts on the influence of BTS or idols on trends and her personal style choices:

- "If BTS or an idol starts a trend, do you feel inclined to follow suit?

Yes, especially when it comes to clothing trends. For example, I admire and purchase short shorts.

- Do you incorporate K-pop idols' styles into your everyday outfits?

No, I don't feel comfortable wearing them outside, but I do within the company of other girls or women.

- Why do you feel unable to adopt idols' styles outside your home?

It's due to my family's restrictions. In religious families, it's common for daughters not to have the freedom to dress in certain ways.

- How do you perceive these limitations imposed by your family or society that hinder your expression through clothing?

I feel powerless. It's disheartening when I can't assert my autonomy over my own body and express that only I should have the right to decide how to dress. Or I can't destroy wrong mindsets, it instills a sense of inferiority in me.

- What are these wrong mindsets that you struggle to overcome?

The notion that my hijab or my actions are everyone's concern is a challenge. These are personal matters that should only concern me, but as I am a girl all think they have a right to hold me in the line.

- What led you to believe that your personal matters are a concern for everyone just because you are a girl?

For instance, the boys in our family are sometimes seen in public areas wearing shorts without any objections, but if I choose to let my hair down or wear a short coat, it becomes an issue."

One of the complex dynamics between idols and fans involves the promotion of high-end brands by idols. Many BTS fans aspire to use the same brands endorsed or used by their favorite idols, but due to financial constraints, they may not be able to afford these luxury items, this may lead that person to the feeling of being humiliated.

In an interview, 21-year-old Mohammad Reza shared his perspective on this aspect in a recent interaction:

- "Have you purchased albums or products advertised by idols or featured in their advertisements?

Honestly, I haven't. I lack the patience for it, and the cost of these items is often beyond my budget. However, I have friends who do indulge in such purchases.

You know, all the items they advertise are often not within reach for the average consumer. They promote things that are brands. For example, a dress they promote may cost around 14 to 15 million tomans, equivalent to two to three thousand dollars each. The clothing items they endorse can be exorbitantly priced; for instance, I recall a jacket they advertised priced at 23 million tomans, or a shoe, possibly from Versace or Gucci, can't remember, maybe it was Versace, priced at 115 million tomans. These luxury items are out of reach for many due to their steep prices."

Feeling frustrated

Teenagers and young individuals often grapple with feelings of frustration due to their limited age and social experiences from one hand and the idealistic notions that dominate their thoughts in the other hand. They tend to approach their challenges with a binary mindset, viewing situations in terms of absolutes.

Moreover, the admiration and reverence that BTS members show towards their fans, coupled with their altruistic actions (such as accepting UNESCO ambassadorships and supporting Asian communities in the U.S. during a meeting with U.S. president), lead teenagers and young people who resort to binary logic, elevate BTS to a pedestal in their minds. They project their ideals onto BTS, believing that the group embodies all the goodness they aspire to achieve.

In her interview, 17-year-old Reihaneh exemplifies this projection of ideals onto the BTS group:

- "Do you earn money as an administrator?"

No, not at all. I believe that exchange is a kind of burden on the individual, it depends on the banner and things like that. Ultimately, it's the individual's responsibility.

Secondly, the activity we engage in is fueled by the love we receive from the BTS members, and our desire to share that love with others specially those kids and Adults of the different ages who are in our page. It's essential for me to create a positive atmosphere and connection with individuals who visit our page, fostering a sense of camaraderie and warmth in a world where all sides are clashing and genuine friendships are scarce. The love I receive from them, without any special effort on my part, is truly invaluable.

- What do you mean of it is a burden on you and a responsibility for you?

I mean, if I say upon posting your banner in my page you will attract 2K followers but at the end that page gain just 100 (followers), is it fair to spend this money?

- Can you elaborate on the impact BTS has had on your life, such as the role model you've found in them for your behavior or appearance?

I believe BTS emerged as a beacon of light and hope in our lives precisely when we needed it most. Psychologically, having a successful person you admire can greatly inspire and empower you to progress and be resilient. Their unwavering love and support, even in the darkest times, in any form, have motivated me to spread love and positivity to others, striving to uplift those around me. I've learned that if I failed somewhere, gather myself and hold on my goal, and make another effort. One very important thing about them is that despite having the best facilities, they are somehow the biggest boy band of recent years, but they have always been humble, warm and friendly in their approach, always showing their good and friendly deeds, the fact that my artist does not elevate himself too much and is intimate with others, makes me be like this when I reach a certain place. "

When fans encounter situations that challenge their initial perceptions, they may experience disappointment in themselves for misjudging the circumstances. In an example shared by 15-year-old Nikoo this situation can be observed:

- "If your favorite idol makes a mistake, would you continue to support for him?

In a recent event in Iran, BTS's response was delayed, and the one who particularly responded, was Namjoon. While ARMYs swiftly rally to support BTS during Korean events, the delayed reaction to the events in Iran left fans expecting a more immediate and robust show of support. Namjoon posted a story and dedicated 'Spring Day' to an ARMY member who passed away in Iran, expressing sorrow. However, I myself anticipated a more substantial response. While this doesn't mean I'll stop being a fan altogether, such instances can be disheartening. "

In another interview, 21-year-old Narges, who once aspired to pursue a career as a dancer in K-pop groups, shared her shattered dreams and ultimate disappointment:

- "When you were considering pursuing a career as a dancer in K-pop, were you aware of the challenges and pressures they put on artists?

Absolutely not. It was only later that I realized the extent of the challenges they endure.

- What did you noticed about it?

Dancers in K-pop are subjected to strict diets and limitations on their activities. They are not allowed to do many of what they like. They often have to adhere to strict rules and follow instructions without question. The physical demands of K-pop dance routines are intense. I don't remember exactly what I have read. It's been a long time, but for sure it was a terrible report. You know, as dancers are not well known like artists and do not have fans, they can easily do whatever they want with them. They rape them. They abuse them. They deceive them by promising that if they give them sexual service, their status will be promoted. I remember reading a story about a K-pop dancer who was in a well-known band. But he was a boy not a girl. They abused him a lot. These conditions can be particularly harsh for female dancers, they go through strict trainings who may face even greater challenges and physical damages. The physical, sexual, and psychological toll on dancers can be significant. When they are done with dancers, kick them out like a piece of trash, dancers will not have any gain of this situation. What is helping them to endure is their love for what they are doing in the industry. Situation is really harsh toward K-pop dancers. But are not unique to K-pop but can be found in anywhere. "

It appears that individuals of different ages are grappling with various forms of disillusionment and comparisons with the lives of BTS members. The 46-year-old Fariba, in her interview, expresses that when her daughter saw a picture of one of the idols without makeup in military uniform, she was disgusted and said she never wants that image to stay in her mind, even though the image without makeup and without whitewashing the skin color of (the yellow race) idol is much more real than photoshopped images and whitewashed ones, while showing those persons wearing earrings and necklaces.

"I have heard a shocking news someday ago.

- What was that?

It seems like they had said that Jin should go to the military service

- Well, did he went?

Yes, I showed my daughter a picture of Jin on Telegram, but her reaction was a bit strange.

- Why? How her reaction was and what was depicted on that picture?

The picture was of Jin in military uniform with very short hair, he was a simple and regular man. It seemed to have upset my child. Suddenly, she became very upset and said, "I don't want this image to stay in my mind. I don't want to see him like this."

22-year-old Mohsen reflected on the stark contrast between the luxurious lifestyle of BTS members and his own modest economic circumstances imposed by society. He came to this conclusion that slogans about the rewards of hard work chanted by BTS members are just slogans and can't touch the realities of the society he lives in.

- "Do you compare your living with that of BTS members?"

Yes I do. I also compare it with other successful people too.

When I see the luxury birthday parties of the BTS members, I ask myself why should there be such a class difference between two people.

- Do you feel disappointment too when you think about these things?

Honestly, I feel disappointment. But at least for a moment, it don't last long. Believe me, I give up on work and studying. I think, what's the point in the end? I reach a point where I agree with what my friend says. I can never make it to anywhere decent with a miserable salary of 6-7 million tomans in these terrible conditions, so let me just take things lightly, at least think about everything less, and bother myself less. "

On the other hand, 12-year-old Elnaz is in the brink of being disappointed from a different perspective. She initially embarked on learning Korean due to her deep interest in BTS. However, as she realizes that mastering this complicate language might not make a big difference in her daily life, she begins to feel disappointed by the perceived loss of time and effort invested in learning a language that may not offer immediate benefits.

- "Do you like to attend in the BTS concerts?"

Yes, that's why I am learning Korean language.

- You mean you are learning Korean with such difficulty just because of a concert that it's uncertain whether you'll be able to attend or not?

Yeah,...

- Well, and you mean you are learning a language with such difficulty just for that single reason?

Of course, I think this language is not difficult at all, it's Chinese that is very difficult. And, yes, that's why I am learning this beautiful language.

- Can you please specify the BTS role in motivating to learn that language?

That's obvious that if I learn their language I will be able to speak with them."

Envy

Fans of the BTS group become familiar with many aspects of their behavior and performance as they express their love for the idols.

Some of the behaviors of the group members are inspired by the values of capitalist and secular Korean society. These values might not be as accepted in relatively religious society of Iran. So, it's possible that some fans see the BTS boys doing things like dyeing their hair, wearing lipstick, and using earrings and accessories, and they might want to do the same. But because of the cultural differences, it can be hard for fans to act the same way, and they might end up feeling regretful about not being able to do things that are not allowed in their society.

In other instances, despite the BTS boys chanting beautiful slogans, in practice, they may engage in displaying excessive consumption and welfare in their daily lives, which can lead some fans to feel envious and discontent when comparing their own circumstances with the members of BTS. Mohsen, a 22-year-old, has expressed an example of cultural differences that have left him feeling envious in his interview:

"My friend Hamid has changed recently; he's started wearing lipstick. He didn't used to do that before. I ask him why you're coloring your hair What's wrong with his natural color or why you are wearing makeup? He says this way I look good. I tell him guys shouldn't wear makeup. He's getting attached to being glamorous, and that Iranians used to be glamorous before, look at the Koreans. People feel good when they see the style and appearance of BTS members. He says he wishes he was born somewhere else other than Iran. He envies Koreans and BTS a lot. What else can I say!"

15-year-old Reihaneh, 19-year-old Mahlagha and 22-year-old Shirin also spoke about their inner envy, highlighting the contrast between their own lives and those of their idols:

- "Do your friends have the same opinion about BTS and Blackpink?

I think yes, like I said, generally all the girls [feel that way]. Some girls are even envious of Blackpink and hate them. For example my friend Mahsa.

- What do you mean, by saying envious?

Because they are beautiful, rich, and like models. Mahsa also wants to be like them, but she can't, so she feels envious. For example, Blackpink are very rich and have luxurious entertainments; they show off their purchases and generally live a luxurious life. The girls envy them. Once Mahsa bought a skirt similar to Lisa's. She is curvy and skirts don't suit her, she can't be like them, so she gets upset if we tell her.

- You mean, because your friend doesn't have the same facilities and money as Blackpink, she envies them?

Yes, because she cannot dress and go around like them.

- Well, do you think this behavior and approach is appropriate?

Envy is generally not a good feeling. My mom says a person should always compare themselves to themselves. But in my opinion, many girls experience this jealousy and have no control on it. Mahsa is the same way.

- Well, even though Mahsa envies them, she had bought a dress similar to theirs?

She wants to be like them, and when she sees she can't do everything they do, she becomes disappointed and envies them even more.

- What about you, do you want to be like them too?

Yes, all girls want to, but I don't envy like Mahsa. As I said before, I sometimes follow Blackpink too, but Mahsa, out of her excessive jealousy, falsely claims she dislikes them. She can't be like them, that's how she says it.



- Were you not a fanatic person at that time?

When I was a K-pop fan, I thought I wasn't, but I was. Its effects are still here in me.

- Well, can you say how you were?

If someone didn't like them, I would get defensive and wanted to prove to them that my group was good.

- "Weren't you a bigot at that time?"

When I was a K-Poper, I thought I wasn't, but I was. Still feel its effects on myself.

- Can you tell me how you were?

If someone didn't like them, I would take a guard and I wanted to prove to them that my group is good.

- Do you remember exactly why and what thoughts came to your mind when you were upset?

I think naturally one of them is jealousy, yes, I'm sure one of them is jealousy, one of them is also possessiveness that you have towards these people, but I couldn't control the jealousy, however, I could control the possessiveness and be like, see, this is their life and you don't own this person, and he don't even know you, and that ummm, is free to do whatever they want in their life and be with whoever he want. So, it's nothing, but another jealousy was why shouldn't I be in that person's place, lucky this person who is loved by someone I admire so much, someone who is such a good person, someone who has so many good qualities, someone who is so cool and successful, someone who is so attractive and beautiful, and these things like these."

- "What negative effect can these birthday parties have on the fans?"

These extravagant billion-dollar birthday celebrations of idols ignite feelings of envy among young people. These celebrations highlight differences and contradict the slogan of equality of humans promoted by BTS themselves. If humans are equal, why the idols' birthday parties are billion-dollar events while some can't even afford a family celebration.

- Do all these contradictions between the slogans and messages of idols and their actual behavior serve as a red flag for fans to become more aware?

(she has a long pause, and respond thoughtfully) The truth is, I have often noticed the discrepancy between their slogans and the actions and behaviors of the idols, and it is not wise to see all the faults on the company, it's unwise. For example, they promote equality among humans but then have billion-dollar birthday celebrations. I highly doubt that the idols themselves are not pleased with these extravagant birthday parties deep down and be not satisfied with it.

- BTS members are seven individuals, so having seven extravagant birthday celebrations in a year for the company is not sustainable, right?

Oh, it's very costly. The company calculates the birthday expenses for each idol, adds it to their debt, and also adds any additional expenses to the amount owed by the idols so that they can keep them for years and exploit them under the guise of settling accounts. Idols have bought fame at the cost of owing the company for years."

Depression

By examining the opinions presented by fans of the BTS group, it becomes apparent that some fans have experienced depression for various reasons.

One of the major reasons for the depression of BTS fans is the observation of the multiple pressures the company puts on the idols. Fans who love their favorite idols, when faced with the pressures imposed by the company, have felt distressed and have expressed their distress in this regard.

15-years-old Shadi and 22-years-old Shirin have mentioned in their interviews about their depression, which has gripped them by witnessing the challenges faced by idols, as follows:

- "Does the company pay attention to the mental well-being of the idols?

No, their attention is mostly superficial, focusing on them looking beautiful, stylish, and attractive. Some of them are depressed; their close fans even say some of them have severe depression. I think it's due to environmental conditions, I mean it is due to the high pressures from the company on them in terms of appearance, behavior, movement, and sexual orientation.

- Do fans have a strong attachment to idols?

Obviously yes, when they fantasize about marriage and having a spouse with them, they naturally develop a strong attachment to them. And after hearing that some idols are depressed, many fans became upset, and some even burst on tears because of it. "

- "Shirin, how does the discrepancy between the idols' actual moods and their slogans and messages affect fans psychologically?

It has caused confusion among fans. Their slogans are all good and full of spirit and hope, but the pressure that idols endure due to the company's tyranny and the accusations made against them by enemies weigh heavily on them, they are immersed in depression and despair, which in a way this depression is transferred to the fans as well.

- What moral impacts can this depression have for fans?

Fans, due to their love for the idols, try to understand them and realize that the idols are under immense pressure and endure it solely for the fans. Therefore, fans may feel down and suffocated by the heavy burden of pressure on their beloved idols. This distress can lead them to become irritable and ill-tempered, or even depressed, as they feel helpless in being able to do anything for the idols."

Another important factor contributing to the depression of some fans of the BTS group is derived from comparing the fans' circumstances to the living conditions of the BTS idols.

16-years-old Saba, 17-years-old Ehsan and 46-years-old Fariba in their interviews, have addressed instances of depression resulting from comparative analysis of the conditions of fans and their favorite idols:

- "What looks like the lifestyle that the BTS group shares?

It's mostly consumerist, with lots of varied and colorful clothes, constantly changing hair colors and like that, and always changing outfits with new accessories and so on....

And when they keep saying to love yourself they essentially mean love your physical body, but they themselves are the opposite of this, they always change everything they have and there is a contradictory between this statement and their actions, and then when they say go out and explore and enjoy life and so on, they promote their country in the midst of all this; so this is a kind of outfoxing to attract some immigrants. They go around and keep saying, "Wow, how beautiful it is here, how great the weather is, how good we feel," and they burn people out more (laughs) as you see you're not living like that in your life and how unfortunate you are in comparison to them. "

- "Ehsan, can you mention some negative impacts of the BTS group on the adolescent generation?

One of its negative impacts is that due to the group's high fame and global popularity, and with the expansion of the online space and the sharing of details of the idols' lives, many young people get caught up in their lives and news related to them, diverting their time and thoughts away from many of their own goals, or even experiencing depression and despair as they don't have the same status as the idols".

"...My daughter really loves the daily life videos of BTS and constantly says she wants to be in their place."

- Did she told you why does she want to be in their place?

She says they are happy, always having a good time, but I think the glamorous life they show has influenced my daughter, her head is in the clouds. If I'm honest with you, even I look at myself, I want to be in their place too.

- Why?

What they show of their ordinary life is much better than our life. No fights, no arguments, no debates. It's all jokes, laughter, and fun. It's strange that even in their hardships, they are still happy."

Some girls, who as fans hold idols dear to their hearts, upon realizing the impossibility of accessing their favorite idols or upon sensing the likelihood of their favorite idol's inclination towards another girl, experience the loss of their imaginary love, and as a result feel a sense of depression.

Nervousness

Some fans have admitted in their interviews that they have experienced nervousness during their fandom of the BTS group.

In the most common cases, fans' nervousness stems from the injustice of the company towards the idols and comparing their limited amenities to the extensive amenities of the idols. However, in other cases, the imaginary love of female fans for the idols and the sense of rivalry they feel against those who are in competition with them or the uncertain future of their imaginary love have caused distress and nervousness among this group of fans. Mahdijeh, 20years-old, and Sanay, 16-years-old, in their interviews have mentioned their nervousness during their fandom of the BTS group as follows:

- "Mahdijeh, have you ever find yourself criticizing K-pop or K-drama or doing something negative and tell yourself aha, that was due to the influence of K-pop and K-drama?"

For sure it has negative impacts. The constant following has not always positive impacts. For instance, the certain quality of life they display from their life make a person sit and think, "Wow, how happy they are, how much they live in comfort and luxury." This creates a sense of regret in the viewer.

- Mahdijeh, has this sense of disappointment/regret that you mentions happened to you too?

Well yes. I was talking about my own experience.

- What were you regretful for, and how did this longing impact your life?

Well, I often feel regretful because of the state of our country. I was wondering, why do they get to live in such comfort and luxury while our circumstances are so difficult? Why can't I have what they have and so on.

Regarding the impact, well, it had made me completely hopeless about everything. I mean, I would tell myself, no matter how hard I try, with these limited resources, what will it ultimately lead to? Or with these stingy people, what will happen in the end? I always was pondering I wished Iranians had some of the good attributions of the people of Korea. All of this had made me become aggressive. You know, I didn't even understand why I had become this way, but I realized I had become aggressive. Then, when I sat down and thought deeply, I saw the reason was that I was feeling a lot of regret and getting anxious about the lack of resources. I mean, I would get anxious from this comparisons. "

"...I really don't like to talk about BTS with the girls.

- Why?

I really love Jimin, even the background of my phone is a picture of him. Also I have a BTS theme for my phone. I get a little envious if someone in my family, for example, likes Jimin. I kind of dislike it. I want to be the ace.

- If you were to give Jimin a role in your life, what role would you like it to be? Like a father, brother, or similar roles.

The best role I would definitely give him is that of my boyfriend.

- So do you see Jimin as a boyfriend even now?

No, he's not my boyfriend right now, but I would definitely accept the proposal on the spot (laughs). I really love him, but I can't assign him a role because he would have to be there and actually accept that role. However, I can't deny that I've thought about him in that way in my mind. When I'm listening to music, my thoughts become very abundant, and I can't stop these thoughts.

- What kind of thoughts?

The fact that how much I do love him, and sometimes I even think about why my mind is so occupied with Jimin. You know, I'm really preoccupied with him, and of course, I know how silly it is.

- Does the fact that you don't want anyone else to express their feelings for Jimin relate to the intensity of your feelings for him?

Yes, absolutely. Both my desire to be the ace, the number one fan in the group and the very very big interest I feel toward him make it hard for me to tolerate anyone else saying they like Jimin. It's like he belongs to me or that I own him, something like that."

Physical deformation (Body image)

The encounter of fans with idols, whose initial acceptance condition has been their beauty, and after that they went through continuous exercise, professionalism and well calculated and precise nutrition, they have achieved an attractive physique, granting them significant physical beauty. Additionally, the appeal of diverse hair colors, the use of accessories, wearing branded clothing, and outfits designed by fashion designers further enhances the attractiveness of idols.

When fans encounter idols who, given the aforementioned conditions, possess significant attractiveness, they return to themselves and compare themselves to these idols, realizing that they fall short of the beauty standards set by the idols. They find it very difficult to adopt measures that would make their bodies resemble those of the idols (such as following strict diets). As a result, in a simple summary, they conclude that they have failed and subsequently perceive their own body image negatively. But if these individuals had not interacted with idols, their perceptual threshold would not have been raised, and perhaps the issue of body image would never have arisen for them, consequently had a greater satisfaction with their own bodies. The statements of 21-year-old Narges and 19-year-old Fereshteh provide examples in this regard:

- "So you wished you could go to Korea?

Definitely. I have always loved K-dramas even before I got into BTS and K-pop, and Korea has been one of my favorite countries. I really loved it. I remember when I became a fan of BTS, I was constantly asking questions and searching the internet for information on how to immigrate to Korea. One of the ways was studying and getting a student visa. But since I didn't enjoy studying, I discovered another way. One of my classmates in my hip-hop class told me, 'Since you're a good dancer and love Korea so much, why don't you do audition?' she told me I could record a video of myself dancing and send it to music companies, and if they liked it, I could go for an in-person audition and internship. I had never thought of that route before. I had heard about it, but I didn't have enough information. My dream was to become a dancer. One time I recorded a video of my dance and applied, asked that if it is possible watch it hoping that I could take the main audition. I danced really well, but it's not that easy to get a response just by sending a video. I don't remember exactly where I sent it. But I didn't get a response from them, and I felt somewhat disappointed. Then I thought to myself, it must be because my appearance doesn't resemble that of the girl idols or female dancers, or maybe I'm not pretty enough, which is why they didn't respond. My body was okay because you need to have a good physique for dancing, but at that time, the thought that my skin was darker and I didn't have a pretty face bothered me."

"For a long time I had really bad headaches for a while that lasted for several hours. My hormonal system was really out of balance, and I had to go visit a physician. He told me right there that if I continued like this, I would face serious consequences. I can say that was when I gradually distanced myself from K-pop."

- Why?

Because I felt like I was getting hurt because of it. The more I was in the fandom and saw content related to the groups, the more I hated myself. It wasn't just my body; I also had issues with my face. I was seriously considering getting a nose job, even though I knew it would harm my ability to exercise. As I moved forward, I realized it really wasn't worth it."

Alienation

The concept of alienation is one that has been of interest in religious, philosophical, social, and psychological texts for a long time.

The term "alienation" in the Oxford Dictionary is defined as becoming estranged from friends, relinquishing, transferring, and alienating oneself.

In Persian dictionaries, the term of بیگانگی (bi-gānegi) is defined as being foreign or strange, unfamiliar, and unknown, as well as it is opposite of the insider. It is also synonymous with a lack of reason and logic, leading to an expression of helplessness in the face of understanding the realities of life.

Mitchell.J believes that there are multiple forms of alienation. Self-alienation, other-alienation, and social-alienation and its associated institutions are all forms of alienation (Mousavi and Heydarpoor, 2011).

In self-alienation, the individual abandons their own identity and behaves in a way that is pleasing to others, even though their true self does not accept this behavior.

In social-alienation, the individual becomes detached from their own cultural and social realities, acting not based on the desires of their own community but rather according to the wishes of foreign or non-native societies.

19-year-old Tina literarily discusses her friend's experience of self-alienation in her interview:

"One of my other friends is also an ARMY. She actually listens and streams way more than I do. Because... well, she doesn't really stream, but she listens to a lot more than I do. For example, I listen less, even to other people's songs. She's really into it, to the point that her Spotify for the end of 2022 told her she was in the top 0.5% of people who listened to BTS. And that's a pretty scary thing, you know? She took a screenshot of it as one of her achievements and devotion."

Shaghayegh 19-year-old also shared a similar account in her interview:

- "So these individuals have been culturally dominated by them?"

Yes, exactly. Their language, their style, their way of speaking, their laughter has become their culture. For example, the person's own language is Persian, but then they change their entire page to their language, even putting someone else's picture on their profile or using Korean effects on their face to look like them for their profile (surprised). They write the captions of their posts in Korean in a way that makes you really feel like the person is actually from there (laughs)."

The actions that the aforementioned individuals are attempting to undertake can be explained through the label of psychological disorder of alienation. In the disorder of alienation, the individual acts in a way that seeks to impress others, without regard for their own inner emotions and feelings, solely to appear appealing in the eyes of others.

2-19- Sexual Identitylessness

Some fans of the BTS group have pointed out that the ultimate goal of Big Hit Entertainment is, economically, to generate profit and, culturally, to eliminate and desexualize clothing, makeup, and love. This means that Big Hit not only requires stars to use women specific makeup styles but also emphasizes desexualization in the clothing of its stars. Additionally, it has placed desexualization of love on its agenda, asking its stars to occasionally create rumors of homosexuality by kissing each other during performances, while at other times, they express admiration for female stars to show their attraction to the opposite sex.

The company's requirement for BTS stars to adopt a genderless male identity serves as a suitable introduction to promoting the theory of desexualization of love. This means that the stars, through their makeup, clothing, and adopting movements, gestures, and behaviors that give them an almost feminine appearance, are effectively taking steps to further reinforce the theory of desexualization of love.

Erfan 21-years-old, while confirming that BTS idols do not display a definitive sexual identity, links the sexual identitylessness of the BTS boys to capitalism, which seeks to promote a culture of sexual diversity.

Samaneh 17-year-old also confirms the unclear sexual identity of the BTS boys, noting that the display of both homosexual and heterosexual behaviors is a

requirement from the company for the idols, allowing BTS to be more successful in attracting an audience Shirin 22-year-old, while acknowledging the feminine appearances of the BTS boys, attributes this to the group's desire to stand out in the K-pop scene.

- "Erfan, why do all the boys in BTS resemble girls?

The seven members of BTS appear male, but they lack a definitive sexual identity. Interestingly, this issue of having a blurred sexual identity is one of the central themes of the BTS project. They are young boys with masculine bodies and clothing, yet they have very delicate and feminine faces, making it difficult to determine their sexual identity due to their use of makeup and feminine accessories.

The seven members of BTS are androgynous boys whose makeup makes it hard to identify their gender.

The company typically selects idols from among boys who resemble girls or have undergone plastic surgery to correct any perceived flaws.

- Why does the company do this?

The company operates under one of the programs of a global network that forms the command center of the liberal capitalist system. In recent years, with the influence of this powerful network, discussions around sexual diversity and sexual identities have been culturally promoted. In the last two or three years, they have added the term of queer to the LGBTQ. "Queer" originally means strange or odd.

It is a term generally used for individuals with ambiguous sexual identities, and in the literature on sexuality that has been fabricated in recent years by the liberal capitalist system propaganda, "queer" refers to individuals who are legally and physiologically male but have a feminine appearance and demeanor.

- Why are there no girls at BTS concerts and in their videos?

Because they have reached a state of sexual identity confusion and sexual self-sufficiency disorder. Even in a romantic song titled "I Need You, Girl," which is addressed to a hypothetical audience that is a girl, there are practically no girls present in the video."



- "Are their sexual identities clear?"

Well, not really, because as I said, they want to respect everyone, so they don't come out and say it. Even to attract more audiences, they sometimes display homosexual/heterosexual behaviors to indicate that they are fans of them too, which means their identities are not very clear in that regard."

- "What differences did the BTS singers have that made you see them as different?"

The difference was in their appearance and the attractiveness of all the members of BTS was interesting to me. They all had a polished and made-up appearance. The seven boys had faces that resembled beautiful, made-up girls, and they all had a lot of talent in dancing and singing altogether."

Ehsan 17-year-old, apart from the analyses of Erfan, Samaneh, and Shirin, considers the BTS boys' actions in sexual identitylessness to be a favorable development for women. He believes that as male identity becomes less pronounced, the existing gender discrimination between men and women is weakened and fades away, allowing women to escape the dominance of oppressive men:

- "Ehsan, what impact does this elimination of gender distinction have on the fans?"

This elimination of gender distinction has made girls and women happier. Because in the past, men were always considered the superior gender and felt entitled to comment on issues concerning girls, women, and their sisters, with men being the final decision-makers. Gender discrimination was very evident in earlier years, to the extent that if a murder occurred, a girl would be given to the family of the victim as blood money without even considering her opinion. Female fans are very happy about this and show greater support for BTS.

- What impact does the lack of gender distinction have on the fans?

With the slogan of equality between men and women, boys feel allowed to wear makeup, hang earrings, and undergo cosmetic procedures just like girls. Conversely, girls also want to wear boys' clothing, cut their hair short, and be more present in public spaces and stadiums alongside men."

The interviewed fans described the characteristics of the new identity that the BTS boys are promoting and striving to reinforce, mentioning aspects such as: feminine faces, the use of gold and feminine jewelry, provocative semi-nudity, exhibiting feminine softness in their actions, engaging in flirtatious and coy behaviors, using makeup, feminine hairstyles and colors, adopting colors that are more commonly used by girls, and having feminine-sounding voices, among others.

Negin, 13-year-old, referring to the criticism from parents regarding the feminine appearance of BTS members, emphasizes that these issues are not a concern for her generation.

Sixteen-year-old Thna, who has copied Jimin's suit and ordered a similar one for herself, fundamentally considers Jimin's appearance to be feminine.

Seventeen-year-old Ehsan, in his interview, also emphasizes that the faces of BTS members are feminine and mentions their use of jewelry and accessories that have a more feminine connotation.

"Nowadays, if you ask any parent, whenever they see a male singer, they say, 'Why do they look like girls?' But in my opinion, being a man isn't just about having a beard; a person can be very clean, kind, and helpful to everyone, and that itself is a sign of manhood. However, parents nowadays tend to say, 'What are you looking at, this boy who looks like a girl?! What do they have that you like?' They don't even realize that these individuals have saved thousands of lives and helped countless people find their way."

- In your opinion the way idols dress how is related to the help they provide to people?

I don't think it has anything to do with it, but parents nowadays believe that men shouldn't wear makeup, while our generation doesn't really distinguish between male and female. If a man wears a pink shirt, they think, 'Well, he likes it, so what does it matter to us?' But parents say, 'Oh, what does that mean? He's a man; why should he wear a pink shirt?'"

- Why are you interested in suits?

Jimin and his friends wear a lot of suits.

- So you want to wear a suit just because they wear them?

They look more attractive and cute when they wear suits.

- Well, they become attractive and cute; why do you want to wear one?

I think a suit would look good on me, just like it does on Jimin. I have an image in my mind of what a suit looks like.

- But isn't a suit masculine?

No, whom have said that!? In fact, there are women's versions too. Plus, Jimin looks more like a girl than a boy (laughs). He looks so good in it, it's unbelievable.

- Ehsan, is it true that BTS believes there is no difference between men and women?

Yes, they completely believe in the principle of equality between men and women. They themselves do not have a clear sexual identity. In terms of appearance and makeup, they resemble women, but in terms of physical build, they are like men. They believe that just as girls wear makeup and adorn themselves with jewelry, boys can do the same. I think this mindset has helped them attract many male and female fans.

- What impact has this lack of gender distinction had on the fans?

It has led most male fans to imitate the idols by wearing makeup, hanging chains and jewelry like girls, dyeing their hair, and in the meantime, female fans are also imitating their makeup, clothing, and fashion styles."

Masoud 20-year-old and Mohsen 22-year-old, referring to the bodies of the BTS boys (who always have their hair shaved), have compared the idols' bodies to those of girls, noting that this is why the semi-nude bodies of the BTS boys (unlike the semi-nude bodies of male wrestlers) evoke sexual arousal in male audiences, serving as a kind of encouragement for homosexuality among them.

- "What differences do you see between the BTS boys and athletes?

The BTS boys have such beautiful shapes, faces, and appearances that they all look like girls. For example, if you place one of the members' bare legs next to a girl's bare leg and cover the rest of their bodies, no one would be able to tell which leg belongs to the girl and which one belongs to the BTS boys. That's why when the BTS boys wear semi-nude outfits, as they don't have a masculine physique, seeing their bodies brings pleasure, and there are accusations thrown at them. But, for example, wrestlers, even though they

are semi-nude, don't evoke that kind of feeling in their audience, whether male or female."

- "What weaknesses does BTS have?"

(After thinking for about two or three minutes) Please, when I say this, don't take it the wrong way.

- No, I'll listen without judgment; you can relax.

I'm not gay, but sometimes when I see their photos, I get aroused. It's strange because I'm a straight guy, not gay, but they wear so much makeup and look so attractive that I get stimulated.

- So, do they wear heavy makeup?

Not heavy, but I think their makeup artist is specifically doing their makeup to attract boys. They do their makeup in a way that makes them look beautiful and appealing to me.

- Is this a weakness for them?

They're imposing homosexuality on me as a fan.

- How do they impose homosexuality on you?

I said they do their makeup in a way that even a boy can like the idols.

- Unless someone likes an idol, it means the idol has sexual appeal for them?

Well, they have sexual appeal for boys.

- How do you know they have sexual appeal for boys?

I've talked to my friends, and they say they're good-looking too.

- So your friends explicitly stated that the BTS idols have sexual appeal for them?

Yes, exactly. When I was with three or four of my friends, they said this.

- What exactly is sexually appealing to you and your friends?

The lip gloss they wear, the tight clothes they put on, the fact that they are very fair-skinned and use whitening products. Also, their hairstyles are attractive. I've heard them talk in a few videos, and honestly, they have nice voices.

- So they dress and do their makeup this way to attract an audience?

That's how I think.

- So where do they promote homosexuality? What you mentioned is for attracting an audience. Have they ever directly stated that they are gay?

No, I just said a few minutes ago about being fair-skinned, they don't say many things directly, like. But the fact that I become interested in a boy and imagine fantasies in my head is encouragement for homosexuality! That's how I see it. They don't need to take a loudspeaker and shout, 'We are gay.'"

Ehsan, 17-year-old, emphasizes that the boys of the BTS group have lost their masculine stature due to their use of makeup and feminine clothing, considering them to be gentler and kinder than other men. 22-year-old Mohsen confirms that the members of the group exhibit feminine behavior and mentions the cute and flirty demeanor of the idols during their performances:

- "What moral impact has the lack of gender distinction in clothing and attire had on fans?

It's possible that male fans previously exhibited rough behaviors, but with shared feminine and masculine makeup and clothing, they seem to be more flexible, or at least that's how it appears. Makeup in boys inevitably diminishes their masculine presence, making them appear gentler and kinder."

"...BTS has fun rhythms in their songs, but I think the group itself is a bit too feminine.

- What do you mean? If possible, please provide some examples so I can understand your point.

They come across as very cute and flirty, and this behavior seems more fitting for girls than boys. A boy shouldn't be this cute and flirty; these are feminine traits. Maybe it's because I grew up in a family where such things are mocked when seen in boys, which is why I think this way."

- Please elaborate on two points. First, provide more examples of the feminine behaviors of the BTS members. Second, explain about your family and why they do not accept such behaviors, and give examples regarding that as well.

The feminine behaviors of BTS include their heavy makeup; my friend, whom I mentioned, uses these colorless lipsticks. I can't even imagine if he were to wear bright red or purple lipstick (laughs). I think this is the

influence of BTS on my friend. He has even told me that he wears lipstick to look pretty.

- Did you ask your friend if BTS has influenced him use of lipstick?

Yes, I asked him. He said that they wear it and look beautiful, and he even said, 'If I weren't embarrassed, I would definitely wear colored lipstick too.'

The use of bright colors and shades that are more commonly used by girls is another aspect that some of the interviewees emphasized. 22-year-old Mohsen stated in this regard:

- "Have you seen any other feminine behaviors from BTS?

They all have favorite colors; they like bright colors."

- All of them?

Not all of them; I think one of them has a strong liking for black, but most of them like bright colors.

- Is that bad?

I have a problem with a boy having a favorite hair color; it seems very effeminate. These things are just out of style now.

- Does that decrease your interest in BTS?

Yes, these things really reduce my interest in BTS. I feel embarrassed to say I'm a fan of BTS.

- But you mentioned that one of them likes black; why don't you like him?

It's about the majority. Most of them exhibit feminine behaviors. I'm sure the one who likes black also has feminine traits."

16-year-old Sana considers Jimin's voice to be feminine, and 46-year-old Fariba emphasizes that the boys of BTS do not have the roughness of male voices, also stating that their makeup and hair colors are not masculine:

- "Which one of Jimin's songs do you really like?

He sings 'Christmas Love' beautifully. Jimin's feminine and velvety voice is amazing."

- "Do you agree that your daughter doesn't listen to her father?

Not in everything, but if the BTS idols had acted according to their father's words, they wouldn't have reached this point.

- How do you know if the idols' fathers were supportive or obstructive?

I guess they must have been that way. Men are generally like that.

- Aren't the members of BTS men? So why don't you have that belief about them?

I don't know; I connect well with them. They have good energy and don't have a masculine appearance, maybe that's why I don't feel like I'm talking about men. I'm not anti-male, so don't get me wrong; it's just that when it comes to the BTS idols, I can't seem to visualize that rigid and rough masculine image. For example, my husband has a very masculine voice, appearance, and tone. It's not about liking; it's about the image I have of BTS, which I can't seem to project that masculine image onto. That's why I feel that the idols are a bit different from other men in my mind.

- What makes you feel that they are different from other men?

Their faces aren't masculine, their makeup and hair colors aren't masculine, they don't have rough voices, and I think all of this has influenced the way I feel."

The overall content mentioned suggests a promotion (whether intentional or unintentional) of sexual identitylessness by the boys of the BTS group."

2-20- Dependence and Addiction to BTS

In the past, addiction was solely referred to substance dependence, such as dependence on alcohol and psychoactive drugs. However, subsequent studies have shown that some behaviors, due to their obsessive and repetitive nature, follow a similar pattern to substance dependence. Thus, the concept of behavior oriented addiction has gradually emerged, referring to addictions to behaviors such as gambling, shopping, watching television, exercising, working, and other similar activities, in a manner parallel to substance addiction.

Research indicates that there is a common physiological basis between drug addictions and behavioral addictions. This means that in substance addiction, the consumption of alcohol or psychoactive substances leads to an increase in the secretion of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain. The rise in the secretion of these hormones results in feelings of pleasure in the individual. Similarly, the repetition of behaviors such as gambling, exercising, engaging in sexual activities, shopping, and immersing oneself in technologies also stimulates the release of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain. Therefore, human pleasure-seeking drives individuals to increasingly engage in these

behaviors. An important point to note is that although initially, an individual's choice to engage in behaviors such as interacting with a K-pop group or reading K-pop fanfiction is entirely voluntary, the recent hormonal secretions create a pleasant feeling in the brain that the individual experiences as a good and pleasurable sensation. Consequently, the resulting pleasure compels them to repeat that behavior, gradually leading the individual away from their previous free choices and into a cycle of impulsive patterns, distancing them from their voluntary reactions. Thus, it can be stated that the brain of an addicted individual compels them to repeat the desired behavior.

What has been discussed regarding dependence and addiction in various contexts can serve as an introduction to the discussion of dependence and addiction to the BTS group and related fanfiction.

An analysis of the field data collected from the research population indicates that some fans are heavily dependent on the boys of the BTS group.

13-year-old Negin recalls the tears of a large crowd of her schoolmates that formed after hearing the news of Jin's enlistment in the military.

16-year-old Saba stated in her interview that if one of the idols catches a cold or falls ill, their fans might skip school and sit in sorrow and lamentation.

Similarly, 18-year-old Taraneh mentions fans who even faint at the sight of their idols' photos:

- "On one hand, you say that idols can do whatever they want, but at the same time, their departure leads to the disintegration of the group. How do you react to these consequences?

Actually, that's why when it was announced that one of the members had to go to the military, a series of videos came out of the company headquarter. You could say all the ARMYs were gathered at the company, chanting not to send the members to the military. The funny part is that there are a lot of ARMYs in our school, and my mom, who came to school once, said she saw everyone crying and thought someone, principal or one of school staff had died. When she asked one of the mothers what happened, she was told that the kids were mourning because one of the BTS members is going to the military.

- So, do fans have a strong dependence on the idols?

Yes, very much. In a way that if one of them catches a cold or gets sick and isn't around, their fans become depressed, skip school, feel unwell, and even cry the whole day. You can see them getting depressed; I used to be like that

too, meaning I would get really depressed if one of them wasn't around or if one of them got sick. Now, I've become a bit wiser (laughs).

"One of my friends went to Dubai for a BTS concert, and in the videos she brought back, there were fanatic fans who screamed and fainted upon seeing BTS, literally tearing their throats out. If you show them a picture, they lose control. Some even love them so much that they can't sleep at night"

The examples mentioned raise the suspicion in any observer that a dependency may have developed between fans and idols, leading fans to consider themselves somewhat addicted to engaging with the idols, their songs, and everything associated with them.

Some of the interviewees explicitly mention their addiction to the aforementioned aspects, suggesting that the raised suspicion may indeed be valid.

46-year-old Fariba, who had sought counseling regarding her daughter, mentions her daughter's addiction to BTS and further admits that the group's appeal has also drawn her in. She currently listens to BTS songs while doing her studies and, if necessary, sacrifices her sleep to listen to their music. Similarly, 14-year-old Gelareh has referred to her addiction to BTS songs, emphasizing that she feels unwell and cannot work without listening to them:

"... My daughter was addicted to BTS videos for a while, watching them from morning till night, until her father and I decided to take her phone away. Her studies were declining, and it seemed like she was addicted to her phone.

- She was addicted to the phone or to the BTS?

I'd say she had become addicted to BTS, and she was using her phone because of BTS...

- What about yourself, are you currently dependent on one of the BTS members or the whole group?

If dependency means that when I cook, or as soon as I wake up in the morning and at night, I sacrifice my sleep to listen to their songs and lose a lot of time, feeling very guilty about it, then yes, I am dependent.

- When you say songs, do you mean BTS songs?

Yes. Recently, when I study, I've gotten into the habit of listening to BTS songs and remixes, along with a couple of other bands, and I get distracted; I can't focus on what I'm reading.

- So why do you do this simultaneously?

I can't stop listening; I've gotten used to it. Of course, it hasn't been long since I became this way. I'm afraid that BTS songs will become repetitive, and I'll move on to other songs.

- Why are you afraid?

Because right now, I think that because I love BTS, I can't quit. What if it has nothing to do with my love for BTS and I just become addicted to music?

- You mentioned that you sacrifice your sleep to listen to music?

Yes, I have my phone in my hand, and I end up falling asleep. I listen until 2 or 3 after midnight, and sometimes even later, and I scroll through social media. "

- "What do you do during those hours?

I listen to music, watch videos and photos, and check the latest news.

- If one day you can't spend that much time following BTS, how would you feel?

About listening to music, I listen to it for about 5 hours, and I'm addicted (laughs), and it might even increase because I listen to music while doing everything, and I really can't work without music; I feel bad."

16-year-old Ghazal and 18-year-old Taranom have stated in their interviews that if they are unaware of the group, they lose their peace and feel a sense of being lost:

- "What do you follow K-pop for, the style of their songs or the idols themselves?

At first, I hadn't watched their shows at all. I was only interested in their performances and songs. Then I really liked it, so I started following them. But I still love their performances. Their songs are my favorites to the point that I prefer really listen to other songs much less, unless they are very famous. But now, they themselves are very important to me too. They are honestly more important to me than their songs. I can tolerate them not releasing songs for several months, but I can't go a few days without getting an update from them. They always keep us informed about themselves, on Weverse, Twitter. Now they're posting photos on Instagram. They just came

[to Instagram]. But they talk more with fans on Weverse and Twitter, mostly Weverse."

- "What do you think are the good or bad things about being a BTS fan for you?

I don't know, honestly, but there's one thing that I can't say is bad or controllable, and that's the strong dependency on them. I think if they're not around, ARMYs might feel a sense of being lost and confused for a while, but it depends on the person. Some get hurt, and some, even if they're not around, remain happy and don't get lost; they strive for themselves because that's life—people come and go, and BTS is the same. For example, I can control this feeling of being lost and frustrated and continue on my path because I've gained that strength from BTS."

18-year-old Pooneh mentioned in her interview her addiction to reading fanfiction stories created by fans about BTS, stating that sometimes she reads two stories in a day:

- "What style and genre do you like, and how much time do you spend reading these?

I go on Wattpad almost every day and read fanfics. Of course, now I can't go on as much because of the internet and things, so my time spent has decreased. There were times when I would finish two fanfics in a day. I can say I've immersed in Wattpad. One can say I am addicted to it (laughs), and the topic doesn't really matter to me. If I like a writer's style, I'll read it. It doesn't matter what the topic or genre is. If it's beautiful, I'll read it. But I should also say that if the writing is beautiful but the topic is offensive or really bad, I won't read it. Because many people have beautiful writing, but the content of their stories is really nonsense."

Despite some fans becoming addicted to the BTS boys, their songs, and reading stories created about the group, some fans have noted that to avoid disrupting their lives, they have tried to reduce the intensity of their dependency. The interview with 15-year-old Diba contains an example in this regard:

"... You know, many of fans spend a lot of their time on these things, but I don't really like being on social media because I feel like I've become addicted. That's why I just try to follow BTS to calm myself down.

- Can you explain more about how you calm yourself by following BTS?

It's not that I calm myself with BTS; what I meant is that, for a while, you were constantly following BTS, wanting to know where they were going and

what they were doing, and you were keeping up with all their news on social media. But when you set that aside and don't follow them as intensely as before, it feels like you're an addict who has quit their addiction.

I'm generally not very into the news and don't feel the need to be the first to know everything. When you want to keep up constantly, you get used to being aware of everything about BTS, and whenever someone asks you a question about them, you have to be informed about those matters.

- From what you've said, can I infer that you don't try to follow BTS in a way that disrupts your daily life?

Yes, that's right. But overall, I try to incorporate the useful things they say into my life because I think BTS has chosen this model to help people through their mindset and their songs in their profession and activities.

- Did you have such behavior of spending a lot of time on BTS before you reached this perspective that you might become addicted to them?

Yes, for example, I used to stay up at night and watch BTS videos for a long time."

2-21- Other Psychological Issues

So far, we have discussed some of the psychological consequences and implications of being a fan of the BTS group, such as: adolescent confusion, motivation, increased self-confidence, helping to improve individuals' bad moods, providing relaxation, generating happiness, moderating susceptibility over time, imaginary love, fulfilling maternal instincts, satisfying sensation-seeking, adopting emotional encounters, psychological release, time-wasting, delusion, remaining behind in concrete thinking dimensions, gradual desensitization, serious cognitive errors, the emergence of certain psychological disorders, sexual identitylessness, and dependence and addiction to BTS.

However, the consequences of being a fan of BTS that have been discussed so far are not exhaustive; other issues are also observed in field studies, some of which are as follows:

- Enhancement of fans' critical thinking,
- Acceptance of fan-generated content,
- Creation of opportunities for projection and the relative expression of individuals' forbidden thoughts,
- Diversion of individuals' curiosity,
- Seeking refuge in music as a sanctuary,

- The phenomenon of saturation,
- Engagement with predominantly pornographic content,
- Sexual arousal of fans,
- And neglect of individuals' mental health

All of these topics will be briefly addressed in the following sections.

Some of the interviewees emphasized that through the ups and downs of being a fan of the BTS boys, they have somewhat reached a state of "critical thinking." This means that some fans, who initially viewed the group and their company as completely ideal, may, over time and in facing the darker side of the company and the group, come to the conclusion that they should not adopt an all-or-nothing approach in their social lives. They recognize the necessity of considering various aspects of phenomena before making conclusions about them.

13-year-old Sarina and 18-year-old Maryam have demonstrated examples of users' thinking shifting towards critical thinking in their interviews:

- "Can you explain more about what you mean by the dark side of K-pop?"

I don't mean it in the sense of saying it is evil or anything like that, but in many other ways, yes. For example, we can refer to the deaths of K-pop idols due to suicide. It is unclear what has befallen those unfortunate ones. For instance, I find Jonghyun's death very suspicious because he really didn't have any specific problems, I mean, I hope he was so. But he suddenly committed suicide. However, one can justify the case of someone like Sulli, who committed suicide due to public hate. But with someone like Jonghyun, who received relatively less hate and whose cause of death is still unclear, it makes one suspicious of the company. I often think about whether the company could be responsible for his death or not, but since I'm not a police officer, I can't provide more precise information about his death (laughs). Of course, when I refer to the dark version of K-pop, I don't mean just suicide; there are also issues like rape, assaults, sexual harassment, and the relentless pressures, such as idols being forced to follow strict diets and dance for 12 hours a day. Plus, the age for becoming an idol in K-pop has significantly decreased; one of the members of IVE¹, I think, is now 14 years old, and if she has to endure all of this, she will really be exhausted.

The clothes they are forced to wear, the fake actions or behaviors they have to perform, the music videos for which they have to risk their lives, or for

¹ IVE is a successful and famous girl group from South Korea that was formed by Starship Entertainment and made their debut in 2021.

example, I don't remember which group it was, but I was watching their clip, and they [management team] would take their phones away to make sure they focus on their work and not set any date, God forbid. Another thing is that they give idols such hard training that during performances, they faint or can't stand on their feet due to exhaustion. I've seen this a lot, like with GFriend¹, BTS, Stray Kids, and many other groups. Overall, all of this is maddening."

- "Considering that the company has complete control over all the actions and behaviors of the members, how can you believe and accept the words and actions of BTS?

I think now the knowledge of ARMYs has increased to the point where they understand that they shouldn't see BTS's actions as one hundred percent representative of themselves. If you are aware of this, you will be mindful not to model all their actions for yourself and not to take all their words as completely correct and without error. One should always reserve a percentage of error and first judge for themselves whether what they see or hear is logical or not. If the members of BTS say something, I personally first think about whether that statement is logical or not, and then I decide whether to accept it. Given the current state of K-pop, one cannot be an absolute fan of someone and imitate them."

Acceptance of fan-generated content refers to the creating and uploading fan-made content on fan pages for boy groups or websites that see it as their duty to support and promote BTS.

Editing photos, creating clips, producing oneshots, and storytelling centered on idols, as well as creating entertaining and recreational content, are among the activities that some fans have engaged in and uploaded to social media. In an interview, 46-year-old Fariba discusses her daughter's productions (and subsequently her own productions) in relation to the BTS group.

- "How many videos has BTS produced that your daughter wants to get so involved with them?

Well, it wasn't just videos. She was chatting and writing stories.

- What kind of stories, where was she writing them?

It seemed like she was writing a screenplay where the main characters were the BTS idols like Jin, Jimin, V, and the others.

¹ GFriend is a music group from South Korea that was formed in 2015 under Source Music.

- What was the genre of the stories? Romance, horror, comedy, or something else?

It was covering all the genres; she was writing in the notes section of her phone. She's a very creative and smart girl, but I saw something inappropriate that I really don't understand why she did it (she seems very upset).

Her dad never lets her put a password on her phone, and since she goes to school, she doesn't take the phone with herself. A few days ago, she went to school, and I was tempted to read the stories. Of course, I know I made a big mistake; maybe it was the right thing to do. Anyway, in her notes, one of the story titles was different from the others, and I don't know if it was a sign from God, but it seemed so when I went straight to that one.

- Can I ask what the title of the story was?

The title was a code name, "Jihats", but I don't know what it means or why she chose that name. Maybe it was so that if someone opened her phone, they wouldn't pay attention to such a name. In the story, like the other stories she wrote, almost everyone was there, but there was one difference that was really strange to me.

- What was the content of the story?

I don't know where she learned these things. We always made sure she hang out with good friends, use the internet properly, or tell me anything that was going on, but this story was full of kisses and other things.

I also had fantasies about one of the idols, but not like this.

- If you would like and it's possible, please explain your own imagination.

When I first read my daughter's stories, to be honest, out of my own boredom, I also started writing stories and fantasizing. One of the professors had said that someone with a stronger imagination becomes more creative. I searched the internet and found that writing stories can activate the imagination. I put these things together and decided to start writing stories myself, and what better than BTS, a group I am interested in. But my fantasies always revolved around creating heroes from each of the BTS members. It feels good to me when I write about their heroics; I feel like I am the hero and writing about myself."

"Creation of opportunities for projection and the relative expression of individuals' forbidden thoughts" is another important issue that should be

given due attention. Big Hit Entertainment, during the rise of one-shots and fan fictions, which is almost common worldwide in relation to celebrities and prominent figures in society, has, through silence and lack of serious objection to the explicit oneshots and obscene storytelling processed by some fans around the idols, effectively opened a favorable space for the most troubled and problematic individuals in society. They, free from the possibility of legal repercussions for the insults in their explicit oneshots and storytelling, open their minds and, under the guise of writing, project and express their deepest emotions and feelings."

Kosar, 25-years-old, discussed the following in her interview regarding this topic:

- "What types of fan fiction are there and what kinds of content are produced?"

Look, it all depends on the writer. Just like we have novels, we have erotic romance novels that have a lot of explicit scenes, and we have soft romance novels that don't have many explicit scenes, and we have crime novels, detective novels, sensationers, and science fiction. Fan fictions are the same. They are no different from other novels and stories; the writer creates the image they want to write about, and it includes all these genres. They simply use characters that are familiar to the readers, and the reader can imagine, for example, if they mention a certain singer's name as a character in their story, it's easier for the reader to visualize that character with the image they have in their mind because they know who that person is, and the genre is the same.

- So do you think one reason for producing fan fiction is that it provides a character that is easy and ready for you?

Yes, exactly. You start reading those stories that feature characters you like. For instance, if you really like this or that member of the group, you go and read a story that has that members in it.

- So you're saying that even though they produce a lot of content, like releasing songs, music videos, and sometimes vlogs about their daily lives, it still seems to be not enough for their fans, and they still turn to fan fiction and things they create themselves?

Yes, that's right. There is a lot of artistry among K-pop fans, and of course, fans of anything. I think it's a very wrong perception for someone to say that K-pop has become something very widespread and that its fans are doing strange things. Everything that K-pop fans do, anime fans do too, Hollywood

series fans do, fans of foreign actors do, and even fans of some domestic content do. It's just that domestic content is often censored, so there isn't much room for people to do things.

- Uh-huh.

That's the nature of fandom. No matter what you're a fan of, you want to engage in that area. Now, if someone is an artist, for example, a painter, they will paint in that field. If they are a K-pop fan, they will paint those singers. If they are a fan of specific movies and series, like Harry Potter, which is so famous, even after all these years, fans still come and talk about it, saying, 'Yes, I am a member of such-and-such house.'

- Uh-huh.

They say, 'I am from that wizarding school.' For example, 'I am Hufflepuff' or 'I am Gryffindor.' Then they form groups and talk within those groups. They pretend that they are always with those houses and display the behavioral traits that each of those groups had in the movie. They buy the clothes, they buy the wands. What I want to say is that the processes that happen in K-pop, especially among K-pop fans, are exactly the same as those that happen among fans of anything that might exist in the world."

Curiosity is a natural phenomenon that is observed not only in humans but also in animals, and often humans strive to provide appropriate and relevant answers to their boundless curiosities.

Some fans of the BTS group, in their interviews, demonstrate that their innate curiosity has not been directed towards appropriate paths due to finding inappropriate answers. Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, and Taranom, 18-years-old, have referred to their 'deviated curiosity' in their interviews as follows:

- "Were you talking about the videos where members are shipped together?"

Some ARMYs are very opposed to shipping, while others really enjoy it. Personally, I really like their shipping. For example, there are signs that lead ARMY shippers to delve deeper into the idea that which ones are definitely together. Jikook also does things in between that give ARMYs subjects to work with.

- Uh-huh. So what do ARMYs who like these subjects do?

They create clips. For example, in one of their lives where Taehyung was introducing Jungkook, he said, 'This is my friend,' and Jungkook replied, am

I your friend? Introduce me properly.' This made ARMYs create a lot of clips from it. "

- "What is a photobook that you are talking about?

The photobook that I'm talking about regarding the members is that they come together with their own tastes and designs in the photoshoots, expressing the things that have been on their minds and that for some reason they haven't been able to tell us, through a series of images and specific symbols. Then they collect these in a magazine and sell it as merchandise. It's exactly like that 'Come Out' moment from Jimin, where he hasn't directly stated what his sexual orientation is, but has conveyed it to us through images."

"Seeking refuge in music as a sanctuary" refers to some of fans who stated in their interviews that due to certain problems they have faced in the course of their lives, they have sought refuge in music to forget their issues, and they have often succeeded in this regard. Mahlagha , 19 years old, and Fariba, 46 years old, have provided evidence of this in their interviews:

- "Do you remember what your reason was for following the boy group in the beginning?

I was going through a tough time in my life due to family problems. I didn't had any close friends and was always a quiet, reclusive and isolated person. That group made me laugh and brought me joy. There was no one to understand me or talk to, but the boy group acted like a painkiller for me, and I could escape from the world around me to them. I even remember times when apart from them, I found absolutely no joy or reason to keep going. I think they were my saviors for a period, and I can't imagine how those years would have passed if I hadn't been their fan."

- So let me ask this question: Did this group fill the emotional voids you felt?

Yes, exactly. And they made me feel important. Loving people is an attractive feeling, and when you are immature you idolize people, you start a kind of worship for them, regardless of the fact that they are human like you and have their own flaws. During my free time, I would dream about the future. I have always loved music, and I think the boy group had a significant impact on my interest in music and ultimately my choice of major."

- "Do you have any issues with your husband because you stay up until 2 or 3 AM for BTS?"

My husband and I have been distant for a while, and one of the reasons I keep myself occupied with BTS songs at night is his lack of attention to me. He goes on his phone, and I go on mine. He doesn't show me affection, and to forget that, I turn to music and clips.

- Do the members of BTS emotionally compensate for the lack of affection in your relationship?

No, they don't do that. Just the fact that they make me feel good is enough. I watch previous BTS concerts, the celebrations they have, and I immerse myself in them. One strange thing that I really want to continue is reading romantic stories where the main characters are the members of BTS.

- Do you mean fan fictions?

Yes, oh my god, how much I have gotten involved with BTS (the smile on her face faded, and her gloomy face showed her sadness).

- If your relationship with your husband becomes warm and intimate, will you set BTS aside?

Maybe I won't set them aside totally, but they will definitely become less prominent in my life, I'm sure.

- How are you so sure?

Because this has happened before, there was a time when I was really into football and followed it a lot out of boredom, but after my husband entered my life, especially in the early days of our engagement, football faded away. You might think, why would a woman be interested in football and get involved with it? Back then, football was very prominent; there were no smartphones, no various foreign and domestic songs, and more importantly, my brother was very into football, so I got involved too. Right now, when I think I see three main reasons for being involved with BTS: first, my daughter loves them a lot, and it's important for me to connect with her. Second, I have a lot of free time these days, and this fills my time. Third, I keep myself occupied so I don't think about the problems I have with my husband. Of course, I do a few other things as well.

- So if these three factors are resolved, will BTS fade away?

Yes, it will fade away, I'm sure."

"The phenomenon of saturation" is another psychological concept that some of the interviewed individuals have mentioned.

The phenomenon of saturation indicates that by presenting a stimulus repeatedly, the recipient gradually reaches a state of saturation and boredom with that stimulus. This causes someone who was, for example, a fan of a specific K-pop group to become saturated over time and easily lose their initial interests in their favorite group.

Fariba, 46 years old, recalls experiencing the phenomenon of saturation in her youth and expects to see the same issue for herself and her daughter, who are currently very passionate fans of BTS:

"...Jin had dyed his hair blue, he looked very attractive, and my daughter wanted to dye her hair blue for a while, which got her beaten by her dad because of it. As a result, I think both the company and the idols want this visual appeal to increase.

- How long will this appeal last? Will fans maintain this interest forever?

I heard they said they want to disband the group by 2025. I think that's why they're disbanding; otherwise, what other reason could there be? Fans reach a point of saturation. But the point is that my daughter can't accept that they might be disbanded.

- Why does this saturation happen?

Because they can't create a new image or how much they want change their clothes or how much they want change their hair color? It is true that the style may be different at any spot, but the sounds become repetitive, and it gets very boring after a while.

- Have you felt that the group has become boring during the time you've been a fan?

I predict that I will continue for another year before that happens, and I suspect that since my daughter has more interest, maybe two years, but not more than that. This isn't the first group I've liked. Before this group, there was an Iranian group that is a bit older; I don't know if you remember it given your age, but it was called Arian Band, and they were Iranian."

- Yes, I remember.

I was in love with Ali Pahlavan to the point that my whole room was filled with his pictures. I used to fantasize a lot about him back then. I was addicted to their songs but really disliked Golzar (laughs). At that time, it

was said he was let into the group because of his looks. But time passed, and gradually my interest in Pahlavan diminished, and eventually, they disbanded, and everyone went their separate ways. Ali Pahlavan's voice was very sweet, but despite all that, everything became ordinary at some point. The same thing happens with BTS, and I think if the group is beneficial, a positive and beautiful image remains in the fans' minds, and whenever they remember, they say, 'Ah, those were the days.' Otherwise, everyone forgets, and everything ends. Getting attached to these things is really a mistake. This is my experience because one day, which comes very quickly, you lose everything you've built in your mind. The reality is that Jin's true image is the one I showed you from his military service, which my daughter doesn't even want to see this photo."

"Engagement with predominantly pornographic content" is another topic that has been confirmed by a significant segment of the interviewed fans. This means that with the widespread prevalence of one-shots and fan fictions among BTS fans, in many cases, recent content has taken on a sexual tone and addresses some sexual issues between the idols or between an idol and the writer. Fans, while engaging with these contents, suddenly encounter sexual scenes that had not even crossed their minds until that point.

- "What kind of things were written in these fan fictions that could change your perspective on the members of BTS?"

I personally haven't read more than 4 or 5 fan fictions, but most of them were mafia-themed or featured members as individuals who owned a company. Overall, it wasn't good because it portrayed the members as people with messed-up personalities or bad traits, and I'm realizing now how corrupted I was for reading such things at one point.

- Why do you think you were corrupted when you were reading fan fiction?

Well, I was reading boy-girl fics out of curiosity, and I mostly read things that were just floating around on the internet. Besides, most of the fictions depicted the members as people who easily kill others, are shameless and deviant, or very violent, whereas in reality, they are not like that at all." (Sarina, 13 years old).

- "For example, what kind of story do you think is inappropriate?"

Look, I don't know if I can call it a story. Should I say the genre? What should I say? If I want to give an example, there's a fic on Wattpad where the pairing is Taekook. I don't just read Kookmin; I read other pairings too.

Now, think about the most famous Taekook fic, which has a lot of readers and is called 'Desire.' The content of the story is pedophilia. Though, the writer's style is excellent, but the content... I remember a few months ago there was an argument in the fandom on Twitter about this. The fans of this writer were saying, 'No, it's not pedophilia.' Then many others were saying, 'You're being biased, and your love for this story has blinded you.' The story goes that Jungkook is the younger brother of Taehyung's girlfriend. For example, in the story, Taehyung is 22 years old and Jungkook is 10 years old. Taehyung has loved him since childhood, and now that he's grown up, he enters into a relationship with him. Now, the fans were saying, 'No, when Jungkook was a child, he loved him as a family member, not romantically.' But they are just fooling themselves. In fact, I don't enjoy these fics that are very smut and sexual or have BDSM content¹; I think it's a kind of insult to the idol to come and highlight only the sexuality of their relationship. Besides the content, these fics often have audiences under 15 years old or elementary school kids. It's really not correct for a child to read BDSM fics about Taekook or others at this age. Honestly, I don't enjoy this kind of content. I think it's very trivial and inappropriate for both idols and I, and even though I really enjoy reading fan fiction, I prefer not to read these kinds of stories. But there are many who like these genres and seriously follow them. For them, it doesn't matter that these things are ugly. It's sick and ugly or pedophilic. I've seen in many fics that they normalize relationships with family members. There was one fic where Jimin and Yoongi were brothers, and in it, Yoongi falls in love with Jimin and then they enter into a relationship. I read a few parts, and when I realized what the story was about, I stopped. But many people were reading it and leaving comments,

¹ BDSM is an acronym for four terms: Bondage, Discipline, Dominance & Submission, and Sadism & Masochism. It refers to four behaviors in sexual relationships:

- An interest in physically restraining or binding an individual during sex; this can range from a simple handcuffing to a complex system that requires half an hour of preparation.
- A desire for discipline and actions that lead to the submission of an individual in a sexual relation. For example, demanding a certain behavior with authority and enduring something that may not be comfortable. It is noteworthy that the deeper the relationship, the more discipline enters into more private matters.
- Dominance, where the dominant individual enjoys being powerful and exerting that power, and submission, where the submissive individual is interested in having power exerted over them and having no control over themselves.
- In sadomasochistic relationships, where inflicting and receiving pain is central. One party derives pleasure from sadistic behavior, torturing and punishing their partner, while the other party finds pleasure in being punished and tortured through masochistic behavior.

A key point in BDSM is that the consent of both parties is a necessary prerequisite. It is essentially a form of consensual behavior between two (or more) individuals, where their roles complement each other but are unequal, aimed at achieving pleasure and emotional, physical, and sexual excitement, as well as psychological and emotional release.

saying they liked it. Fan fictions, with all their goodness and beauty, also have these downsides." (Pooneh, 18-years-old).

Although there are many one-shots and stories with sexual undertones in the fandom and among BTS fans, these issues are not limited to fans alone. There are also same-sex behaviors exhibited by idols, which, at the direction of the company, idols display, such as kissing each other's lips in front of an audience or engaging in symbolic behaviors that have sexual connotations. These actions have caught the attention of some fans and play a role in their 'sexual arousal' and potential modeling

Marzieh, 19 years old, in her interview, refers to scenes that symbolically evoke sexual issues, saying:

- "How do some of BTS's sexy performances affect your physical and mental state?

Are you talking about their baepsae movements?

- I think so.

I say, 'Wow' (laughs), and at that moment, the Angel of Death comes to get my death certificate for signing (laughs)."

"Neglect of individuals' mental health" is another important category that needs attention. Some interviewed fans have mentioned the plethora of rumors in the fandom and anti-fandom surrounding BTS, which gnaw at and scratch the minds of the audience.

- "Have there been any bad news about the group?

I don't read bad news about them at all. I don't follow rumors or anything like that.

- For example, what rumors are there about them?

For instance, that someone is their girlfriend, and things about their personal lives that are not interesting to me at all. I'm more interested in their positive actions and how they react to social issues, and I follow that." (Shabnam, 25 years old).

Observing the company's actions, which sometimes expect idols to act contrary to their sexual orientation, or not responding seriously to those who spread rumors about the idols or incite hatred against them, or individuals who undermine the human identity of the idols by creating inappropriate one-shots and stories, is another concern that some fans have mentioned:

- "Does seeing the company's strictness make you think something should be done about it?"

Well, sometimes I get really annoyed with the company, both because of all the strictness they have and their indifference, as it seems a bit indifferent towards its artists. For example, in some cases, the company came out days later to defend their idols, even though that issue was completely over. Yet there is another problem that the company doesn't take any action against the fake ARMYs who depict the idols as sexual slaves. Unfortunately, this indifference from HYBE can be really frustrating. Of course, we haven't been passive in this regard; we've tried to issue statements, but some of them have only remained as statements, while others have been effective. For example, when ARMYs noticed that the boys' manager raised his hand against Jungkook and was about to hit him, there was a lot of protest, and Big Hit issued a statement, apologized, and said that the person was fired." (Marzieh, 19 years old).

Diba, 15 years old, also notes in her interview that linking idols together (as a same-sex couple) will have inappropriate psychological effects on them:

- "What is your personal opinion about fans shipping idols together?"

I'm not really on board with this wave because, you know, it seems that the members of the groups are very close and they do a lot of things that are suspicious (laughs), but I really don't like to say, for example, when two people are sneaking glances at each other, 'Oh my God, these two are in a relationship.' I mean, it doesn't make sense to me to say that just because two people are doing something together, it means they are in a relationship. Besides, I think there are idols who see that they are being shipped with others and they don't like it. I mean, I put myself in their shoes, and it's really hard for me to have a huge crowd of fans constantly giving their opinions about me and saying this or that, when maybe that thing has never happened in my life. Overall, even if they are in a relationship, that's fine; we don't need to keep repeating it, and if they aren't, I think constantly bringing it up can make it embarrassing for those two when they meet."

The presence of individuals who spread hate about idols (and even their fans) and those who have a toxic attitude towards idols is one of the issues that has distressed and hurt the minds of BTS fans. When they encounter such behavior, they become generally pessimistic and fearful about their own community and even the global community.

- "Were those people who criticized Jungkook for going to the amusement park BTS fans?"

We can't really call them ARMY because they are mostly sasaeng fans¹ and fake ARMYs (non-authentic fans), but they were mostly from the haters.

- How does it make you feel when such issues lead to negative feedback towards idols?

My reaction to these matters is a completely furious reaction. For example, it often happens that under the name of ARMY, they say things like, 'Jennie is really fat' or 'is a lazy dancer' or 'She can't sing,' and in that moment, I want to choke myself and that person. It's really annoying that a multi-fan² comes to see one of their idols being attacked by another idol's fan, and my reaction to such people is like, 'Are you joking? You think you're so great. Don't kill us, come on, you're so cool.'" (Sarina, 13 years old).

"... There are some fans who are called 'sasaeng,' and they are really dangerous.

- What do you know about sasaeng fans?

Sasaengs are obsessive and intrusive fans who are really dangerous. Some of them constantly meddle in the private lives of idols and are looking to gather dirt on them. They want to get to know the idols' families and constantly create rumors about them. There are others who feel a sense of ownership over the idols and claim them as their own; they might even harm the idols or their other fans. In think, those who are sasaengs have gone crazy from their intense love and fandom. It's as if they are mentally ill" (Taraneh, 18 years old).

¹ Sasaeng fans are those whose behavior goes beyond fandom and resembles that of paparazzi; they disturb the lives of their favorite celebrities. For example, they find the phone numbers or home addresses of famous individuals and disrupt their peace.

² A multi Fan refers to a person who is a fan of all or many K-pop groups. In more colloquial terms, a multi fan is an ardent K-pop music fan who follows and supports all or a large number of Korean music groups.

3- Social Effects of supporting BTS group

Somebody call me right one
Somebody call me wrong
I'm not gonna care about it
What about you
So what
Let them go
In a sigh, lots of worries are hiding
Stop thinking about it. You already know all of it
In the middle of the road, in the moment you want to give up
Shout out louder
So what, what, what
There's nothing that I can do
There's nothing to hide
It's already been a while since the dice were rolled
If you dawdle, you'll be swept away, oh together
90% of your worries are an imaginary swamp that you created
I don't go
So what?
We are, we are, we are
Young & wild & free
Your worries, worries, without no answer
Don't fall into them and stay in them
Even if you're in danger boundary

Let's cut through the wind while laughing and chatting

Sometimes run like a crazy

With mistakes and in tears, we just go

So what

Don't stop and don't worry

I need it

Let them go

Although there's no answer yet

You can start the fight

You can start the fight' (a part of the song 'So What' by BTS).

Support for the BTS group has various effects, including psychological, social, cultural, ethical-belief, educational, economic-political, aesthetic, artistic, health and hygiene, and familial impacts. In this section, the social effects of supporting the BTS group will be examined and discussed. The topics that will be addressed regarding the social effects of supporting the BTS boys in this section are as follows:

Critique of the limitations within Iran, critique of the professional and ethical weaknesses of Iranian celebrities, starting fandom at a young age, idols addressing youth issues, deepening the relationship between idols and fans, multidimensional and multifaceted approach toward the group and its members, encouraging immigration to South Korea, in-person and virtual friendships, Altruism, globalization and global thinking, role modeling from idols (appearance modeling, behavioral modeling, modeling after the value systems of role models, Levels of Influence of Role Models on Fans), identity transformations (robotic identity, group identity, network identity, identity formation of identityless individuals, toxic identity, toxic group identity), evolution of social relationships among fans, the sense of commitment to support the group, efforts to increase the number of fans (ARMYs), Fanaticism in Fandom, adopting emotional responses towards in-group and out-group individuals, critique of the Big Hit's policies, and other social issues (changing the racist views of fans, increasing certain social skills, leaning towards extreme individualism, indirect education of norm-breaking, negative perceptions of Iranian men among fans, involvement in the group's controversies).

In the following, the aforementioned topics will be examined.

3-1- Critique of the Limitations within Iran

An examination of historical records in ancient Iran indicates the significant importance of emotional satisfaction and the joy and happiness of the people. The multitude of celebrations throughout the year (especially during the autumn and winter when agricultural work was less) reflects the importance of emotional fulfillment for the people in this region.

After the advent of Islam, religious perspectives also viewed emotional satisfaction positively, placing it alongside the three main duties of a believer (relationship with God, relationship with people, and earning a livelihood).

Even after Islam, Iranian society maintained a positive view towards emotional fulfillment. For instance, the renowned Iranian poet Ferdowsi advised throughout history that:

چو شادی بکاهد، بکاهد روان

When joy diminishes, the spirit wanes

خرد گردد اندر میان ناتوان

Thus wisdom falters, burdened by weakness

Similar emphases on the importance of emotional satisfaction can be observed in other parts of the world. For example, in the West, every opportunity is seized to spread joy and happiness among the community.

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, some officials, lacking a deep understanding of the importance of emotional fulfillment, not only neglected the promotion of joy and happiness within society but also withheld necessary investments in recreational infrastructure for diverse social groups. At times, they even opposed the expressions of joy and emotional satisfaction among the populace.

The people's need for joy and contentment in their personal and social lives led them, especially the youth, to resist the suppression of their emotional fulfillment and seek alternatives. Consequently, they turned their attention to other parts of the world and endeavored to create their own joy and emotional satisfaction by drawing inspiration from their achievements in this area.

In the process of Iranians utilizing global achievements to satisfy their joy, entertainment, and leisure, attention to the East, which has a

closer cultural affinity with Iran, has been more prominent among certain segments of the Iranian population than the West. In the following, in line with the critique of domestic limitations, five subtopics will be examined: "the lack of thematic diversity, the relatively depressed atmosphere of domestic music, and the neglect of serious youth issues," "the presentation of some vulgar content in the music available in society," "the cultural proximity between Korea and Iran," "the lack of recreational facilities and resources within the country," and finally, "the hope and motivation provided by BTS music."

"The lack of thematic diversity, the relatively depressed atmosphere of domestic music, and the neglect of serious youth issues" are among the initial critiques expressed by the interviewed teenagers and young adults. Reihaneh, 15-year-old, and Zahra, 24-year-old, in their interviews, referred to issues such as the lack of diversity, the prevailing sadness in the music available in society, and the use of some vulgar language in Persian rap, mentioning their choice of BTS as a substitute for Persian rap:

- "Do you listen to Iranian songs too?

At first, yes, but since I got to know BTS and such, Iranian songs are just not appealing to me at all; they make you feel worse when you listen to them. Some of them are nonsense or just sad.

- For example, which songs?

Songs by Mehdi Ahmadvand are all sad, or Mohsen Ebrahimzadeh; you don't even understand some of the things he says; they're all very cheap and ridiculous. Most of them are about sadness or meaningless love songs. For example, why should a teenager listen to so many sad songs, full of depressing messages? Some of them have repetitive rhythms and sound similar. Since I became a K-pop fan, the Iranian songs just don't catch my eye anymore and have lost their appeal to me. But I still like and listen to Shadmehr [Aghili]."

- Well, Shahram also has a lot of sad songs.

Yes, but his voice is amazing, and his songs are special; everyone loves him. A lot of people go abroad to attend his concerts.

- Why does everyone like him?"

Well, he's a really good and professional singer, he is kind and respectful toward people. The fact that he has been able to succeed abroad is a merit in itself."

- "So, at first, their humor attracted you to them.

Yes, they are both fun, Kind and cheerful.

- As you explored the group's music further, what made you interested in the songs of this group?

The meanings of their lyrics are interesting, and unlike Persian rap, they don't often use vulgar language, and most of the time, though not always, they talk about real concerns. "

Masoud, a 20-year-old, also mentions in his interview that the lack of a suitable alternative has led him to continue following BTS despite some of his criticisms of the group:

- "Why do you think the company tells the BTS boys to wear makeup?

The company wants to convey that men and women are equal, and that boys have the right to wear makeup just like girls."

- Do you think that the boys wearing makeup proves this equality?

No, equality between men and women lies in the character and humanity of each person.

- Do these conflicting thoughts you have about BTS make you hesitant in your fandom?

Sometimes I think that way, but I don't see or find any alternative as good as BTS. So, I'll continue to be a fan.

- So, if one day you find a group better than BTS, would you give up on BTS?

Yes, that's how it would be. Because I don't agree with some of BTS's actions, like the boys wearing makeup. "

The presentation of some vulgar content in the music available in society" is another serious critique that the interviewed individuals mentioned regarding some of the content in domestic music and the music from abroad that Iranian teenagers and young adults consume.

Sena, 16-year-old, and Sheida, 20-year-old, expressed the following in their interviews:

- "Despite all these moral conflicts that you are aware of, why do you support BTS?"

Because I feel like I've grown up; I can speak up, and I can choose to support a band. The right to choose is the best word I can use to answer your question.

- But the group you support doesn't have much rights to choice, does it? How can they be a suitable role model for you and your friends?

Despite all their shortcomings, they are still better than many other groups, and at least I, as a teenager, learn some things from them. Should I listen to Eminem, who is all nonsense, or Sasi Mankan¹? I have to choose the lesser evil, and BTS is that lesser evil, not the worse one. You tell me two positive groups that are as appealing as BTS and provide good content, and have many of the qualities that BTS has while lacking its downsides. There aren't any. I need BTS for its uniqueness, its status, its popularity, to boost my self-confidence, and to have something to say. Many people think we teenagers don't understand, but we do. If we have problems, it's because there's no one to introduce us to suitable role models so that BTS isn't our only option."

- "You mentioned parents' concerns about their children being constantly occupied with BTS. How about you? Have you ever had a strong emotional conflict because of BTS? For example, have you ever engaged in arguments with those who criticize them?"

Once. One of my friends said, 'They are really disgusting. And things like that. I mean, another friend was listening to a BTS song, and then this person said that. The friend I'm talking about, who was listening to the BTS song, really likes anime too and watch them a lot. Then the one who was against BTS also spoke badly about anime too, she said what is that I hate it and I think it's nonsense and more like this, and that it's for kids. Then, as I don't like it when someone insults another's interests, I got into a discussion with her and told her that just because you don't like something doesn't mean you can mock it. For example, I don't like Tataloo, which you like, but I wouldn't insult him because of you. Then she said, 'Why are you following them so much?' I replied, 'Well, because Iranian songs are all about sadness, and they say things like "cry, crying is beautiful." But these guys talk about hope. One of their songs says, "Don't cry, my dear." They give positive energy in all their songs, and I've even heard that they use words from the

¹ Iranian singer

Bible in their songs too.' After that, our friend was convinced and didn't say anything more."

"The cultural proximity between Korea and Iran" is another category that the surveyed population agreed upon. For instance, Fariba, 46-year-old speaking about her daughter, noted that due to the cultural closeness of Eastern productions to the Iranian culture, she prefers recent works over Hollywood productions and encourages her daughter to engage with these Korean works

- "So, you can't do something more important that would be beneficial?

Actually, I know that I overdo it. It keeps me occupied, at least I don't think about my problems with my husband. It's a way to escape from these repetitive thoughts. To be honest, I prefer Eastern music and films to Turkish and American movies and series."

- Why?

Because they have less content about betrayal, promiscuity, and generally less sexual content. Indian films also have less sexual content compared to Western films. If watching Korean films and series and listening to Korean songs, and generally Eastern content, helps my daughter move away from Western and Turkish content, that's very helpful. BTS is much better than some Western groups and singers; at least the words they use are polite and respectful, which reflects exactly the nature of the Eastern culture. Excuse me, but whether it's Western films and series or their songs, their catchphrases often contain words that I feel embarrassed to utter. So, I try to keep myself entertained with Korean films or engage with BTS instead of watching the extremely vulgar Turkish films."

Kosar, a 25-year-old, expresses similar sentiments:

- "What made you turn more towards Eastern content rather than Western music and films?

I feel it was because of the romantic aspect of the series that is much more pronounced in Korean dramas than in American ones.

- Uh-huh!

You know, for example, when I watched American series, they seemed very distant from our culture. They were far from what we might experience. At least it was like that for me, as a thirteen or fourteen-year-old in the cultural context I was in. But that Korean series are not that much far from my mind.

It was much closer to the real life I might experience compared to Iranian and American series.

The lack of recreational facilities and resources within the country" was another important theme that some of the interviewees mentioned. For example, Masoud, 20-year-old, stated in this regard that:

- Masoud, what impact do you think the majestic birthday celebrations of idols have on their fans?

It stirs up the excitement of the fans, and they celebrate and dance in celebrations and gatherings organized by fans in specific places, so they will have a great time.

- Have you ever participated in such celebrations?

Yes, a few times, and each time, all the effort fell on one of the fans who had a good financial situation, and they covered all the catering costs.

- How was the celebration organized? Can you elaborate?

For example, Jimin's birthday was celebrated at his villa's garden, and there weren't many of us—about twenty BTS fans, both boys and girls—who were treated to drinks and birthday cake. Then, one of the fans who was also a singer brought an organ and musical equipment, and they didn't turn up the volume too loud so as not to disturb others. The celebration felt like a small party without chaos, and after the catering, we all went to the center to dance.

- Did you also filmed your celebration?

Yes, we recorded videos, and the kids would post them on their social media accounts. If others had their own private celebrations, they would send their videos, and the account manager would showcase those as well.

- Did these birthday celebrations have any negative reflections among the fans?

No, everyone enjoyed it, and we kept track of birthday celebrations happening all over the world."

"The hope and motivation provided by BTS music" was another significant factor in the attraction of Iranian teenagers and young adults, which was noted in the field research.

Sheida, 20-year-old, in her interview, pointed out the limitations in planning for youth in various cultural fields and their relative neglect in social equations. She

emphasized that the attraction of young people to a group like BTS is not only due to the appeal of their music but also because they represent a source of hope for the youth. Additionally, Sheida highlighted the discrimination that exists between Iranian girls and boys, introducing BTS as a representative for addressing the issues faced by this important social group:

"Many people say that factors that bring success for BTS are not solely their art and music. Rather, there is a large network that even guides the company, with extensive advertising and significant expenses that have turned them into global figures. According to these people, focusing only on their musical talent and considering it the sole reason for their success is not somehow subverting the reality or an emotional perspective. And logically will lead children to proceed with unrealistic expectations and when they face the harsh reality, they become severely disappointed.

I see more of the positive aspect, and I think that in these times of despair, having a source of hope is a positive thing...

Another reason I believe BTS has a following in Iran, especially among Iranian girls, is that we have so many constraints and dos and don'ts. For example, we constantly hear that boys shouldn't do this, girls shouldn't do that, they shouldn't sing, they can't get permits, and so on. Since I am involved in music and interact with families, I see a lot of these issues, especially in the music field. In this situation, when you see a group on the other side of the world moving against all these constraints and seemingly voicing your innermost feelings, you are naturally drawn to them even more."

Another important point to consider when dealing with cultural institutions in Iran is their often unscientific approaches. This means that these institutions tend to address various issues with a narrow-minded and ideological perspective, rather than seeking to scientifically explain the concerns of teenagers and young adults. Consequently, their approaches, which are based on denial and lack logical support, will not succeed in convincing young audiences.

Sonia, 17-year-old, along with Saeedah, Negin, and Mahdiah, 20-year-old, mentioned the non-argumentative responses of some critics and cultural institutions in their interviews as follows:

- "First of all, I want to express my sincere gratitude for agreeing to have this conversation. Many fans tend to decline collaboration as soon as they hear about my request.

Yes, because most one people when here of someone liking K-pop and follows the boys, start insulting them. But I'm ready because you've reassured me that such issues won't be involved in this interview."

Negin: For example, the Tebyan website claims to be an Islamic website. If this is really what religion is, I'd rather be an infidel. This site photoshopped a picture of BTS and put an LGBT flag behind it, claiming that they are gay. So, what does that Quran you claim to read say? Doesn't it say not to gossip and not to slander?!

Saeedeh: Oh, when Tebyan posted that, I kept going to the admin's private messages asking, 'What's the reason for your hostility? What's wrong with you?

- How are you so sure that those photos were photoshopped?"

Saeedah: Well, we were their fans. Naturally, we have all the photos they take. As soon as we saw the photo, we recognized it and understood that it was edited and different from the original. I have a file that is 6 gigabytes. It contains all the photos BTS has taken so far. No one can fool me.

Negin: The reason we say it was photoshopped is that we are BTS fans. We have all the BTS pages, both official and unofficial. So, as soon as the photos are taken, we first get them from BTS's own page and then from other pages. We have the originals of all these photos. As soon as a photo is published from somewhere else, we immediately recognize whether it's photoshopped or not, especially such a blatant photoshop (She laughs and continues). If you want to know whether a photo is photoshopped or not, just send me a message."

- "Mahdieh, what do you mean when you say some websites provide ridiculous information?

Look, I don't know what a trend is this that everyone wants to say that K-pop, especially BTS, is useless and misleads people, and that they are destroying the younger generation. First of all, regarding Iran, I should say that the younger generation has been lost due to the policies, thefts, and corruption of the government leaders. Now, when someone wants to awaken this generation and bring them some hope, they want to oppose it and portray it negatively.

"Because the fans of these industries and BTS are usually teenagers. Some websites try to wake up the parents of these teenagers and school authorities with false information and misplaced interpretations, claiming they are

saving them from falling. One hundred percent of their content is lies and fake. For example, the Tebyan website says things about BTS that are truly shocking. They make bizarre lies and interpretations that if you are a true and serious fan, you can understand that it's all false.

- Can you give an example?

Well, for instance, they photoshop pictures of the BTS group to say that they are gay or that they promote promiscuity. As soon as we see the photo, we realize that these images are fake and photoshopped. We remember all their photos with their details".

The combination of what has been mentioned leads adolescents and young people, seeing the domestic environment as inadequate in satisfying their emotional needs, approach toward what is offered on the other sides of the borders of the country and to embrace things that may not align well with their own culture and beliefs.

3-2- A Critique of the professional and ethical weaknesses of Iranian celebrities

Although there is little attention given to the issue of leisure, entertainment, and the emotional satisfaction of teenagers and young adults, which can be considered as a missing link in Iranian society, the professional and executive weaknesses of Iranian artists are also emphasized by the surveyed population. They refer to this issue as a reason and a context for young people turning to cultural resources from abroad.

Although the limited attention given to the issues of leisure, recreation, and entertainment for adolescents and young people, as well as their emotional satisfaction, is considered as a missing link in Iranian society, the professional shortcomings and performance weaknesses of Iranian artists are also among the issues emphasized by the research participants. They have referred to this matter as a reason and a context for adolescents and young people to turn to the cultural resources overseas.

Sonia, 17-year-old, in her interview, addressed the cultural, social, and economic shortcomings within the country while justifying the actions of Korean idols:

- "Have you seen the advertisements that the group produce for brands or large companies?

Yes, the modeling I mentioned is one of their advertisements. I personally follow this more because I like their clothes, both the style and the color.

- BTS does significant advertising for some brands like Coca-Cola and McDonald's; have you seen those?

Yes, a lot of photos came out when they advertised those brands.

- Considering that the activities of idols are under the supervision of the company, important decisions like whether to advertise for a brand or not are also determined by the company, right?

Yes, the boys can't just advertise any brand they want, or not even brands. They can't advertise everything they want; for example, they can't promote dishes and utensils (laughs)

- The fact that they advertise for two major American companies, and as you said, many photos of them have been released, isn't that a decision that sends an indirect message?

For example, do you mean support for America or collaboration with them?

- The two cases you mentioned are appropriate. Do you think they have such an intention?

I don't know, but even if they do, it's not a problem. America is a superpower in the world; countries want to maintain their relations with them, even improve them. No one wants to clash with America because if that happens, the situation in that country will fall apart, just like ours."

In her interview, 21-year-old Sayeh referred to the polite interactions of the BTS idols with Iranian culture and civilization, making a comparative mention of some domestic celebrities who have had mocking attitudes towards them:

"In one of the episodes of BTS Run, Jin mentioned that Iranian food is famous for its deliciousness. Namjoon also in the behind the scenes of episode forty-three of BTS Run said that he has great respect for Cyrus the Great and has read parts of the Shahnameh and the medical book of Avicenna.

One fan asked Jimin do you knew you have many fans in Iran? And Jimin replied that his Iranian fans are always kind to me, and I have read some tweets from his Iranian fans, noting that people in Iran care a lot about their beauty and, in my opinion, they are very attractive. Jungkook also mentioned in a program, I think it was called Wiki Idol [correct name for the show is

Weekly Idol], that one day while browsing the internet, I saw pictures of Persepolis and became fascinated by the history and culture of Iran, and he also said he wants to visit Shiraz. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, BTS respects different religions. Even when they were performing in a Muslim country, they played the call to prayer during the concert to honor the Muslim ARMYs and gave them the opportunity to pray.

Now, let's put this in contrast to the insults directed at the BTS group. I should also add that many YouTubers insult and curse BTS, which is unethical. Perhaps their goal is to gather comments and gain attention, because if they had content for their videos, they would post their own material instead of mocking others.

For example, the singer Sasi Mankan¹ was present as an audience member at the 2017 MAMAs², and during BTS's performance, he turned the camera towards himself and mockingly said, 'Who are these guys?' After facing severe criticism from ARMYs, he not only did not apologize but also closed the comments on his posts.

Another example is Shahrokh Estakhri³, who wrote on social media that "At first, I thought BTS was a disease, and when I searched, I was sure of it."

The next point I want to mention is that even domestic singers lack the creativity to create content for themselves and produce their own songs. For instance, at a concert of the Makan Band, Amir Maghareh wore an outfit that copied one of the BTS members, which faced severe criticism."

20-year-old Baran and 22-year-old Mohsen have also mentioned in interviews that, unlike idols who treat their audiences with respect during and after performances, some domestic artists do not behave this way. They cited an example of a disrespectful encounter between a singer and an audience member at a concert, noting that such incidents do not occur in the careers of Korean artists:

- "Can you give me more examples?"

For instance, among Iranian singers, Garsha... held a concert in Zahedan on Jun 30th. An audience shouted out and asked Garsha... not to perform playback. In response to this request, Garsha... asked the person if they knew what playback was, and when he received a positive answer, he began to

¹ Iranian Rap artist

² Mnet Asian Music Awards

³ And Iranian actor

disrespectfully respond, saying, 'My good boy, my little one, what grade are you in?' But the story doesn't end there; a few minutes later, Garsha... started insulting the audience member and mockingly repeated the same request in the final moments of the concert, saying, 'Some people want to say we can do this too; I can bring this person on stage right now and ask him two questions, then he will need diapers!'

We receive this criticize that why we don't support domestic artists, while our artists do not pay attention to their own culture, at the same time BTS (and other K-pop artists) showcase Iranian clothing.

- What strengths does this group have that you can point out?

I don't pay much attention to fans' opinions about the group's policies, but I can say that at least the members of the group show a lot of respect to fans during performances, after performances, outside of performances, and even online, which I have seen from very few groups in Iran! Even Garsha... do you remember he insulted his audience member at his concert not long ago."

If we set aside the professional weaknesses of Iranian artists, the weakness of performances is another issue that some interviewees have mentioned regarding Iranian artists. They recalled the exciting scenes that BTS creates during their concerts and questioned the performances of Iranian singers, which are often very simple and lack elements like lighting effects, exciting backgrounds, and similar features. 21-year-old Leili stated in this regard:

"BTS performances are truly magnificent, and sometimes your hair stands on end while watching them because they have such powerful performances that you can't even sit still while following them."

3-3- Starting fandom at a young age

The field data indicates that many fans have become familiar with K-dramas and K-pop from a very young age. After getting to know K-dramas, they have been drawn to K-pop, or vice versa, leading them to engage with the South Korean film and television industry. For example, 15-year-old Razieh mentioned in her interview that she initially became acquainted with the South Korean film and television industry and then moved on to the South Korean music industry.

- "Sweetheart, can you tell me how you got to know K-pop?

I first watched the series 'You're Beautiful' on Gem TV when I was about 11 years old, and then I became interested in K-dramas. I started watching them, and from there, I got to know K-pop and became an ARMY.

Looking closely at the ages of the interviewees, it seems that over time, with the formation of BTS in 2013 and its gradual rise to fame, the age at which the interviewees became familiar with BTS has decreased. For instance, 20-year-old Sheida reports that she started being a fan of EXO in the third grade, before BTS was formed, and later became a fan of BTS after the group was established."

18-year-old Fereshteh started her fandom at the age of 13, 15-year-old Sahar began her fandom around the age of 11, and 13-year-old Sarina announced that she started being a fan at the age of 10. In other words, it seems that as BTS gained more fame, the age at which audiences became familiar with them has continued to decrease:

- "Sheida, when did you get to know BTS?

Since the third grade. At that time, I don't think BTS existed. I first got to know EXO, which was a group like BTS that was more famous than all the other groups at that time. There were twelve boys, and they were making a lot of progress, but gradually, some of the members left, and their number decreased. But they are still around, with about four or five members now. After a while BTS came and took their place. I mean they were in competition until BTS surpassed them, and I shifted my fandom to BTS."

- Well, shall we start, dear Fereshteh?

Let's gooo!

- At what age did you get to know BTS?

Since I was thirteen

- Sahar, how long have you been into K-pop?

For about 5 or 6 years, since I was around 10 years old.

- How did you get to know BTS?

In the fourth grade, I found out that there was something called BTS, but I only heard their name until the fifth grade and didn't know them, until one of my friends in class was a BTS fan. On the first days of the school year, she asked me are you an ARMY. Since I was familiar with K-pop, I understood

that she was definitely referring to a fan of a K-pop group, but I didn't know which group's fandom ARMY belonged to. Then this friend introduced me to BTS a bit more, and I became their fan. After a while, I stopped being their fan, but then I became a fan again."

- "At what age did you get to know K-pop and K-dramas?"

Around 6 or 7 years old.

- Was your sister a fan of BTS at that time?

No, she was an EXO-L, and I only knew EXO and BLACKPINK.

- What happened that made you get to know BTS, become interested in them, and become their fan?

I wasn't a fan of BTS at first, but I was a die-hard fan of BLACKPINK since I was about 10 years old.

At that time, I didn't know BTS, but sometimes my sister would talk about them, and I only knew that there was a 7-member boy group called BTS. After a while, I downloaded the Likey app, and since I downloaded it, the app was full of K-pop and BTS content. I got to know BTS more through that, and after 1-2 months, I became interested in them and started stanning BTS alongside BLACKPINK."

Some of the information gathered through interviews or observations in the community indicates that the age of familiarity with BTS has even reached preschool age. For instance, 6-year-old Roza mentions her and her kindergarten friends' strong admiration for Jimin and other idols. Additionally, 15-year-old Reihaneh reports her observations of her younger brother, stating that her 6-year-old brother asked the barber to style his hair like Jimin's.

- "Roza, do you know BTS?"

Yeah.

- Which member of BTS do you know the most?

Jimin. I really like Jimin.

- Do your friends know BTS too?

Some of them do, yeah. We talk about them."

- "Reihaneh, do your friends know BTS?"

My friends! All the girls at school are in love with them; everyone knows them, they are really famous. My friends and I even argue about them at school. Even my little brother, who is six years old, knows them a bit because I watch BTS so much. He even memorized some parts of their songs. One time, when he went to the barber with my dad, he told the barber to style his hair like Jimin's (laughs), and then he came home imitating him."

Regarding the fans of BTS, it seems that most of the fans of this group are girls. 12-year-old Elnaz explains this issue in her interview:

- "In your opinion, are there more female ARMYs or male ARMYs?

There are more female ARMYs because the BTS members are of the opposite gender, but there are also male ARMYs who are quite present at concerts. For example, Taehyung would come to the concerts and check whether there were more girls or boys, like he would say, 'Girls, make some noise now; it's your turn, let's see how many boys are here.

- What do you mean by the opposite gender?

Well, boys don't feel the same way about boys, so there are just a few like that.

- So, does that mean boys aren't fans of BTS because they don't feel the same way?

No, there are male fans, but their numbers aren't as high as the girls'. There are more girls.

- What do you mean by feeling?

Um, the feeling that you can establish an emotional connection with them.

- So, you and other female ARMYs want to have an emotional relationship with the members?

In our minds and imaginations, yes.

- By emotional relationship, do you mean affection and love for the members?

Yes, that's what I mean.

- So, do you think boys can't be ARMYs as good as girls?

No, because they might feel that connection less.

Recent fans sometimes have one bias and sometimes two (bias wrecker), and sometimes they love all the idols (OT7). 18-year-old Sofia explains this in relation to BTS:

- So, do you have a bias in BTS?

Ummm, Yes, I do. My bias is TaeKook¹.

- Do you ship or do you mean that these two are your biases?

(Laughs) Both! I ship them, and I like these two more. But overall, I like all seven of them. I'm OT7. I don't differentiate between them.

- OT7 means... all seven of them?

Yes. It means we don't differentiate between them. We stan all seven of them."

3-4- Idols Addressing Youth Issues

At fan meetings, many young people would come and say, 'We wanted to commit suicide, but because of BTS, we came back, or because of the things they say, we are alive now (Taraneh, 18 years old.)

It has been previously mentioned that adolescents are undergoing extensive brain, emotional, cognitive, social, moral, cultural, ideological, and even political transformations. However, sometimes the transformations of adolescence (especially brain-based transformations) are not recognized by many parents. For example, an adolescent who exhibits intense and almost uncontrolled emotional behaviors due to the earlier maturation of the emotional parts of the brain and the later maturation of cognitive and control centers may face criticism from parents who are not familiar with their child's developmental characteristics.

Similarly, the transition of an adolescent from the stage of moral other-directness (where the child is merely waiting to comply with their favorite individuals) to moral self-directness (where the adolescent, by setting aside compliance with close others, seeks to act according to their own desires) may be difficult for many parents. Additionally, as the adolescent reaches the onset of puberty, they may naturally enter a phase of self-denial and self-rejection, seeking to assert themselves by denying their surroundings, which can be hard for some parents to accept

¹ The combination of the names Taehyung and Jungkook, two members of the BTS group

The series of transformations that occur during adolescence and young adulthood brings confusion not only to parents but also to the adolescents themselves. On one hand, parents find themselves facing a rebellious and independent child instead of the well-behaved and modest child they once knew. On the other hand, adolescents, due to the rapid succession of changes, struggle to process and understand all the transformations they are experiencing.

Big Hit Entertainment, by creating BTS, took an innovative step¹ to address the issues faced by adolescents and young adults in society, thereby gaining an edge over competitors.

19-year-old Mahlagha acknowledges in her interview that BTS didn't judge her like her family and peers did, which is why the group has become a refuge and sanctuary for her. 25-year-old Kowsar also points out that the focus of BTS's songs on the problems faced by adolescents and young adults has created a special place for them in the hearts of their fans. She notes the comforting slogans from the BTS boys (such as "Even if the world is against you, we are here") has granted a special place for them in the eyes and hearts of their fans:

- "What do you mean when you say the group was a source of joy for you?

Regarding joy, it felt them as a few friends. I didn't have many friends during that time; I mean there were some, just about three or four, but I still wasn't completely comfortable with them because I always feared being judged. I had to be the way they wanted me to be. Also I faced various problems in my family. They [BTS] were the only friends who didn't judge me, and even though they didn't know me, they gave me so much love, and I loved them back. Being involved in their lives made me less preoccupied with my own life and less overthink about my own issues. And that, look, they had various

¹ The innovations and initiatives of Big Hit Entertainment are not limited to BTS's engagement with youth issues and providing them with hope; there are other aspects that should be added to the list of the company's innovations.

The company's strategy to keep idols single is another of its innovations. This means that, considering that during adolescence (especially in girls, who are more emotional), the sparks of love emerge with the onset of puberty, falling in love and romantic feelings become a priority for many of them. Idols, who have been deliberately selected for their attractive appearances and have maintained their fit bodies through rigorous diets and exercise programs, and who are styled and dressed attractively under the guidance of fashion and beauty experts, are seen as the best options for shaping the (imaginary) love of their female fans towards the idols.

The identity formation of identityless individuals is another issue akin to the concept of imaginary love. This means that individuals without identity can join various groups and, under the umbrella of that group, attain the identity they need, allowing them to vent their aggressions towards fans of other groups under the title of the group's supporters.

The social activities of BTS (such as becoming UNICEF ambassadors, meeting with the President of the United States), charitable actions, and similar initiatives are some of the other innovations of Big Hit Entertainment, which will be discussed in other sections

programs and concerts that made me feel like I was in a colorful and good world. And then, you know, thinking about them brought me a felt good, and it gave me a reason to smile. Their shows, themselves, everything was a reason to keep certain feelings alive within me so that I could fight and find joy in my own life. I didn't have anything beautiful in my life to be happy about, but over the past few years, I gradually found good things, made good friends, pursued my favorite field, and don't know, discovered my favorite instrument, and step by step, I created various reasons to find joy, but at that time, K-pop was the only thing that kept me happy; it was the only thing that brought me joy."

"Even One Direction, which was a Hollywood group and had the support of all of Hollywood behind them, didn't become as famous as BTS did.

- Uh-huh.

That is, for example, our families hadn't heard of One Direction. Now, I'll explain the reasons for the differences.

The popularity of the group is separate. BTS's fame itself shows the difference because K-pop has existed for many years. I said I was a K-pop fan since I was fourteen and listened to the songs, but BTS became so famous that the whole world heard their name. They became the first K-pop group that, for example, a super-religious family in Iran had heard of, and they would come and ask me, knowing that I was into K-pop, 'What is BTS?' For instance, my relatives come and ask me, 'What is BTS?' You know? And this fame itself is a clear example of that difference. Now, why the difference? I can explain that to you because there are many differences, and I, being in the K-pop context, understood these differences. Maybe someone who is just coming in, for example, becomes a fan of BTS right now or becomes a fan of K-pop, hasn't seen the things I've seen over these years. But the first difference that BTS had, which is why I liked them from the beginning, was that the meaning and concept of their songs, I think many BTS fans would say this too; meaning of BTS songs is different from the meaning of all K-pop songs. I mean, for instance, before BTS released their songs, K-pop was mostly limited to romantic songs, like 'Oh Girl, I lost you.' Even BTS has some songs like that. But the foundation of BTS's songs is based on the problems faced by teenagers.

- Uh-huh.

Not just teenagers, both teenagers and young adults. The issues that exist in their society, the hardships they face. For example, they have an album that

is entirely about how much kids are bullied and experience hardship in school

- Interesting!

And for example, they recorded its music video at a school.

They really addressed the issues that young people face in their society, which was very relatable for us as Easterners. And maybe it can also be quite relatable for Westerners to some extent. They talk about issues like suicide, about how hard it is to have no purpose in life. For example, they have a song called "Nevermind" which is one of my favorite songs.



- Uh-huh.

Later, when you read the lyrics, you'll see that it has a very heartfelt tone. It conveys that it's okay to have these feelings; sometimes there are things in life that you can't do anything about. But it's okay, for example, if you can't... Then it offers hope. It comes and says, 'I understand you.' Most of their songs, especially those from around 2014, 2015 to 2016, 2017, during the early years of their career - not the very beginning or the very end, but in the middle - had songs that were incredibly relatable. When you listened to them, you could say they were speaking your heart. For instance, they would first present the problem, then say, 'I understand you,' and then they would offer hope. Or they have another song with a very famous part that says (괜찮아: gwaenchanhayo) which means It's OK.

- Uh-huh

Then they say, 'One, two, three. Count with me, come with me, like this.' Then they offer hope and a sense of companionship, saying, 'Yes, I am here,

even if the whole world is against you, I am with you, side by side of you.' And nowadays, many K-pop artists do this kind of thing, and there are many songs like that, but at that time, BTS was the first group to release songs like this and established a deep connection with their fans and talked about their problems. Initially, as their style was hip-hop, and a large part of their songs consisted of rap, they had very few fans in Korea at first; I mean, they became famous worldwide and after that in Korea. But anyway, that deep connection was established because of the mutual understanding they created with their fans. You know, they call their fans: ARMY.

An ARMY might say, "well yes, BTS understands me," and then a heart link establishes, not just because I like their song and it has a nice rhythm."

Critique of the educational system, criticism of the prevailing social relationships, and inappropriate treatment of young people, as well as encouraging youth to resist the older generation, which constantly judges and denies the younger generation, have been other significant aspects of BTS's work from the beginning:

"...The first songs of BTS, like 'No More Dream,' were entirely about school. For example, the music video was set on a school bus, and all the members had a rebellious mood, as if they were being forced to go to school. The generation that was attracted to this concept was struggling with these issues themselves and, in a way, resonated with the themes presented in the songs" (Diba, 15-years-old).

- "... What do you think makes fans pay attention to these issues

There are various factors. It could simply stem from a person's emotional and extreme nature. It might be due to their inability to plan. It can be due to feelings of loneliness, emotional deficiencies, or even a lack of entertainment and excitement.

Given the circumstances, an ordinary teenager here does not have various options for entertainment, catharsis, and the development of different aspects of their personality. A person seeks fun, excitement, and variety, and in these conditions, it is not surprising that a young person becomes excessively dependent on the excitement of a particular environment.

In this prevailing atmosphere - socially, politically, and in education - a teenager or young adult is constantly subjected to emotional and psychological suppression. To heal, they are definitely drawn towards a colorful, joyful, positive, and gentle space. You know, I really blame our society for this, since childhood.

- Uh-huh. Can you explain more for me?

Look, one of the educational principles that has always been in play for a child is this: let's assume the child has taken a necessary and important object and is unwilling to give it back in any way, because he love it and enjoy playing with it. A parent resorts to force and, at the cost of the child's crying and dissatisfaction, takes the object away from his hand. This approach is certainly harmful and does not provide proper education for the child.

However, a mature individual would replace the important object with a more attractive one. They would offer a toy or another item for the child so that the child willingly sets aside the important object. In this way, neither the education is harmed, nor is there any dissatisfaction or crying involved

I think our society is like a parent. It insists on taking away K-pop, BTS, and this dazzling, joyful world from the youth, trying to forcibly strip them of this happiness. Meanwhile, it offers nothing in return or as a substitute. In music, in imagery, and in content, it has nothing to say, yet it simultaneously wants to take away one of the few sources of entertainment for this generation and leave a void in its place.

Society, politics, education, and institutions like these need to provide greater, more vibrant entertainment and joy for the youth of this country.

Otherwise, behavior filled with force and dictatorship, without understanding and recognition, will only yield negative results.

No one can forcibly take away a source of happiness from individuals. This only harms this generation and makes them resentful of their own society.

We need a mature society, not a parental one.

Because there is no room for acceptance. Because our society is like an old, grumpy, angry man who insists that everything he says must be right. It is an old, patriarchal society.

In a way, it makes me sad. We are truly oppressed. You know... our moments of joy are taken away from us, and when we become depressed, we are ridiculed and blamed for it.

- What does society do, and what kind of things do you usually hear?

Unfortunately, our society is currently somewhat intolerant and closed-minded, and perhaps even racist. Most people take a strong stance against new things, whether it be technology or even K-pop. Due to the type of

culture and upbringing that has existed until now, the prevailing atmosphere in society raises individuals who are constantly skeptical of new things and feel insecure. I think this issue has its roots in our country's permanent defensive stance against other cultures and nations. This makes anything new and unfamiliar seem unsafe, threatening, and alien in society

Then, one of the results of this defensive stance is that our country unconsciously perceives its own culture and viewpoints as superior, more important, and more complete, and always views any stimulus as a harm and a threat, even if that stimulus is good, beneficial, and progressive, and lead to further advancement and expansion of culture.

Therefore, the general perspective of society towards K-pop is that it is an foreign, alien, and harmful factor, especially among the older generation, who naturally have less flexibility, and unfortunately, this group constitutes the lawmakers and holds political and social power. Instead of analyzing the situation and measuring it fully and flexibly, they simply decide to resist." (Reihaneh, 21 years old).

- "Erfan, why did the company name the group BTS?

According to the research I did on Google about the group BTS, BTS is a Korean name meaning 'Bulletproof Boys,' and since the members of the group are boys, their 'bulletproof' nature is a symbol of resistance. According to J-Hope, this name refers to the resistance against unreasonable criticisms and expectations placed on teenagers.

- Is this resistance also seen among the fans?

It is seen among most fans. When you live in an Islamic society and wear fashionable outfits and do your makeup against societal norms, you face a barrage of criticisms and objections, and you can do nothing but resist and stand firm against your family and society. If you give in even a little and reduce your insistence on your inner desires in the face of others' opinions, you will gradually drift further away from BTS.

- Has this happened to you?

Yes, a lot. Initially, my father opposed my style and makeup, saying that you with what are you doing bringing shame to me. Then, in social gatherings among relatives, from uncles to aunts, everyone would criticize me.

- Why did your father oppose you so much?

In my father's opinion, boys shouldn't wear makeup, colorful clothes, or adorn themselves with jewelry. If they do these things, they are labeled as homosexual in society, which would be a source of shame for the family.

- Erfan, how were you able to continue despite all this opposition?

I explained to my father very kindly that I like to be this way and said to him that you know I'm not gay. I like this change; it gives me a new identity, and I have been very successful in my work. This change has led me to professional success and popularity; otherwise, there are many organ players in the city. Why do all the groups choose me? Because I am different from the others. BTS taught me to respect both my parents and other people of all religions and ethnicities, and it also taught me to resist and strive against the unreasonable demands of others." (Erfan, 21 years old).

A particular focus on women and the LGBTQ community is another aspect that may attract more attention from the younger generation.

- "In your view, does being a K-pop fan raise standards? For example, some people in the media have been seen complaining about their boyfriends regarding this issue.

For me, yes. Most ARMYs I have seen are focused on their studies and work, and their standards for choosing friends and partners have increased. For instance, BTS respects women so much that they check the lyrics of their songs with a women's rights expert to ensure there is no disrespect towards women. It is these matters that raise our standards."

Diba, 15-years-old, highlights the subtlety of BTS by referring to the group's criticism of fans, as they suggest fans that they should not be so focused on watching BTS Run or do not follow the In the Soop or Bon Voyage show too much, but rather pay attention to their own lives:

"I recently listened to a song called 'Pied Piper' [2017] by BTS, which I didn't know the meaning of, and it had an interesting melody. But when I went and looked up the translation, I realized it was one of those songs that you shouldn't see the translation for (laughs). For example, in the lyrics, it says that we know you've devoted your whole life to loving us, and you're fully watching BTS's 'Run BTS' or 'BTS in The Soop'¹ and 'BTS Bon

¹'BTS In the Soop' is a program created by Big Hit Entertainment and Big Hit Three Sixty featuring the members of the group BTS. The show has two seasons, with the first season airing in 2020 on JTBC and the online platform Weverse

Voyage¹, 'but when will you get back to your own life? Or it says something like, 'I know I'm attractive, and you're always looking at me,' and I think Namjoon sings all these lines. In a way, this song gives you a wake-up call not to get too caught up in BTS and its surrounding issues, and it kind of slaps reality in your face. I really liked this lyric."

If actions like the ones mentioned provide theoretical attention to teenagers and young adults, encouraging them, other actions, such as producing a plethora of content to fill the leisure time of teenagers and young adults and provide them with entertainment, practically position BTS as a savior for the youth.

The result of the aforementioned points is the positive outlook many fans have towards BTS. Sarina, 13-years-old, mentioned in her interview that she receives positive energy from the statements of BTS idols, and Banafsheh, 20-years-old, explicitly states that the members of BTS have perhaps helped 80-90% of their fans out of their own confusions and saved them:

- "Does the positive energy you receive from BTS affect your everyday life?

Yes, a lot. Because when there's someone who tells you they love you and encourages you to love yourself, it really gives you hope and a special sense of comfort.

For example, Namjoon said to use BTS to love yourself. Overall, even when I'm not following them, BTS still has an impact on me.

- In your opinion, what is the difference between being a fan of BTS and other K-pop or Hollywood groups?

I'm not very sure about this because I don't have many ARMY friends; it's just me and one other friend. But what is correct about the two of us and what I know through virtual interactions is that I can honestly say that they have saved about ninety percent, if not maybe eighty percent, of those who are ARMY. I believe they saved us. So, I can say that our difference is that we support them in every way. Personally, I'm willing to give up a lot of things to support them because they have given me what I needed emotionally and psychologically. And yes, maybe that's our big difference, and it applies to my friend as well, and to those we've talked about online."

¹ BTS Bon Voyage is an online program by the group BTS that has been airing since 2016, consisting of 4 seasons with 8 episodes each, available on Vlive and Weverse.

3-5- Deepening the Relationship between Stars and Fans

Big Hit Entertainment has considered the deep connection between stars and fans in designing its programs. By developing various entertainment, recreational, and communication programs, it has sought to realize its intentions, which seems to have been largely successful.

Expressing gratitude to fans after BTS concerts, performing songs in praise of fan support, stars thanking fans after receiving various awards, hosting fan meetings and fan signings, showcasing the BTS boys in entertainment programs like Run BTS, Bon Voyage, and In the Soop, idols expressing their appreciation to fans on their personal social media pages, connecting with fans through Weverse, hosting individual and group live streams, sharing videos of their daily lives (such as BTS members exercising), posting them on social media like Twitter, and accepting fan naming are all part of Big Hit's programs aimed at deepening the relationship between stars and their fans.

20-year-old Baran, in her interview, stated that stars have showcased the word "ARMY" through their actions, mentioning Jimin's deep gratitude towards fans, via kowtow which resembles the prostration posture of Muslims in prayer, in front of the fans.

20-year-old Banafsheh, while expressing BTS slogans such as 'Know that we love you regardless of any color', also mentioned the idols' act of kowtow to their fans:

- "What do you think are the differences between the K-pop music industry and Hollywood or other types of music like Iranian one that attract people?"

I listen to very little Iranian music and mostly listen to Hollywood (English-language) music. What attracted me to K-pop is, first of all, the high quality of the music and the message it conveys. Secondly, the concept of the group, the family, and relationship they have with their fans is valuable to me. If you look, most celebrities do not treat their fans well worldwide and see them as nuisances, but K-pop places a high value on its fans, and that is very significant.

In the picture I sent you, Jimin is thanking the fans for 'Permission to Dance' reaching number one on the Billboard charts. Or look, BTS often uses many symbols of ARMY, even in their music videos. In every competition they win or awards they receive, they always think of their fans and thank them. When they receive awards, they say these are because of your support, ARMY, and you are much more valuable to us than the awards we receive.

They somehow convey the message that without ARMY's support, we wouldn't be in this position in the world. This is something that is seen less in Hollywood; they often are like this that say these awards are for their tireless efforts without considering their fans.

In photo I sent you below, for the song 'Butter,' the members formed the word ARMY with their standing posture.



BTS also directly used the word 'ARMY' in the music video for 'Boy With Luv.'

I was always thinking, how can someone be so grateful to a fan they haven't even met? Or in many interviews, they would kneel in a bowing or prostration position to thank their fans, and it fascinated me that they knew where they started from. They understood who they owe their current success to. I hadn't seen this in other artists or groups. Not that I'm saying others are disrespectful or hate fans; no, no one does that. It was interesting to me that they were always thinking of their fans at every moment. And there was an interview with RM, the group's leader, at the United Nations where he talked about cultural differences and self-love. He was mentioning that it doesn't matter who you are or what your past is, where you come from, or what kind of culture you have; what matters is that you love yourself and know that we love you too. This was incredibly appealing to me, too attractive."

19-year-old Marzieh, in her interview, reiterated slogans such as 'ARMYs are the brightest stars in the idol's sky' and mentioned Taehyung's use of sign language to thank deaf and dumb fans and respond to comments from fans online:

- "Now can you tell me what words from them helped you reach self-love?"

What I remember is that Namjoon addressed the ARMYs, saying, 'Just as I use you to love myself, please, please use us to love yourselves.' BTS has shown their affection for their ARMYs time and time again, I mean they have cared for their fans in various ways. All of this made me proud to be a fan of someone who values their work so much and respects their fans to the extent that after every award they receive, they thank their ARMYs. I am a fan of someone who loves me, and with the love and affection I receive from them, I can reciprocate that love and kindness to myself and those around me.

One sentence from Taehyung keeps repeating in my mind, and I constantly remember it, making my heart sparkle. He said, 'ARMY, you are the brightest stars in my sky,' and I deeply feel that I am one of those stars. Again, I say that we see them as our stars who illuminate our lives, just as they see us.

- You mentioned that they care for their ARMYs; how does that manifest?

It's like they always remember their ARMYs. At every concert, event, or program anywhere, they mention our name and express their affection. Then, on Weverse, they post friendly updates, share selfies, go live, and even respond to ARMY comments. Meanwhile, we have Taehyung using sign language to express his love for deaf ARMYs, and J-Hope, who even considers Muslim and Iranian ARMYs. They are so close and warm that they made a video for ARMYs who were taking college entrance exams, talking to them to help reduce their anxiety and encourage them. Or Suga, who says, 'Let's grow together, side by side, shoulder to shoulder. "

20-year-old Banafsheh, in her interview, recalls a song that the BTS boys sang in praise of their fans.

18-year-old Taranom also mentions the evolution of Big Hit's logos, referring to the latest logo for fans, which complements the BTS logo and serves as a protective shield:

- "Can you send me the lyrics of the song that talks about ARMY?

Sure. This is part of the lyrics from the song 'We Are Bulletproof':

... Yeah, we have you, have you

Yeah, we are not seven, with you (we are more)

Yeah, we are not seven, with you (we are more)

Yeah, we are not seven, with you (we are more)

- What does the BTS symbol represent?

The ARMY and BTS logos resemble a door that opens and closes, with a light of hope shining in the empty space in the middle. This hope allows people to continue living without thinking about death and loss. The BTS logo has changed four times over the past 11 years. Their first logo, designed in 2013, is a bulletproof vest that symbolizes their fire power and penetration in music. The name 'BTS' is written on the heart of the vest, and there are lines and lightning bolts around it, representing the vest's shine and the group's brilliance, while the lightning symbolizes the power of bullets impact.



The second logo is for 2016. This logo consists of four circles, each containing a different design, and below these circles, the word 'Wings' is written.



The third logo was introduced in 2017, consisting of four blue ovals that intersect in pairs. I'm not exactly sure what its precise meaning is, but below it, the word 'Wings' was written, along with the phrase 'You will never walk alone.'



The last BTS logo, which they have now, was also designed in 2017 and resembles a door, encouraging the ARMY to pursue their goals.



Initially, ARMYs did not have a logo, but in the first chapter, a logo was created for them, which is somewhat the opposite of the BTS logo, meaning it is a closed door that represents a protective shield."



18-year-old Pooneh and 14-year-old Hadis, in their separate interviews, mentioned fan meetings and fan signings, which are events where idols meet their fans:

- "What is a fan meeting?

In a fan meeting, the members of BTS come and meet with ARMYs, and during that meeting, they play games or sing songs, and sometimes they surprise some ARMYs. It has a cozy concert vibe. There's also something else called a fan signing. However, a fan signing is a bit different from a fan meeting. It has a more private atmosphere where fans meet with the members, get autographs, take photos, and talk, giving a lot of love to the fans, and the fans reciprocate that love. A beautiful thing is that if, for example, a Muslim ARMY attends a fan meeting, they are treated with complete respect, and they won't touch them unless the fan wants it, and they are very kind to them, just like they are with other fans.

- Please explain the fan signing to me.

Well, a fan signing is something that companies announce from time to time, saying that on a certain day at a certain location, for example, BTS will hold a fan signing. At the fan signing, fans can give gifts to their idols or get photos and autographs. Registering for a fan signing is very difficult; before registering, they have to answer a lot of questions about that group or soloist because, at the fan signing, the idol and the fan talk face to face and are very close to each other. If someone is a sasaeng, they can easily harm the idol. That's why they conduct this test to ensure that the person going to the fan signing is genuinely a fan of that idol or group."

15-year-old Diba, in her interview, mentioned other entertainment programs that the BTS boys have, such as RUN BTS, In the Soop, and Bon Voyage:

- "What are the programs you mentioned, and what is going on in them?

For example, the Bon Voyage program has several seasons, and in it, they travel to different places. RUN BTS has various concepts; for instance, they sit together and play different games, or the producer himself, comes and presents them with a challenge. They cook or invite someone to teach them new things, like pottery and yoga. In 'In the Soop', which has had two seasons so far, they go to beautiful, classy forest houses, and the activities they do during those three or four days become part of the program."

16-year-old Rokhsareh mentioned the idols' connection with fans on Weverse, and 20-year-old Banafsheh talked about BTS's individual and group live

streams, reality shows, and Festa celebrations¹, each of which plays a role in deepening the relationship between BTS and their fans:

"Then, the app. that BTS is very active in and responds to all ARMYs and posts photos and things is Weverse.

- How so?

Weverse is a platform where K-pop idols interact with fans, responding to ARMY comments and sharing their daily lives there."

- "Can you explain the programs that BTS has, like Run BTS and the special live streams they hold?

Regarding the program, Run BTS is the most famous, but there are many other things, like 'Bon Voyage,' where they travel for a few days, and 'In the Soop,' which has a similar vibe. They also participate in other programs, reality shows, and they go live. We had many programs like this. We also have something like 'Festa' which we celebrate every year, marking the anniversary of BTS's debut and introducing new concepts to us. Sometimes they even sing during group live streams, and after every nomination or competition they win, or when they receive something, they go live together; and for their birthdays sometimes they go live. We have many of these programs.

- Have you seen all the programs?

Yes."

Golnoosh, 14-year-old, mentions the connection idols have with their fans on their personal pages, noting that idols share every moment of their lives with their fans for guidance.

Masoud, a 20-year-old, emphasizes the portrayal of even the smallest movements and actions of the stars, reminding that they even post videos of their workouts on YouTube to attract more audiences:

- "How do the stars connect with the ARMYs that you say they spend time for you?

They can't connect one-on-one because there are so many of us, but the fact that in addition to making music and all the work they do, they are willing to post photos and write texts for their fans on their pages and consider them

¹ The annual FESTA commemorates BTS' debut on June 13, where ARMY fans from all around the world gather to celebrate.

part of their lives is very valuable. Which singer is as big and famous as BTS and doesn't keep themselves distant? There is no one who has that much fame and comes to share everything about their life openly and simply with everyone, giving you the feeling that they are your friend and will always help and guide you on what to do in sensitive situations.

- So you feel that the members of BTS are like your friends and guides?

Yes, that's right."

- "Besides their songs, what else does BTS post for their fans on YouTube?

BTS posts videos and clips of their daily lives, their activities, and even their workouts on YouTube for their fans, who never get tired of watching these videos over and over again and love them dearly. These videos show that the idols care about their fans."

Another aspect that has fueled the relationship between idols and fans and deepened their connection is the acceptance of fan-given names for the idols. This means that the names of the boys in BTS are often not their real names but are derived from the naming by the company or the fans. Naturally, the fact that even the idol in question considers the name given by the fan as their real name is an important and impactful issue that has not been observed in other similar domestic and foreign groups.

Rokhsareh, 16-year-old, says in her interview regarding this:

"... each of the BTS members has separate nicknames, and some even have pseudonyms that are not often used.

- Why is that?

After all, some of them changed their names in the company, and the ARMYs gave them these nicknames.

- How do they feel about their names being changed?

They really like these names that they chose, and [chose] whatever nicknames the ARMYs gave them became very viral, and even BTS themselves call each other by these nicknames.

The collection of aspects mentioned briefly is rarely seen in any K-pop, pop, or domestic music groups, and this deepening of connections provides even more popularity for the boys of BTS among their fans."

3-6- Multidimensional and multifaceted approach toward the group and its members.

By examining the opinions presented in the surveyed population, it is observed that the fans of the BTS group have expressed various motivations in explaining their interests in the group. This means that while some initially became aware of the group based on the physical attractiveness of its members, others were drawn to their appeal in terms of makeup and fashion. Some fans cited the members' kindness, good humor and the deep friendship among them as reasons for their attraction to BTS, while others were captivated by the social and political activities of the group members (such as their membership in UNICEF, speeches at the United Nations, and meetings with the President of the United States), their charitable activities, and similar endeavors, leading them to join the ranks of BTS fans.

Recent information indicates the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of BTS, which allows it to encompass a wide range of audiences.

19-year-old Nastaran stated that the physical attractiveness of the stars was the reason for her and many other fans' attraction to BTS:

- "What was your biggest motivation for being drawn to BTS?

Honestly, their beautiful faces initially caught my attention, and later their performances and the content of their songs also seemed beautiful to me."

The appeal of the idols' clothing and makeup is another reason mentioned by some BTS fans:

- "Dear Mahshid, what was the main reason for your attraction to BTS?

They were showing interesting styles, and their hair colors were amazing.

- What do you mean by their hair colors being amazing?

I mean that their hair color changed at every concert, and each time it looked more beautiful than the last."

24-year-old Zahra was attracted by the members' humor and good manner, which made her a fan of the group. 21-year-old Reihaneh also mentioned in her interview that the friendship among the idols and the deep content of BTS's songs motivated her to support them:

- "So, at first, their humor made you attracted to them.

Yes, they are both fun and cheerful."

- "Sometimes people say that you only became fans just because of their looks. What do you think about this judges?"

I think that, just as these critics settle for a superficial view of the matter instead of a deep analysis, they show defensive reactions and assume that people like us, who are part of a fandom, also have a superficial and appearance-based perspective and that our interest in them is solely due to their faces, looks, and the artists' appearances.

This is while a beautiful appearance that aligns with current trends can only remain appealing and trendy for a limited time. I previously mentioned the vast diversity and rapid growth in visual appeal within K-pop.

Therefore, being a fan of an artist, especially in a context where beauty standards change rapidly and, as the saying goes, new faces emerge every day that are more beautiful than the last, is not solely based on looks and beauty. Of course, I cannot deny that this physical beauty is very captivating at first, but what sustains this interest and fandom over time? After getting used to these faces, or with changing trends, or even as the artist ages and their appearance changes, what "keeps" a fan as a fan is the content, not the face or appearance.

For me personally, when I was drawn to BTS and entered the ARMY fandom, beauty standards were absolutely not a consideration for me. My least attention at that time was on glamour and beautiful faces.

What seriously attracted me was the power and depth of their content, the profound and non-superficial beauty of the members and their music, and the strength of the friendship among them."

21-year-old Sayeh stated that she became interested in the idols while exploring the UNICEF website, considering their activities as UNICEF ambassadors, and subsequently became a fan of their music. 25-year-old Kowsar also emphasized BTS's social activities, such as their work with UNICEF and their presence at the United Nations, where they spoke about violence against children, which led her to notice and eventually become attracted to the group:

- "Is your interest in BTS due to their music, performances, beauty, or all of these?"

I was like this that searching a lot on YouTube, and then I was browsing the UNICEF channel, where I saw a speech that was very interesting to me. Even though I didn't know them, you know how they say, What comes from the heart will inevitably touch the heart? That's how it was for me. Those

days, I was going through a tough time, and those words were very comforting to me. I saved the audio file of that speech and kept listening to it. Since I also listened to the soundtracks of their Korean dramas and movies, YouTube's algorithm started suggesting BTS videos to me. I had two friends who were haters of this group and had no interest in them, so I heard the name of this group a lot from them. That's why, while browsing YouTube, I would unconsciously come across their videos, and they were interesting to me because I had never seen anything like it before, even though I really love music and have seen many concerts and performances."

- "Do K-pop groups engage in political or socio-political activities?

Well, I don't know about other groups, but BTS, has been a member of UNICEF (the largest international organization addressing children's issues). They have been very active for them. I think they have also given several speeches at the United Nations, most of which were about children's rights and the rights of the oppressed and like that. For example such as children should be protected, preventing violence against children, and things like that. Their activities have mostly been in this area, as far as I know. I don't know much more than that."

17-year-old Sonia initially became interested in BTS due to the members' presence at the United Nations and their speeches about the necessity of eliminating human discrimination and establishing peace around the world. 21-year-old Erfan praised BTS's meeting with the President of the United States and their speech about the need to support Asian-Americans, which made him a fan of the group

- "Do you think BTS is active in politics?

No, I don't think they are politically active.

- Considering the events we've seen, like their speech at the United Nations or their meeting with Biden at the White House, do you think they are not politically active?

Yeah, I've seen those too. But I wouldn't call it political activity. It's more of a social activity because when opportunities like the ones you mentioned arise for them, they talk about peace and non-discrimination. In my opinion, they are active in social matters, but not in politics, because politics doesn't really have a place in K-pop. I mean, K-pop artists usually don't engage with politics. I have the text of BTS's speech at the United Nations; I'll send it to you so you can see how much they care about social issues..."

- "What connection exists between the BTS group and the governments in Korea and the U.S.?"

The BTS group is established under a company affiliated with the Korean government and has continued to grow, and the group conducts all meetings under the supervision of the company. The meeting of BTS with President Biden was to participate in Heritage Month celebrations and to discuss the concerning rise in crimes and hate and discrimination against Asians in the United States. You may have heard that American hate towards Asians living in America has increased to the point that on March 16, an armed American man killed eight people, including six Asian women.

- What cultural and social impact has BTS's presence in the White House and meeting with Biden had on the world?

It has had a significant cultural impact. A group of handsome and attractive Korean boys has made headlines in American and global magazines and newspapers with their meeting with the then-President Joe Biden, which is the biggest promotion for the BTS group. With this, BTS has been introduced as young ambassadors of peace worldwide, and their popularity and fame have increased.

- What benefit does this meeting have for Biden's presidency?

In all the past years and during Joe Biden's presidency, the American people have repeatedly shown their anger and hatred towards Asian Americans. They have expressed their disgust through racial discrimination, killing Asian Americans, and humiliating them. This move by Joe Biden conveys a message of peace and equality for all residents of America. This action has had very positive political repercussions.

- What political repercussions has it had for Joe Biden?

With this action, President Joe Biden has been able to attract many of his opponents and present himself as a peace-loving figure and a fighter against racial discrimination and for the equality of all humans, regardless of color and race. This is very impactful for Biden if he wants to run for president again after his term ends."

Based on what has been mentioned, the reasons for attracting fans to BTS among ordinary people start from aspects like the physical attractiveness and style of the idols, leading to their impressive concert performances. For more educated individuals, factors such as the group's humanitarian activities, acceptance as UNICEF ambassadors, and social and political activities aimed at

peace and addressing existing discrimination among humanity are among the reasons that have fostered fans' interest in the BTS group.

3-7- Encouraging immigration to South Korea

By examining the mutual relationships between Big Hit Entertainment and the South Korean government, it can be inferred that Big Hit operates in alignment with the country's macro policies and plays a role in this regard. On the other hand, the South Korean government also strives to enhance the company further by honoring its actions.

With the brilliance that the BTS group has achieved in recent years, recognizing it in the macro equations of South Korea is not far-fetched. According to Wikipedia, BTS generates nearly \$5 billion in revenue annually, and one in every 13 tourists visiting South Korea travels there to see the BTS group.

The idols of BTS, relying on their significant fame, have entered the realms of advertising on one hand and cultural, social, and political activities on the other.

Advertising for Korean brands, such as Hyundai and Samsung, is part of the idols' promotional efforts.

Since South Korea operates in alignment with other capitalist countries in the world, it naturally adheres to a culture based on liberal policies. BTS also promotes recent cultural policies, and the desexualization of makeup, clothing, and love is among the key aspects accepted by liberal culture.

Moreover, the President of South Korea has granted diplomatic passports to the BTS boys, effectively assigning a specific social-political role to the group, which is realized through their peace-promoting actions and the condemning of existing discriminations in human society, indirectly contributing to the elevation of the country.

In return, Big Hit Entertainment, alongside its cultural and economic role in South Korea, engages in promoting the immigration of elites to Korea, which is not and was not fundamentally a part of the duties of a musical group.

In an interview, 15-year-old Shadi notes that BTS, through their side activities, creates an attractive and beautiful image of South Korea to encourage individuals inclined to immigrate to the country:

- "Do they share their personal lives with their audience?

Yes, they have a lifestyle blogger vibe and film and post their lives, like cooking or their daily activities or shopping, but what they show is a bit fake.

- What do you mean?

I mean, for example, no one goes shopping at 6 AM and then comes back to home to make breakfast with them; it's a bit idealized, what they are showing. Or for example, after that, they go take a shower and then have breakfast. In real life, we are just rushing in the morning to get to work (laughs), or for example, there are no lines wherever they go; is that possible? It's like that there are no crowds there; well, the population there isn't that small either, so this portrayal is really quite idealized.

- So, are they promoting their country?

Yeah, I think it's a bit like that, where everywhere is empty, there are no lines, things get done quickly, and everything is chic and beautiful, and their lives are luxurious. Maybe the company wants to present them in this idealized way because they do whatever the company tells them to do."

Elnaz, 12-year-old, notes that she has been influenced by the BTS group and is inclined to immigrate to Korea. To achieve this, she has started learning the Korean language. Additionally, Elnaz emphasizes that all her classmates are also looking to immigrate to Korea, illustrating the depth of this issue:

- "Well, besides streaming, what activities have you done related to being an ARMY?

I am learning Korean because of them, and I created a fan page for them.

- When did you start learning Korean?

Since September 30, 2022, which is about a month and a half.

- Have you made any progress in this month and a half?

Yes, we have learned all the Korean alphabet, and now we are learning sentence construction.

- Is there anyone in your class like you who is a BTS fan and wants to learn the language because of them?

Yes, all the kids in my class are BTS fans, and they all want to learn the language because of them.

- How many people are in your class?

Four, including me.

- So all four of you are ARMYs and are going to Korean language classes because of them?

Yes, but they are also studying Korean for immigration purposes.

- So your classmates want to go to Korea?

Yes.

- What about you? Don't you want to go?

Of course, I want to go too."

Shabnam, 25-year-old, also mentions her intention to immigrate to Korea, stating that she has been pursuing this goal since she was 19 years old. During this time, she has taken the necessary steps in this direction, and alongside learning the Korean language, she is working on acquiring a valuable profession to realize her goal:

"Look, when I started learning Korean, honestly, I had no goals in life. Nothing! I didn't even knew what I wanted to do. When I first started learning Korean, I was 19. Then there was a break, and I resumed seriously from the age of 21, my goal was going to Korea. I had even saved money, but unfortunately, due to rising prices, I couldn't [continue it]. My language teacher at the academy told me that you can't find a job in Korea just by knowing the Korean language; you need to have another profession or skill to work there. I told her about my field (carpet design), and she encouraged me a lot. As a result, I started weaving carpets again and set a deadline for myself that I had to be in Korea within two years. But then some problems arose in my life, and I haven't been able to reach my goal until now."

Mohsen, 22-years-old, contemplates about the issue of immigration to Korea from a different perspective, focusing on the freedom of expression that K-pop girl and boy groups enjoy in Korea:

- "Have you ever thought about leaving Iran?

A thousand times. When I know that anywhere you go is better than Iran, am I crazy to stay?

- How do you know it's better

We have seen the good life from afar. All these films and clips show how well they are living! Just look at BTS and the freedom they have, or groups like BLACKPINK, who are K-pop girls. Where in Iran can a girl sing and dance freely? If you were in their place, wouldn't you go?"

Aside from those interested in immigrating to Korea, there are others who, due to the attractions that the BTS group has for them, at a lower level have considered the scenario of continuing their education in Korea, just to see the group. Razieh, 15, mentioned the recent meaning in her interview:

- "I think BTS has a significant impact on students immigrating to Korea. Yeah. Half of them have gone just to see BTS."

Ghazal, 16-years-old, and Mahshid, 21-years-old, also mentioned their goal of continuing their studies at universities in South Korea as follows:

- "Ghazal, do you know Korean?

I do. Not very well.

- To what extent?

Because of the series I watched and the songs, my ear got used to it. But since I wanted to learn seriously, I go to class. Now, more than being able to speak, I understand what they are saying.

- Do you want to learn Korean just because you like it, or do you have another goal like immigration?

I want to go to Korea.

- Are you going for university and studies, or for something else?

I want to go for university.

- So, do you want to go just as a tourist, or do you want to immigrate?

As a fan, I would like to go as a tourist and attend their concert, but as someone who has a high familiarity with Korea. I plan to get a scholarship for my doctoral studies, now let's see what God wants and what is best (laughs)."

Based on what has been mentioned, it can be concluded that BTS should not be viewed merely as a limited musical group. It seems that this group, due to the fame and social impact it has gained, is gradually taking on some secondary and hidden roles to promote the cultural, social, and political policies of its society (including encouraging elites to immigrate to South Korea).

3-8- In-person and virtual friendships

Individuals who gather around the fandom of the BTS group choose each other as friends due to their shared viewpoints. These friends may be in-person or virtual.

In cases such as classmates and schoolmates, friendships are naturally in-person. However, when individuals participate in fan organizations or create fan pages and are followed by others, their friends in this context will be virtual. Of course, if someone is proficient in English or Korean languages, they will have the opportunity to find international virtual friends too.

Negin, 13-year-old who, due to her young age, has not yet had much opportunity to explore the virtual space and fandoms, mentions in her interview that she has met some ARMY members through her in-person friends and has formed friendships with them:

- "How do you connect with other ARMYs?

We don't connect with stranger ARMYs; we connect with our friends, or our friend's friend is an ARMY and has many similarities with us, they introduce that ARMY to us, and then we become friends."

Maryam, 18-years-old, Reihaneh, 21-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old, who adequately are familiar with the virtual space, have also made virtual friends through fan organizations alongside their in-person friends:

- "Can you give an example of what positive and negative aspects supporting BTS has brought you?

My best friendships have been formed because of our shared interest in BTS, and this has allowed me to have deep friendships even with people younger or older than me. I think the information I have about K-pop has always helped me to be more comfortable in social settings. If I weren't an ARMY and a K-poper, it would have been much harder for me to have so many friends, even in the virtual space. I believe K-pop idols are very inspiring; they are people who had plans for their lives from a young age, believed in their abilities, pursued their goals, and were not afraid of the difficulties along the way. They endured hard training with long hours and being away from all their loved ones, and they dealt with the unreasonable strictness of their companies and worked hard. I have always looked up to their perseverance and determination. I think ARMYs should focus on their determination and seriousness in what they do instead of getting distracted by the side issues and personal lives of BTS members."

"... Furthermore, when I consider myself a fan of a group, I inevitably meet people like myself on Telegram, Instagram, or Twitter, with whom I share understanding and common interests regarding our fandom and favorite artist.

This leads me to find new friends, expand my circle of connections, and encounter new people, perspectives, abilities, talents, and different moralities. This has greatly improved my social relationships and communication skills, and in addition to that, it has allowed me to fill my free time with more positive activities."

- "Have you made any friends while supporting BTS?

When I first became familiar with BTS, I didn't have any ARMY friends at all. At that time, when I was a fan of BTS, there were probably not even a hundred ARMYs in Iran. For example, BTS started in 2013, and I became a fan in 2014. So, I didn't have a group to be friends with other ARMYs. Well, a few years later, when the internet got a bit faster and Instagram came along, well, I found a few ARMY friends, and we did things together."

Taraneh, 18-years-old, also states in her interview that she has made many virtual friends while learning the Korean language and has formed friendships with them:

- "Sweetheart, introduce yourself and tell us how old you are.

I am Taraneh, I am 18 years old, I am a final-year student in the field of... and I live in the city of... and I am a translator.

- So you're working as well.

Yes.

- What is your job?

I am a translator of English and Korean, and I work at the company... I also occasionally translate some materials for the embassy randomly.

- What do you translate for the embassy?

They give me some articles that are mostly about culture and such, and I send them to them, and they pay me right away.

- Are you an English translator?

Both English and Korean.

- Are you proficient in English?

Yes.

- That's good. So why did you choose to learn Korean?

I was interested, and also because of my Korean friends and the friends I got to know who were involved in the Korean language, I started learning Korean.

- How did you meet your Korean friends?

I met them through competitions I participated in at the embassy; they would group us together. I also got to know some others on Instagram or KakaoTalk. Some of them reach out to me directly because they find it interesting that a foreigner speaks Korean."

Fereshteh, 19-years-old, mentions in her interview that during the COVID-19 pandemic, her friendships were centered around fans of the BTS group, with whom she shared common interests.

- "So what made you become a fan of them?

It was early in the COVID-19 pandemic when I installed TikTok and created an account. Using it I listened to their songs a lot and watched TikToks. It was around the time they released 'Permission to Dance.' That song gives hope for the post-COVID period and a return to normal life.

It was a really strange atmosphere at that time. I felt isolated from everything and everyone; I was also preparing for university entrance exams. My mood was really down. I needed a distraction, and what could be better than a fandom that has so many side activities? It was a good space to see different things, make friends, and so on."

Some fans of BTS are so enamored with the group that they take a stance against non-fans, believing that those who do not support BTS or criticize the group are unworthy of friendship, and they choose their friends solely from BTS fans and ARMYs:

- "So BTS stationery has been made too?

Yeah, they make everything you could want for ARMYs. Until now, my mom would buy whatever school supplies she saw, but from now on, I want to choose and buy BTS supplies online. If she doesn't buy them, I'll save my money and buy everything in one go for next year.

- Do you want everyone to know that you are an ARMY?

Not just 'BTS fan,' it's better to say 'ARMY.' I take pride in being an ARMY. This way, those who are ARMYs understand that you are one of them and will support you. This way, you find more good friends, and you always have a few like-minded people to talk to. This way in the first glance, we can tell who likes what, and those who don't like BTS don't come to us. Also, for example, my cousin knows my taste and respects it. If everyone were like that, it would be great.

- So you don't want to be friends with someone who isn't an ARMY or is against BTS?

Not at all.

- Well, don't you think you might lose a lot of friends this way?

I don't care. I prefer to have a few friends like me rather than a lot of friends who are different from me and always oppose me.

- How many ARMY friends have you found in the virtual space so far?

Oh, a lot. ARMYs are so kind, emotional, and spirited that when you talk to anyone, even if you don't know them, they respond very well, and if you ask for help, they will help you. I said we look out for each other. It's very easy for ARMYs to become your friends. Of course, the real ARMYs."

(Golnoosh, 14-years-old).

Marzieh, 19-years-old, mentions in her interview that when her relationship with her friend gradually faded, she turned to the themes presented in BTS's songs and sent a song from BTS that emphasizes the need to deepen friendships, transforming their lackluster friendship into a warmer and more intimate one:

"... There was a time when my relationship with my best friend was not at its best like the old days, and it was a rough patch in our friendship; we talked less than before and were slowly drifting apart. One day, I was scrolling through Instagram when I saw a video with Jungkook's voice, which I later realized, not at that moment. In this video, a piece of a song was being sung by someone who happened to be Jungkook, and a translation was written underneath. I was drawn to the text; it said that we no longer talk to each other like we used to, at least not like before (starts singing the song in English):

we don't talk anymore

we don't talk anymore

we don't talk anymore

we don't talk anymore like we used to do.

And the feelings expressed in those lines were very similar to what I was feeling at that time, and the words I couldn't say to my friend were in that song. So, I went to Google to find the full song and sent it to her, and I did that. Now, this part isn't very important, but with that song, my friend understood me, and our friendship returned to its previous state."

3-9- Altruism

Altruism refers to behaviors that are performed with the aim of helping others. Various theories have been proposed to explain how an individual engages in actions for another.

While some theories aim to explain altruism, others fundamentally question the concept itself.

Religious perspectives also view altruism as an innate quality that provides a potential capacity within humans, this capacity activated by environmental factors.

Some empirical evidence suggests that helping others can reduce individuals suffering. Simner, in a study, played recordings for newborns who were 66-72 hours old. In these recordings, the sound of a child's cry and several other indistinct sounds at the same volume were recorded. The newborns cried upon hearing the sound of the child's cry, but their reaction to the indistinct sounds at the same intensity was much less.

Sagi and Hoffman, in a similar study, showed that even younger newborns, who were less than 34 hours old, cried upon hearing the cries of other infants.

Recent findings indicate that humans are instinctively predisposed to feel distressed when witnessing the discomfort and suffering of others.

The discovery of mirror neurons, which first observed in monkeys and later in humans, has simplified the understanding of altruistic behaviors in humans and animals. This means that mirror neurons represent the emotions of the other party in humans, and in difficult and challenging situations, they reflect the emotions of those present and observing the scene. To alleviate the sadness caused by the problems they witness, individuals must take steps beyond their own existence frame to help alleviate the deprivation and suffering they have observed. By resolving the issue, the discomfort felt by those present will also come to an end; otherwise, the feeling of unease will remain and cause them distress.

Big Hit Entertainment, in one of its initiatives, has enhanced the appeal of altruistic actions by directing the members of BTS towards engaging in certain altruistic activities¹. Mahdiah, 20-years-old, in an interview, mentioned the altruistic ideas that BTS has expressed in their speech at the United Nations or during their concerts:

- "Can you give an example of efforts to correct these thoughts from K-drama and K-pop?"

Yes, of course. BTS gave a speech about this in 2018 at the United Nations, and since then, other idols, especially BTS, have talked about this topic repeatedly. In that 2018 speech, the group's leader stated that your skin color, nationality, age, and gender do not matter. The only thing that matters is to think of yourself, love yourself, and live in peace and harmony.

Even at their concerts, if you go, you can see that people from all over the world, from different races, come together, become friends, establish good relationships, and help each other.

In their songs, they also talk about this issue of racial discrimination. In the music video for one of their new songs, they brought together children of different races—Native American, Caucasian, Asian, and Black—to show that there is no discrimination between different races. Because this issue bothers them a lot. Many of their idols have olive or yellow skin and face a lot of difficulties because of this. That's why this topic is often discussed in K-dramas and K-pop, and we learned these things from there."

Ehsan, 17-years-old, also mentioned some of BTS's humanitarian efforts in his interview as follows:

- "Can you name some of BTS's slogans that have a greater impact on fans?"

Sure, slogans about mental health, issues during education and youth, losing someone, traveling, loving oneself, individual independence, and self-empowerment.

- What other activities do the members of BTS engage in?

Charitable activities such as helping refugees and the needy, special diseases fighting against racial discrimination, defending children's rights, strategies

¹ Although Big Hit Entertainment has tried to give a philanthropic image to the BTS group, the reality is that instances such as holding billion-dollar birthday celebrations for the stars (which also serves as advertising for the company) and promoting extremely expensive brands, which are sometimes unattainable even for some affluent segments of society (and of course, these recent advertisements generate revenue for Big Hit), leave many fans feeling disappointed and saddened, which contradicts the philanthropic posturing.

to prevent global warming, and vaccination efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic."

Raha, 18-years-old, and Zahra, 24-years-old, mentioned BTSs one million dollar donation to the George Floyd campaign as follows:

- "Well, Raha, I saw some things about fandoms coming together and trending certain hashtags; they have a kind of union and engage in activities that ultimately lead to positive outcomes. Do you know exactly what kind of activities they do?

Yeah. For example, when George Floyd, a Black man, was killed in America, BTS donated one million dollars to the campaign related to George Floyd. Then ARMYs came and trended a hashtag saying lets also donate a million like our idol, and really, ARMYs all over the world came together and raised a million to donate on behalf of themselves as BTS fans too.

BTS does a lot of financial assistance, which can be in various fields. For instance, during the pandemic, many individuals and famous groups helped different countries to provide hygiene supplies, produce vaccines, or even food and clothing for those who are financially unable. For example, Pep Guardiola donated one million dollars to Spain. There were also discussions about BTS providing financial assistance to combat the pandemic, but there were contradictions. But when that incident happened in America where the police killed that Black man, I forgot his name, I will remember it, it is on the tip of my tongue.

- George Floyd.

Yeah, when that incident happened to George Floyd, the whole world shook. People in different countries protested, and celebrities also addressed this bad event, including the members of BTS, who did not remain silent. They even provided financial assistance, although I think the financial help they provided was before this incident."

BTS fans have also been inspired by their favorite idols to engage in similar humanitarian efforts. Mahshid, 21-years-old, and Ehsan, 17-years-old, mentioned the copying of BTSs charitable activities by fan clubs or fandoms as follows:

- "Does the group also hold campaigns for charitable work?

Yes, a lot. This is quite common among Koreans; generally, wealthy celebrities donate part of their money every now and then, especially on their

birthdays, for a disease, the welfare of a specific group, or to build a place like a school. They do this at least once or twice a year, and they try to keep it secret, but people spread the news.

- What role do fandoms play in promoting charitable actions?

Basically sometimes fandoms decide to collect money on the birthdays of their members or in the name of being, for example, ARMY or a BTS fan, to help people quiet like the group they love, and sometimes large amounts are raised, leading to significant assistance, which causes the news to spread."

"BTS fans helped rebuild a hospital in China in honor of J-Hopes birthday. Fans of several charities also assisted in this hospital reconstruction project, and for J-Hopes birthday, financial aid was provided to hospitals for low-income families, and a hospital in Anhui Province¹ in China was named after J-Hope. This hospital was a project initiated by BTS fans based in China for J-Hopes birthday in 2021. It will help residents of villages and low-income families who do not have easy access to medical facilities."

19-years-old Marzieh discussed the activities of Iranian fandoms in her interview:

- "Well, fan bases usually engage in promotional or charitable activities to support their idols, which you may have heard of, such as collecting and donating financial aid for a humanitarian cause "in the name of that idol" Each fan base typically carries out these charitable activities in their own countries. Do Iranian ARMYs also engage in this area?

Yes, a lot. Besides the boys help, our fandoms assistance is commendable. I can send you some examples of it. Halsey has also mentioned the ARMY fandom in this regard, and I will send that too. And also I love helping others, and one of the reasons that helped eliminate my negative perception of ARMYs from the beginning was this characteristic of theirs. After seeing how kind and warm-hearted they are, I was drawn to them, and the charitable activities and the cheerful and lively spirit of BTSs ARMY really fascinated me, and I wanted to be like them.

- On what occasions are these activities usually carried out, and how is the financial aid collected? And Iranian fandom how have typically spent these aids?

¹ An inland province located in East China. Its provincial capital and largest city is Hefei

Look, every year, several projects are launched among Iranian and foreign fan bases and large fan pages on the occasion of the members birthdays, collecting between three to twenty million tomans, which is donated to organizations like Mahak or similar ones. I personally have also initiated projects a few times, and I currently have a project going on.

- Can you explain the projects you are working on?

My projects were small and informal. The people who collaborated didn't want the collected money to be donated to a specific organization... So, on the 16th of September and the march 7th last year, we gifted a series of food packages, stationery, and New Year clothes to working children and low-income families, and the post was on the page, which received 75K views. Besides that, we did a few small things as well.

- What were the costs incurred for this work?

One time it was three million tomans, another time five million tomans. This is a small part of the members' contributions, from small donations to small organizations to using recycled phone cases to support the environment.

- Using recycled phone cases?! Can you explain that more clearly?

One thing that is common between J-Hopes story and Namjoons post is their phone guards, which are made by the brand Ark. This brand supports the environment, and all products are made using recycled waste."

Reihaneh, 17-years-old does not see altruism and charitable actions as limited to financial aid. In her interview, she states that by creating a fan page, she has tried to reduce human differences and promote love among people:

- "You mentioned being influenced by them; have you been inspired to start something yourself?

The slogan in the fandom is Love Yourself, which has really taught me to love myself. In a way, my perspective on those around me has broadened; when someone insults me, I don't take it too personally and just keep going. What peoples say, aren't worth getting upset over, and everyone has their own beauty, so I try to be kind to everyone and show good behavior and value everyone. One of the reasons I created a fan page was that these days, everyone has become harsh toward each other; when something happens, they jump on each other. Not everyone is doing well, neither physically nor emotionally; the emotional state is what matters, and I've tried to be around

those who come to me every day to feel good and let them know that the world still has its beauties."

Considering what has been expressed under the title of altruism of BTS and the encouragement of altruism among their fans, one can pay attention to the charitable activities that arise from BTS and their fans, as well as the underlying behavioral layers of the group that sometimes act contrary to altruism.

3-10- Globalization and Global Thinking

- "Dear Gelareh, has BTS had an impact on your personality or not?

Yes, it has. Of course, I tried to control it so that, for example, nothing would affect me too much, but I used to think things like, ugh, ugh, a novel! Ugh, ugh, a boy who dyes his hair! Ugh, ugh, pink clothes for a boy! Ugh, ugh, the eyes of these people are like this! And other similar thoughts, But BTS updated my mindset" (Gelareh, 14-years-old).

The present era is referred to as the age of globalization and information explosion.

Although globalization initially focused on economic processes, it later expanded to encompass scientific, social, political, and cultural dimensions due to advancements in communication technologies, increased global interactions, and enhanced mobility, thus becoming a more comprehensive concept.

Important dimensions of globalization can be traced in economic transformations (such as the globalization of the economy and free trade, globalization of financial markets, and extensive movement of goods across borders); scientific (like the scientific revolution, increased technical knowledge, relatively free exchange of information, and rapid information services); social (such as the influence of individuals and groups on rulers in the new communication space, the weakening of censorship by governments, and the presentation of alternative options instead of the ones preferred and proposed by governments); and cultural (like the increasingly growth of mass media that compresses time and space, the emergence of a dominant global culture, the relative predominance of the cultural dimension over economic and political dimensions in the present era, and the advancement of the economic-political-social goals of global hegemons). However, if the focus of the discussion is on the cultural transformations of globalization, it will be observed that the West, as the owner of new communication technologies, has benefited from this important aspect of globalization in the cultural arena by expanding cyberspace and spreading its influence in various human societies. In practice,

it has extended, expanded, and solidified its cultural values, while other regions of the world, due to a lack of similar facilities, have faced the destabilization and weakening of their native cultures.

In recent conditions, with the realization of the goals of the owners of advanced communication technologies in cultural fields, their other economic, political, and ideological objectives have also become largely achievable and accessible. On the other hand, with the widespread nature of cyberspace, users who were previously limited to their own territories and often had awareness only within that scope now find themselves facing a vast space where they can obtain information about other countries and their situations. They can compare the information they acquire with the cultural, social, economic, political, and ideological information of their own society, leading to sometimes significant differences in the aforementioned areas.

The result of these recent interactions has effectively provided users of cyberspace with a global mindset, bringing about a form of globalization and global thinking for them. Naturally, in the current conditions, individuals who encounter various goals, aspirations, wishes, and attachments while using cyberspace will reassess their previous goals, thoughts, and emotions, judging and evaluating their surroundings based on new standards and criteria, and on that basis, they will make different interpretations and judgments from their previous ones

Field research findings indicate that some fans, while supporting BTS, are compelled to participate in various voting activities in the virtual space. This not only familiarizes them more with the globalized environment but also necessitates the coordination of fan organizations at the international level (the base of fandoms), which connects fans with supporters from many other countries around the world:

- "So, I wanted to know how long you have been following the South Korean music and film industry, which is divided into two categories: K-pop and K-drama?

Um, I've been following K-pop since early 2021, so it's been about 2 years, and I've been following K-drama since 2020, I mean dived into K-drama earlier.

- Well, since you follow and are interested in these, what activities have you done in your area of interest?

Well, by fully listening to their songs, I mean during streaming, streaming helps a lot with their songs.

- How do you stream?

Well, I watch their music videos on YouTube completely until the last minute.

- How do you support K-drama?

I go to reputable sites to watch their movies online or download them.

- Since you follow K-pop, which groups of singers do you follow and like?

First of all, I follow BTS and I'm a fan of them, and anyway there are other groups that I know less about than BTS, I mean I don't have complete information about them, like Blackpink, ITZY, and Stray Kids. I follow these groups and their songs that I find interesting, and of course their music videos." (Elnaz, 12-years-old).

- "Have you ever talked to or made friends with people from South Korea through this?

Yes, with Korean fans.

- Can you explain with an example?

Yes, of course, but it wasn't anything special, just that on Instagram, I would react to the stories that fans posted, and they would respond, just to the extent that we knew each other. He knew I was an Iranian fangirl, and I knew he was a fanboy. One issue is that you can find very few Iranian BTS fanboys, but there are many among foreigners.

- Why do you think that is, and why are there fewer Iranian boys who are fans of this group?

Really don't know; I saw a video about this, but I can't remember it completely. The general concept was that the standards of masculinity that are established in our country are not present for these Korean boys. Korean boys are cuter, and Iranian boys want to appear cooler.

- What is the nature of the intimacy formed between Iranian and non-Iranian fandoms?

The intimacy is more among Iranian fans; many still don't like international fans, but they have been very kind to me, and I really love them" (Marzieh, 19-years-old).

"If I have time to spend, it's better to dedicate it to my group rather than other groups. Beside this, I really don't think it's just a hobby. For me, at least, it's more than a hobby. Even if it is a hobby, it's important to me because it makes me feel good.

- When you say you prefer to spend your time on BTS, what do you mean?

For example, I stream. Well, there's Spotify, there's YouTube, and there are other places, but these are the main ones that are prominent among singers. And also, there are the pages I have are for trending.

- What is the result of your streaming efforts, in reality what happens when you do it?

Well, it comes to the top of the charts. Then, in some awards that are, for example, voted on by the public, our work has an impact. They win awards. Even if there weren't these awards, I like them because their work is good.

- How much time does streaming take?

It depends on many things. For example, when they are about to have a comeback (a new artistic activity by an artist), the time is announced beforehand. Then we set a time and start streaming from that hour, to beat the record. For example, the record for the first hour after release, the first day of release, the first week. After their position is established, it decreases. Then, for example, we set another time among the fandom, like the BTS fandom in Iran and, for example, India, or the fandoms in China and Thailand, or the USA, Philippines. The fandoms coordinate with each other (laughs) and explode a streaming bomb. For example, a YouTube stream. It might be for someone's birthday, or close to the awards, or the establishment of the group, or the anniversary of their albums." (Ghazal, 16-years-old).

The intensity of interest in the BTS boys motivates some fans to consider immigrating to Korea:

- "You guys mentioned somewhere that you always compare Korean culture with Iranian culture. After this comparison and realizing that there are probably many differences, does your behavior or spirit change? For example, do you feel hopeless or complain?

Negin: Of course. A lot. Every time we see their way of life and culture, we feel a deep sense of longing. Because it's not just in their movies that they are like this. There's a girl I know who traveled to Korea, and she posted all the details of that trip on her page, always saying that Korea is really like the

movies. That's why I always feel regret. Because Iran is stuck in a swamp that has no hope for reform. So, I can only feel regret and say, Oh.

Saeedeh: I also have a lot of complaints. To be honest, I don't like our culture at all. I don't even feel like I'm Iranian. Now I don't compare anymore. But in the beginning, when I was really into Korea, I kept asking myself why I was born here, why I couldn't have been born in Korea. My behavior is like Koreans, and everyone says I look like Koreans. But now I don't waste my time comparing anymore. I try my best to make all my behaviors like Koreans. My way of speaking, my behavior, my interactions with men, everything should be like Koreans. I refer to Koreans in even the smallest of my behaviors to see how they are. I really love them. I want to be like them so much, and it's really not in my control. Everyone says how much I've become like Koreans. Just a few days ago, my cousin and my aunt were telling me how much I've become like Koreans. My aunt seemed to like it. She told her daughters to be like Saeedeh. Thank God it has been a positive change. For example, when I'm angry, I immediately tell myself, you've watched so many Korean dramas; have you ever seen anyone in these dramas do something wrong when they're angry? So, fix yourself and don't behave wrongly! And I can really control myself.

I was feeling a bit down for a while due to some issues, and being Iranian and not Korean added to that. I kept asking myself why I had to be Iranian. You know, that national pride has dried up in me. I have no attachment to Iran anymore. The only culprit for this situation is Iran itself, its people, and the government." (Saeedeh, 20-years-old, and Negin, 19-years-old).

On a lower level, some fans consider BTSs homeland as their desired destination for obtaining their university degree. For example, 19-year-old Mahlagha states in her interview:

- "So, you want to go to Korea?

Yes, to continue my studies.

- Do you have a lot of information about Korean culture?

Yes, a lot.

- Well, where did you get this information?

I read about them, follow Instagram pages that talk about Korean culture and history, or I search on Google. You can also gain information by watching movies and series.

- Why are Koreans more attractive to you?

Because now most Persian pages either talk about Korean personalities being calm or discuss their beliefs, of that most of which are non-religious, or they talk about Korean history and culture, and many other things... All of this has made me like them. I also love their lifestyle, their face, their language, and shortly everything about them. They have a developed country, and the people of Korea have preserved their culture. Generally, when you talk to them, they are very polite. I'm even learning to cook their foods now.

- How?

Some Instagram pages post recipes for Korean food, but some ingredients are hard to find; it's a bit difficult to order, but it can be found. I ordered Korean noodles from one page, but I couldn't find cucumber and fish sauce for making kimchi, or for making sushi, I definitely have to order seaweed online; otherwise, I can't buy it in person.

- So, do you know how to make Korean food?

Yes, a little. There's a café now; I just found its page on Instagram. It's called Café Seoul, and all its design is like Korean cafés. It has Korean drinks and food, and I definitely want to go there..."

There are other fans who, despite their excessive love for BTS, prefer other countries for immigration or studying over Korea due to the various information they have obtained in the virtual space about different countries by comparing them with Korea:

- "What reasons made you to not choose and not prefer South Korea as a country for living and immigrating?"

I don't mean to say that Korea is a bad country, but personally, I prefer to go to a country like the USA or Canada. I have learned their language, and their language is an international language, so I can communicate with others. It's true that if I want to go to European countries, I have to change my Iranian culture within myself and internalize that the people of the country I'm going to have a different behavioral model, and I also have to behave according to their ways. But I feel that the adjustments I need to make in European culture are easier, and the process is harder in South Korea.

For example, I need to learn their language, and I feel that adapting to their culture takes more time than adapting to European culture. Of course, there are also some other things that one hears about Korea or sees in their films,

for example, that there is a lot of bullying in their schools and things like that.

- What do you think is in Korean culture that makes it harder and more time-consuming to adapt to than European culture?

Overall, Iranians who went to Korea and post videos on YouTube do not praise Korea as much as those who migrate to European countries might praise their new homes. For example, there was a YouTuber who talked about Korean culture and mentioned that Koreans have specific behaviors, such as pressing the elevator button so much while waiting that the button might come off. Their goal is to make the elevator come faster and get their work done sooner. Of course, these issues might not be accurate, and a foreigner might have a similar misconception about Iran, which is not correct. However, right now, it has somewhat influenced me, and as someone who has seen these things on social media, I think that migrating to European countries might be easier for me, and I would adapt to it more comfortably" (Diba, 15-years-old).

In another section, fans of the BTS group, even if they are not considering migrating or continuing their education in Korea or other countries, are naturally led towards a relativistic ethical perspective (which is the prevailing ethics of the contemporary world) due to the extensive information they have acquired and fed on in the virtual space:

"We are living in the 21st century now, and everyone has their own beliefs and can have their own unique style. When I see someone who is an exception and different from the majority of society in every way, I think to myself, it's none of my business how they are. I am not in their shoes to understand their feelings and beliefs, so I won't comment on them.

The opinion of the person who says Koreans are like girls can be respected, but even if they are like girls, it doesn't harm me or you, and whatever behavior and appearance they have is their own business. I think we are not in a position to comment on their actions because it doesn't concern us what they want to wear or how they want to do their makeup. Of course, this perspective on boys wearing makeup is not only present in Iran; other countries and cultures might have similar issues because they are different from us. However, Iranian culture is much more closed and has stricter views on these matters" (Diba, 15-years-old).

3-11- Role Modeling from Stars

- "So do you think makeup is a good thing or not?

If it were bad, BTS wouldn't do it.

- Does BTS do everything right?

BTS supports people; how could such a group want something bad for people?" (Reihaneh, 15-years-old).

To examine the significant role of role models in the psychological, cultural, social, and ideological transformations of individuals, one can start the discussion from socialization. Socialization is a process through which society tries to instill its concerns in the minds of all social classes.

During the process of socialization, individuals absorb, internalize, and integrate the norms, values, and other social, cultural, and political elements of their group or surrounding environment into their personality.

Socialization occurs in two general stages:

Primary socialization is a process that takes place between the individual and the group with which they have close and intimate contact and often occurring in the early years of life. The main factors in this stage are family and peer groups. *Secondary socialization or re-socialization* is a process that occurs in more formal settings, with the main factors being school and mass media.

Many of existing theories regarding cultural effects believe that media play a significant role in socialization by presenting roles and behaviors that are desirable for social stability, and since people spend a lot of time consuming media, it becomes one of the most important agents of socialization.

A significant factor in media that has an influence on socialization process of individuals is the role models it present. Different social classes need role models in the process of shaping their personalities, and these role models serve as lighthouses guiding the ships of human existence. Therefore, parents, educators, and cultural leaders in society must pay special attention to the issue of role modeling, and present various scientific, athletic, ethical, social, ideological, and similar role models to different groups (especially children and youth). Because the choice of a role model by an individual influences how they shape themselves based on the value standards they see in their chosen model.

The Quran (71:23) in analyzing idolatry (which was invented and propagated by the oppressors of society) emphasizes the significance of role models and how

they have led the early monotheistic community towards disbelief and polytheism.

Considering the views of Dr. Ali Shariati, who specialized in sociology of religion, it becomes clear that his interpretation of society deviating from monotheism towards polytheism is precisely similar to Quran interpretation.

Some studies have even emphasized the influence of role models on children as young as 15 months old (Leonardo, 2017).

Therefore, the category of role models should not be overlooked as one of the most serious educational factors for individuals.

Examining the role of BTS in influencing teenagers and young adults reveals that Big Hit Entertainment (the company behind BTS) has employed precise and extensive strategies and measures in introducing and processing this group, which have often yielded remarkable results.

The selection of very attractive faces, diversifying BTSs musical content, creating an air of mystery around their songs for the audience, showcasing the group in a multifaceted manner, elevating the music group and the K-pop industry to an entertainment industry, creating meaningful differences between BTS and Western pop groups (such as spending time with fans and showing them special respect), addressing the confusions faced by young audiences in dealing with the ups and downs of life, participating in charitable activities (which inherently creates a significant desirability for the younger generation), and several other measures are among the strategies devised and implemented by Big Hit Entertainment officials.

The selection of attractive faces for the BTS music group is an important strategy that the company has prioritized from the beginning. Many interviewees have emphasized that they were initially drawn to the group due to the attractive faces of its members, and later, other features of the group caught their attention. The attractiveness of BTS members' faces has been highlighted in the statements of Sahar, 15-years-old, Sonia, 17-years-old, Narges, 21-years-old, Sayeh, 21-years-old, and a significant number of interviewees.

The diversity of BTSs music is another important issue that has elevated the group's status among young people and made them worthy of emulation. Many teenagers and young adults, who are in the midst of biological and social maturation and are often judged or reprimanded by parents and peers due to a lack of understanding of their age-related needs, find themselves facing a group that seeks to enlighten them about their confusions and shows them a way out of their dilemmas.

Addressing the common issues of teenagers and young adults during the critical years of adolescence, providing motivation and hope to the youth, and avoiding judgment of young people are significant positive aspects that the group possesses.

The mysterious nature of BTS's musical content is another attractive factor that makes the group worthy of emulation among young people. The content, which is sometimes based on intellectual and cultural works and derived from philosophical and psychological books, comes together like a puzzle. The discovery of the codes and connections between these elements further engages teenagers and young adults with the content of BTS's songs.

This point is evident in the interviews of many individuals in the study, including Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, Mahlagha, 19-years-old, Banafsha, 20-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old.

The multifaceted qualities of BTS members are another noteworthy aspect that has granted them the status of effective role models for young people. Mahshid, 21-years-old explicitly states in her interview: "I'm happy to be a fan of a group from which I can learn something from everything they do".

Fereshteh, 18-years-old, and Zahra, 24-years-old, also expressed the following in their interviews regarding this topic:

- "Which one of the boys do you like the most?

Jungkook is my bias because his voice is very unique and cool, and he is very talented; he did and does almost everything and has a cute face.

- For example, what can he do?

He can do professional painting and design, boxing, bodybuilding, choreography, cooking, composing and writing songs, playing some instruments, directing music videos, and so on

- In addition to the advertisements primarily driven by commercial interests for BTS and the companies promoting them, you noted that some advertisements also seek to highlight the positive aspects of the group, right?

Yes, there are those advertisements whose main goal is to inform. They want to convey that this is not just a music group; and they are also engaged in very positive humanitarian activities, which these activities also accomplish several goals.

- What are those goals?

For example, the first is that these activities have a positive impact on their own and improve situations. The second is that the group becomes more famous due to its multifaceted activities, I mean, they are working in the music field and using the fame they have gained to expand positive actions in the world, which benefits both the world and BTS. As they say, it's a win-win situation (laughs).

- So, based on what you said about being multifaceted, you think BTS is also multifaceted, right?

Absolutely, because it has changed a lot compared to the past. If we look at the kids, we realize that the parents of these children, to the best of their ability, do not just settle for their child going to school. Alongside school, they try to acquire other skills or knowledge, such as language, art, sports, and programming, which are highly valued. Now, as the kids are learning various skills, famous individuals are certainly doing the same."

The elevation of the K-pop group BTS from a music group to an entertainment industry is another important strategy that has significantly enhanced the groups appeal to fans. This means that due to the gaps between song releases, artists often fade from the minds of their audience until they release a new song. However, by elevating BTS to the entertainment industry, a plethora of entertainment programs are executed by the group and broadcasted in media and online spaces during the intervals between previous and upcoming songs, ensuring that BTS never fades from the minds of their fans.

BTS's social and political activities, such as representing UNICEF, participating in the United Nations, meeting with the President of the United States, and similar engagements, are other factors that have transformed the group from merely being a music group to having a social dimension. This aspect has been pursued by only a few artists globally. The emphasis from Mohammadreza, 21-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old, in a part of their interviews reflects this implication.

Statements from individuals like Sonia, 17-years-old, and Raha, 18-years-old, highlight the differences between the K-pop group BTS and Western pop groups, featuring another distinction between BTS members and similar pop groups:

- "What happens in fan meetings?

It's almost like the live shows, but those are online and this one is real. Fans ask questions, and they answer. For example, I was watching one of the fan meetings where BTS had gone to Japan, and one of the fans was asking,

what do you think about our country and our people? And some other questions like this. Some fans take pictures with them, some give them flower bouquets; you know, these questions and answers aren't very important. What matters is that they take time for their fans and show them they care.

- Why do you think they hold these kinds of meetings with fans and answer their questions?

I personally haven't seen other celebrities do something special and separate to meet their fans like this. Of course one of the reasons I like them is this. Well, the reason they do this is that fans have a lot of love for them, and they want to show their appreciation and say how important and valuable fans are to them.

- Do other K-pop groups have these programs too?

Usually, the activities done in K-pop are quite similar, yes. Some other groups and artists also have these programs; it's not just exclusive to BTS."

- "Well, I've seen several tweets and interviews from K-pop idols where they constantly say, we love you, we adore you, and express a lot of affection. Do you think it's genuine, or are they pretending to attract more fans and popularity?

It's not pretending. But, look, there's something in K-pop called Fan Service, which is the biggest difference between K-pop and America, Europe, and generally every other places. So, what is this? It means that companies, in addition to training in singing, dancing, and songwriting among other things, tells idols that you must also do this. For example, an idol can't come out and say something bad about fans when they're upset or just leave in the middle of a concert. Because I've seen this happen in America, where a singer gets upset and just leaves in the middle of a concert. But they provide fan service, although it takes place in various ways. In my opinion, a lot of these I love you statements are fan service because not everyone can genuinely love someone that much."

In addition to the aforementioned points, the charitable activities carried out by the BTS group lead fans (especially teenage fans, who may have weaker abstract thinking and logic compared to others) to generalize these altruistic actions and similar positive traits to the entire group. As a result, they will be influenced by them and endorse all of the group's intellectual, cultural, philosophical, social, political, and ideological positions.

Narges, 21-year-old, who felt distressed due to some family conflicts, referred to the members of BTS as her "gods" after encountering the group and observing the qualities described earlier:

- "How much has BTS influenced you in terms of beliefs?

Um, A lot. I mean, in the beginning, they could easily influence me; I didn't care whether what they said was right or wrong; I would accepted it without wanting to or it being in my control. Especially Suga. At first, it was a lot, but gradually it decreased, yet overall, I was very influenced by him. I don't remember many specific examples, but they felt like my idols, my fetish. Good, flawless, transcendental, perfect; understanding that they might also make mistakes like everyone else was extremely hard for me.

Exactly the opposite of what I believed about BTS, that they are definitely righteous people, I saw their rivals as completely the opposite. I would say they have no talent at all; there's no way they made it solely with their own talent, or be good people.

- What made you view them that way?

I don't know, maybe because I believed in them in my mind as if they were gods

- How familiar were you at that time with the K-pop environment and the issues behind the scenes?

I didn't know anything back then. Even if someone said something, I wouldn't believe it. It was a bit hard for me to accept things like this that they are under so much pressure. Part of it was because my own life wasn't going well, and somehow, I sought refuge in them to escape the sorrows of my life. Well, I didn't want to believe that these BTS members might not be as they appear. I was deceiving myself. Because I knew that if I faced the reality of how difficult and painful the K-pop environment might be for them, I would probably feel worse. That's why I didn't seek out what was happening and tried to stay away from such news as much as possible. بهتر است.

Other individuals, like Sheida, 20-years-old, have also made BTS their role models by observing few notable qualities of the group:

"Right now, the boys of BTS are my role models because they stood up against everyone who mocked their appearance and called them slanted-eyed or made fun of their language. They told others not to be afraid of the stones in their path and to push aside all the distractions and move forward; you can

progress in every way. When I saw how much they progressed in just a few years, they truly became my role models".

Next, we will discuss how BTS serves as a role model for fans and the levels of influence fans experience from the members of BTS.

Levels of Influence of Role Models on Fans

Children, teenagers, and young adults who are fans of BTS, after encountering the group and observing the aforementioned qualities, may find the group and its members appealing. They might choose some members they like more or feel a closer connection with as their role models and be influenced by their values and messages.

The levels of influence of role models on fans can be classified into three categories: superficial influences, behavioral influences, and finally, influences from the values of the admired individual.

As mentioned in the first chapter, role models impact their audience on these three levels. The influence on the appearance of fans, the impact on their behaviors and actions, and ultimately, the influence on individuals value systems.

The influence of role models on personal appearance can be observed in various aspects, such as how individuals style their hair (haircuts, hair color), the use of similar accessories, clothing (colors and patterns of the clothes worn), movements (sitting, standing, walking, smiling, etc.), and possibly cosmetic surgeries that enable individuals to resemble their role models more closely.

Shadi, 15-years-old, mentioned in her interview that she styles and colors her hair like the members of BTS. Golnoosh, 14-years-old, and Mohammadreza, 21-years-old, also talked about styling their hair in the manner of BTS members. Mohammadreza further noted in his interview that he plays with his hair in a way similar to Jungkook:

- "Do fans interfere in the personal lives of idols?

Idols are generally under a microscope; everything about them-their behavior, appearance, ethics, and interactions - everything you can think of is scrutinized and paid attention to, even the accessories they wear or the styles of clothing they choose, each of which is different and has its own unique style and trends. Some people like one style, while others prefer another.

- Shadi, have you also modeled your clothing after theirs?

Yes, to some extent. For example, I dyed my hair and wear baggy clothes; I've become interested in wearing brighter colors more."

- "I feel like your hairstyle resembles one of the idols, right?

Yes, everyone tells me that my hair looks like Namjoons. It's easy for everyone to tell from my hair that I'm an ARMY and that my bias is Namjoon. They even say my face looks like his.

- Did you intentionally style your hair this way?

My hairstyle has always been like this. I could change it, but many people have told me to change my hairstyle, yet I cut it in a way that makes it look more like Namjoons hair.

- I guess you're really happy to resemble him, right?

Yes. I really love myself. What could be better than resembling your beloved idols?"

- "Mohammadreza, have you modeled your appearance after these idols? Especially since you mentioned they also promote various brands, have you ever dressed like them or imitated their hairstyles?

Yes, I have done that in terms of appearance. For example, the clothes they wear are very baggy, not excessively so, but they are loose compared to their bodies; they are not fitted or body-hugging. I used to wear baggy clothes like them.

As for my hairstyle, yes, I styled my hair similarly to theirs. I straightened my hair, then let it grow long, but then parted it (laughs). I really resembled them; people often told me how much I looked like Koreans. Of course, I also have almond-shaped eyes, which makes a big difference."

- "What features does Jimin have that attract your attention?

Jimin has a cute face, and he is really charming during his performances, which is why I was drawn to him. Of course, Taehyung and Jimin are also really attractive.

- Have the beliefs and behaviors of this individual influenced you?

No (emphatically), but his behaviors have. For example, he always had his hand in his hair, pushing it back; I do that a lot myself, so I guess that

behavior has been passed on to me. But, it is just that, when it comes to beliefs and moral characteristics, no, they really haven't influenced me. "

Shirin, 22-years-old, and Ehsan, 17-years-old, mentioned in their interviews that they use jewelry and accessories in the style of BTS in their lives:

- "Shirin, how has the BTS group influenced your clothing and makeup?

I mostly wear sporty outfits, and my sportswear style is similar to that of BTS idols. My makeup is also similar to that of the BTS group; I have a matte and subtle makeup style. I always dye my hair honey-colored, and I use jewelry only in the style of BTS. I think it's not at all inappropriate for a woman. "

- "What impact does the lack of gender segregation have on fans?

With this slogan of equality between men and women, boys feel allowed to wear makeup, hang earrings, and undergo cosmetic procedures just like girls. Conversely, girls also want to wear boys clothing, cut their hair short, and be more present in public and sports venues alongside men.

- Is it trendy for boys to wear earrings in all countries among fans?

Mostly in Western countries, men hang earrings on one ear, and in Korea and some countries with many BTS fans, in addition to earrings, they wear various types of jewelry, just like women do. But in our country, male fans do not wear earrings. People in our country see earrings on men as a sign of homosexuality. Male fans in our country only wear gold chains, bracelets, or rings and do very subtle and light makeup."

Gelareh, 14-years-old, Fereshteh, 18-years-old, and Golnoosh, 14-years-old, have separately mentioned wearing baggy clothes in the style of BTS, wearing black outfits in the style of Jungkook, and acquiring feminine suits in the style of Namjoons clothing.

- "Do you take inspiration from Jungkooks clothes for home, or do you do this outside as well?

I dress like this everywhere, and even for more formal events, I don't wear shirts or those kinds of clothes, or women's coats in that styles; I mostly wear loose and baggy clothes.

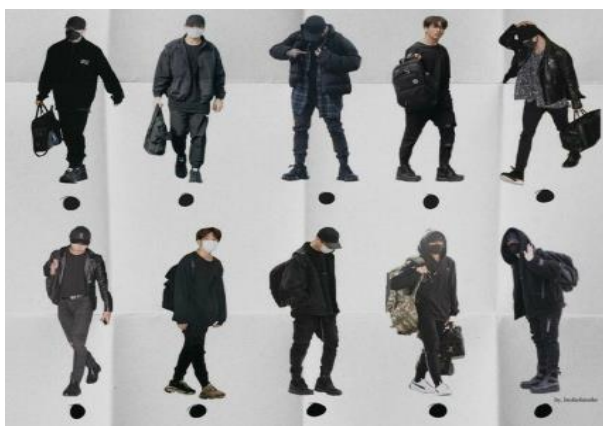
- Do you use the hairstyles and clothing styles that boys wear?

Yeah, in many places, because they choose their styles with a plan and precise discussions with a stylist, and they use trendy styles, so yes, I try to

use them to some extent, as long as it doesn't harm me. Right now, the style I wear is very close to Jungkook's style, which includes: using black in most of the clothes I wear, a black sun hat and cap that is a bit in a rock style, and he uses a lot of loose and oversized clothes, each having its own specific style. "

- "Do you use the style of the other group members as well?

Yeah, to some extent, just from Jimin, because he often combines men's shirts with skinny pants, and I have about seven or eight men's shirts in different colors and sizes. He also uses an extra piece like a vest or knitted clothes or jeans for his outfits, like something that he wears on top. I'm running out of words, I am done, so I'll complete the explanation with a picture.



- One more question came to my mind: have you ever imitated the clothing style of BTS members?

Yeah, I even have all my formal clothes tailored in Namjoon's style and wear them.

- So you wear men's formal clothes?

This style doesn't have a boyish or girlish distinction. I don't like puffy clothes and skirts or anything like that. We always go to a tailor who makes me a suit in the style that I tell her.



- Do your parents have any objections to you wearing men's clothes?

I said it's not men's; it's just a different style. Besides, my mom wears jackets and skirts herself, so just because I don't like skirts, does that make it a men's style? Anyway, the pants and jackets for boys are different from what I ask the tailor to design. What matters is the beauty and that it suits you.

- Can you explain more about the style you usually design?

I design a black jacket with a long white collar, with a special and diverse elegance, black long pants, and she sew the shirt with dantel fabric and guipure lace, it typically make the sleeves or collar filled with floral patterns and white lace, with a fitted black vest. This is one of the styles I really like.

- How many designs have you sewn so far?

I've made one set like this, but I've also sewn a completely white one from head to toe. Just the shirt is simple and has an open collar, it's not guipure, and it doesn't have a vest. I like both equally.

- What do you wear outside?

I mostly wear hoodies because they are comfortable clothes, generally loose and baggy. "

Reyhane, 15-year-old, reports in her interview that despite her familys objections regarding her imitation of BTS clothing, she has taken steps to acquire clothes with BTS symbols:

- Have you ever tried to be like BTS?

For example, in what way?

- In every way, appearance, behavior, ethics.

Well, the truth is ... yes, for example, I like some of them. For instance, I've told my mom several times to let me dye my hair like Jungkook or V, who dye their hair blue and purple. Although the latest colors are temporary fantasy colors that can be washed out and aren't permanent, but my mom says no, my dad gets upset and argues with me, but he doesn't like it either, or for example, I've bought clothes that have BTS written on them or their symbols on them. "

Ehsan, in his interview, notes that his friends go to boutiques in Tehran that exclusively sell BTS clothing to emulate the group members:

- "How do your other friends get BTS trend clothes?

There are a few clothing boutiques in Tehran that only bring in branded and trendy clothes; my friends go there and buy these clothes at very high prices."

Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Sheida, 20-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned copying the movements and gestures of BTS members:

- "So, dear, who is the bias?

Min Miao! [Yoongi].

- Can you tell me why you chose him as your bias?

I have a lot of reasons for it. First of all, Suga is our little cat, and the emoji for Suga in the fandom is a cat emoji, mostly because of his gummy smiles, and when I see him, I think of cats, and I love cats. Suga can be as cute as he can be hot and cool. After all this, Suga might seem cold and emotionless at first glance, but he is very kind and always looks out for the other members. He might not express his feelings verbally, but he always shows his affection through his actions. Everyone says Suga talks very little, and all my acquaintances used to tell me that I talk very little too, and some said it negatively. There was a time when I tried not to be like that and thought being quiet was a bad and negative trait, so I tried to learn to talk more. But when I saw Yoongi, I realized that it's not bad at all; being quiet or talkative, being timid or brave, none of them is superior to the other to be considered bad, and I shouldn't torture myself to change it. Plus, he's very stylish and blunt, and he's a great actor, he responds to haters so beautifully that the fandom goes wild and bursts in lough, and his gummy smiles made me love my gummy smiles too, so I don't feel bad about it anymore. There are very few people who have gummy smiles, and that's unique!

- So, because you felt your feelings and behaviors were similar to his, you considered him as your bias?

Yes, exactly"

- "You mentioned that BTS fans have meetings or gatherings where they talk about the group and their idols. I wanted to know more about them.

Some fans have a very special attachment to the members of the group and imitate all their movements, even their sitting or walking styles. Anything you can think of. "

Of course, in the discussion of role models influences on appearance, it is worth mentioning that some individuals may obsessively imitate the appearance of their desired role model. Negin, a 13-year-old, refers to one of Jimin's fans in her statements, providing a specific example in this regard:

"... If you go to ARMYs and ask them about Oli London, they make a strange face and suddenly start frowning and cursing the person for not knowing about Oli London's story, because he is a guy who underwent a lot of surgeries to look like Jimin, but it turned out to be something very ridiculous. He completely imagines himself as Korean, while he is actually a British American, and he thinks he has become like Jimin. After all these surgeries, he knows only two or three Korean words and thinks he is speaking correctly and teaching Koreans how to be Korean. "

Shirin, 22-year-old, and Shaghayegh, 19-year-old, also mention in their interviews that they have undergone cosmetic procedures and removed their moles in order to resemble their idols more closely:

- "Have you ever had cosmetic surgery like your idols?

Oh, yes, I've had my nose done, my lips augmented, and my teeth have undergone orthodontic treatment.

- Did your husband have any issues with these cosmetic procedures?

Yes, he had a lot of problems; he knew I was changing myself to look like the idols, so he was always upset with me. Everything I did, he saw through the lens of BTS.

- Have your friends also undergone cosmetic procedures to imitate their favorite idols?

Oh, yes, most of them have had chin surgery, upper eyelid surgery, and nose jobs, and honestly, all of us have transformed into different personalities

with these changes, and we love this new identity, all thanks to BTS, and we will support BTS until the end of our lives."

- "Has this issue of makeup or their appearance made you want to emulate them?

Well, yes, for example, I really liked their simple and minimal makeup, so I tried to do my makeup like them, like using a little blush or a lip color that isn't too obvious, or doing a short eyeliner. As for their hair colors, mine didn't have any color before that, but after I became a fan, I was eager to dye my hair, even though I knew that dyeing isn't good for hair, but they had an influence on me a lot. Even now (laughs), my hair is dyed like theirs, but back then, I always wanted to change my hair color like theirs, because they would have a white tip, then a purple tip, suddenly a brown tip, for example, they would change it every time.

And dyeing isn't cheap now at salons, and because of this, I would get into arguments with my family, and they would say, how much dye are you putting in your hair? Enough already, it's expensive, etc.

Beside this, they have really good shaped bodies; they generally follow strict diets, or for example, their noses are very small, their skin is very smooth, and their lips are plump. So, at that time, when I was going to the gym, my job had become to imitate them, and my style of dressing had become similar to theirs. For example, I wore loose clothes and had my nose done. Now I think my nose didn't had any serious problem, but I put a lot of expenses on my parents. I would stand in front of the mirror every day and say, why isn't my skin smooth? Why do I have acne or moles? I went and burned my moles; I was constantly struggling with myself over these things (laughs). "

The next level of imitation involves copying the behaviors, movements, and gestures of the role model, which is deeper than merely imitating their superficial appearance.

In the interviews, instances such as raising money for charity, organizing free classes for students, imitating health and hygiene practices, increasing psychological resilience in relation to haters, acquiring new skills, hard work, discussing problems, trying not to be upset by others judgments, not getting angry quickly, losing weight, adopting more romantic approaches towards the opposite sex, copying BTSs dance moves, and avoiding marriage (like the members of BTS) were emphasized by the surveyed population.

Ghazal and Sana, both 16-years-old, stated in their interviews that they have imitated BTS members in raising money for charity and helping others (by organizing tutoring classes for underprivileged students):

- "How did you start raising money for charities?

BTS members always helped. For example, Jimin bought school uniforms for students at the school he used to attend. It's not just that; he helps a lot, mostly in education. He helps school children. And... Suga, RM, J-Hope, Jungkook, all of them. They all help a lot. The fandom also imitated this, and it started like this in the Iranian fandom too. "

- "Have you ever considered Jimin as your role model?

In school, some of the kids didn't have money to buy study books, so I ordered the books to be sent to the address they provided.

- How did you take inspiration from Jimin in this regard?

He helps students a lot. He has helped the kids at his own school.

- So, did he build a school and provide financial help to the children of that school?

No, he didn't build a school; I'm talking about the school he attended as a child. I also want to help the kids at our school like Jimin. I want to do whatever I can. My grades are good, and I try to help the kids at our school with their studies. Last week we had a math exam, and I noticed a few kids were struggling, so I went to the principal and told her I wanted to hold a free tutoring class. Since the math teacher agreed, the principal said okay, and we gathered the kids, and I taught them. Their grades improved quite a bit. "

Imitating health and hygiene practices, increasing psychological resilience in relation to haters, acquiring new skills, and hard work are among the topics mentioned in the interviews with Mohsen, 22-years-old, Negin, 13-years-old, Mahsa, 19-years-old, and Masoud, 20-years-old.

- "Since you started following BTS, has your effort to achieve your goals increased?

Not so much that I would say I've transformed or changed completely, but they have had an impact. They have influenced my goal-setting more.

- What do you mean? If possible, please explain more.

Jin mentioned in a program that they have a schedule for every day and work for about 7 to 10 hours, or that they wake up in the morning, have 10 minutes of meditation, and then walk or run for 30 to 45 minutes, along with other programs that I can't remember.

- Which of their practices have you imitated and implemented?

I walk for 30 minutes every day. Since my foot hurts, I can't run. Before, when I woke up in the morning, I wouldn't take a shower, but now I try to wake up 30 minutes earlier and take a shower too.

- Can you explain what you mean by suffering?

You see, if someone gives you hate comments 24/7, it really affects your mood. For example, if they say how ugly you are, how bad your voice is, how this is, how that is, many people don't have the strength to endure this hate. But when I see that they can handle it, why can't I? Both the haters are against them, and the company puts them under pressure."

- "You mentioned earlier that their style has been very attractive to you. Have you ever tried to imitate their style?

No, I'm not really into that kind of fan-girl culture where I want to look like them, but one thing I really tried to take inspiration from is that I saw some members, despite their busy and compact schedules, still tried to learn new skills or do certain things and experience new things in their personal lives. This made me think, okay, for someone who is such a big and famous person, they still take time to do certain things and learn new things, while you are not really doing anything. This made me put aside some laziness and try to learn new skills instead of making excuses and doing nothing, and to learn new skill and work on my existing skills. This is how it all started."

- "What are your criteria for choosing your future spouse?

It's much better if he is a BTS fan, but if he are just an ordinary person and I like him, its okay if he isn't a BTS fan.

- If he is not a BTS fan, will you introduce BTS to him?

I will definitely do that.

- Why will you do that?

I believe that getting to know BTS strengthens fans, and if we both know BTS, we will be stronger and won't be discouraged by life's adversities."

Imitating behaviors such as discussing problems, not getting upset by others judgments, striving not to get angry quickly, hard work, and weight loss are other behavioral aspects mentioned by Sana , 16-years-old, Reihaneh, 15-years-old, Zahra, 24-years-old, and Negin, 13-years-old:

- "Has the strict diet of BTS members affected you and the people you know who are BTS fans?

My cousin, like me, was overweight; I think she was around 80 kg, and I was about 75 kg, and we are almost the same height. We decided together to lose weight, so we registered at a gym and used the treadmill a lot. We also went to a nutritionist.

- How did BTS influence this decision you made?

We wanted to be fit and look more attractive, like Jimin and RM. But I didn't want to look too skinny, so I brought my weight down to 69 kg, and I'm still around that now, and I'm satisfied. Jimin motivated me.

- So, did you get motivated by seeing Jimins photos, or did he talk about this?

He didn't said anything; I came to this conclusion by seeing Jimins weight and height. Both the photos and the videos of Jimin that have been released."

- "Have you ever been mocked for supporting BTS?

Not me, but I've seen a lot of comments on BTSS Instagram saying things like, your songs have no content; you sing repetitive and silly things.

- Do you agree that the songs lack content?

They have content, but some people think a song should have deep meaning like every verse of the Shahnameh¹. I say no, a song can have just a couple of meaningful lines, but those lines can be repeated to emphasize their importance.

- Can you give an example, like with Mic Drop?

¹ The "Shahnameh," or "The Book of Kings," is an epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around the year 1010 AD. It is one of the most important works of Persian literature and tells the mythical and historical stories of Iran's kings, heroes, and legendary figures, spanning from the creation of the world to the Islamic conquest of Persia. The "Shahnameh" is divided into three main sections: the mythical age, the heroic age, and the historical age. It features famous characters such as Rostam, Sohrab, and Kaveh the Blacksmith, and explores themes of heroism, justice, and the struggle between good and evil.

Clap, clap, clap, clap all

This is what I did to the haters.

- What does this line mean?

It means that the response I gave to the people who hated me was to applaud them. It means you can't have a negative impact on me.

This song has had a significant impact on me. My mom and I have always had a sort of competition with my aunt and my cousin, and I know they dislike my mom and me. I used to get angry very quickly and get upset. Now I'm not like that anymore; I don't care much about what they say because my aunt talks a lot of nonsense, and her precious gem of a daughter is worse than she is.

- So this song has influenced you?

Overall, getting to know BTS has helped me. I see that they receive so many negative comments, but they don't react in a specific way. Strong people don't pay much attention to what others say. Weak people get easily provoked and upset. I used to be like that, but now I try hard not to get angry."

- "When you're upset, what else do you do to feel better?

I chat with my friends or have video calls with them, and I scroll through Instagram and stuff like that.

- Can you give me an example of how you don't care about others opinions or how you make decisions for yourself?

For example, I get a lot of acne on my face. Before, when someone would tell me how much acne I had or that I was chubby, I would get really upset and go to my room to cry. But after I got to know BTS, when someone says something about those things, I don't care anymore, and I don't get upset like I used to."

"One thing that attracts people to BTS, which I've read in fan pages or heard from friends who follow this group, is that they started from scratch and reached this point through hard work. At first, they formed a group in a bankrupt company, and seven of them slept in one room. Even for their concerts, they had to go out on the street to promote themselves. It's interesting to me that they reached where they are through effort. But some people think that these seven just had to focus on dance and music practice after joining the company, but it's not like that at all."

- "Has the extent to which you talk about your problems with others changed?"

Well, I used to never talk about my problems with anyone, but now many of my friends know about my troubles or issues because after a while, you slip up and everyone finds out. But overall, my problems have become more bearable.

- How so?

Because all idols have their own problems, and I think if they can handle it, why can't I? If they can hide their problems from others, why can't I do that? So I do it myself."

Shabnam, 25-years-old, Reihaneh, 15-years-old, Erfan, 21-years-old, and Shirin, 22-years-old, mentioned in their interviews their more romantic approaches towards the opposite sex, copying BTSs dance moves, and avoiding marriage (like the boys of BTS):

"For example, in relation to the feelings I should say that I used to not care much about romantic and passionate feelings and it was really hard for me to get into an emotional relationship. But I learned a lot from them, and it really affected my feelings.

- What do you mean it affected your feelings? Like, how?

(Laughs) I used to be pretty tough a stone hearted person, you know, in the boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, but watching movies made me a bit softer, and showing feelings became more normal for me.

- So you tried to act like them?

Yeah.

- How do they act?

Well, they're really emotional and sweet.

- And when affected by their model, how you started acting in your own relationships?

Back then, saying romantic stuff or show feelings, would felt cheesy and fake to me. Or I wouldn't do it at all, and when I tried, it felt so silly and over-the-top that the other person thought I was making fun of him; he couldn't see the seriousness in my behavior, even if I was genuinely serious deep down. However, when I saw how beautifully and seriously they [BTS]

express their feelings, it kind of changed my perspective, and it didn't seem cheesy anymore.

- Do you also perform BTS dance moves?

Yeah. Dancing is good for losing weight.

- So you want to be slim like them?

Well, since I'm a girl, I really want to be slim and delicate like the Blackpink members. You can see I'm a bit chubby.

I always play BTS songs and sometimes Blackpink in my room and dance with them. I dance so much to lose weight. In the afternoons, if I don't listen to their songs and dance a bit, I can't do anything else. That's how I get my energy."

- "Erfan, has BTS influenced your decision not to get married?

(with a slight pause) Well, honestly, as a BTS fan, when I see my favorite idol can't get married, and since Jin is my role model in everything, I can't think about marriage. Maybe one of the ways in front of me to be successful in music is that.

- Why do you think not getting married is one of the keys to your success?

Because I am witnessing how successful BTS is in their work and how popular they are worldwide, and it's all because their company is strict and doesn't let them marry. This is happening to me too. I'm young like the idols and have my own charm. If I get married, I might not take care of myself as much and drift away from my goals."

- "What impact does the fact that the BTS members does not get married have on the fans?

Most fans also don't get married, following BTS's example."

The deepest level of modeling occurs when an individual adopts the values of someone they admire. At this level, audiences embrace the values that the role model displays or promotes, and by internalizing these values, they begin to act similarly. For instance, BTS's core ideas about the desexualization of fashion and love, freedom of thought, living happily, and extreme individualism, along with examples from Western culture (such as Halloween), illustrate how acceptance and behavior reflect the infiltration of these values among fans. This internalization signifies their incorporation into the individual's value system."

Sarina, 13-year-old and Nastaran, 19-year-old have been influenced by BTS's desexualization ideas in their appearance and have shown this in their own lives:

- "What's your idea about BTS and K-pop idols wearing makeup?

I think it's really cute and fun. When you like someone, you love everything about him, no matter what he do, as long as it's not bad, there will not be any problem.

Makeup is the same. Beauty exists for both guys and girls, so makeup isn't gendered.

I believe people should be respected as long as what they do doesn't hurt anyone. At first, when I found out they wore makeup, I thought it was interesting, and over time, it became normal for me."

- "What do you think about the idea that clothes aren't gendered? What do you or your friends think about it?

I was totally okay with it before. I really liked it.

- What about your friends?

(Laughs) My cousin is a living example. She just got into it, and I know her. So, I can talk about it. What happened to her in relation to the LGBTQ+ community is happening here too. Before, it was like, okay, in our society, guys should be tough and wear dark colors. I don't know, girls should (laughs) wear pink. But since she got into K-pop, it's totally normal for her that anyone can wear whatever they want."

Saba, 16-years-old and Parinaz, 18-year-old also talked about accepting desexualizing cloths and fashion and showing it in themselves:

- "Do they have specific views on social issues?

Well, they have different opinions, I mean not everyone thinks the same, but in the end, they say whatever the company let them to say. The company gets its money from Western countries and stay in their side, so they naturally lean towards capitalism and Western ideas. One thing that for example is common among them is that they're not gender-focused at all. They don't say this is a girl's outfit or this is a girl's thing. They are not like that at all. I mean, they wear makeup, their clothes aren't based on gender, and they wear all kinds of colors. For example, they wear pink or sometimes dye their hair purple or pink. They wear accessories, rings, and even get dimpleplasty. I think their approach is good to some extent, but not

excessively. For example, I don't think heavy makeup is okay, or getting dimples or surgery. However, I like that their clothes can be any color, and it has made me, for instance, wear dark colors a lot or even cut my hair short like a boy or not wear makeup at all, because girls don't have to always wear makeup, have long hair, or wear bright colors, and things like that. But to that extent, it's good; just not to the point of excess, as I mentioned."

- "Do you think this group is promoting desexualization and trying to normalize it?"

Look, desexualization is totally a normal thing among young people now. Girls and boys are equal, clothes don't have a gender, and LGBTQ+ people are just people, not sick or anything. Even colors don't have a gender; it's fine for a guy to wear pink or a girl to wear blue. A girl can have a boyish haircut, and a guy can have long hair, and it's cool if a guy likes dancing or if a girl likes guy stuff. I think these ideas have become normal not just in Iran but all over the world.

Of course, older generations see homosexuality as a taboo and think it's forbidden, and most of them still feel that way. It's really hard to change their minds about it, they have a right to think so, and you can't blame them because they've lived with those beliefs for so long, it is hard to change them. But young people are more flexible and generally are living in a modern world, so it's normal for us now. BTS agrees with this and shows through their work that clothes don't have a gender, and LGBTQ+ people are human too. They want to show that, and support it too. I think they do the right thing as everyone, no matter their style, opinion, or clothes, is a person and has the right to live. It doesn't matter what brand you wear, what color your clothes are, what color are yourself or if you're a girl or a boy. What matters is that you're a human being, and you should love yourself. They have a song that expresses this idea that you have the right to live with any flaws you have, and it doesn't matter what others say about you. The only thing that matters is you, just you."

Pooneh, 18-years-old and Sheida, 20-years-old also talked in separate interviews about accepting BTS's ideas on desexualization of love and how they've integrated that into their own value systems:

"...BTS, in general, was the first group I got into, and yeah, everything about them was new and different to me. I saw a mix of everything they do, and I liked it, so I became a fan.

- So, BTS actually changed your perspective on some things?

I can honestly say that BTS changed not just my perspective but everything about me-my views on everything, my way of thinking, my tastes. A lot of things. Before BTS, like I said, before I saw their pictures and got familiar with their makeup style and all that, if I saw something like another singer, like Harry Styles, doing it, I'd think it wasn't necessary or wonder why guys would do that. But when I saw BTS, my perspective on a lot of things changed. It didn't seem weird to me anymore, and I stopped caring about those gender stereotypes. My view on LGBT issues changed a lot too. I'm telling you this because you said at the beginning to share everything without hiding or being shy. Otherwise, I feel somehow hesitation as I want say all this.

- Feel free, it's all good, my dear. So, has your view on homosexuals changed? Did you not accept these things before?

Not that I didn't accept it. I had seen one of my friends at school who is a lesbian, so I was a bit familiar with girl-girl relationships and didn't have a problem with it. But I really didn't understand guy-guy relationships or gay couples. It seemed weird to me. But then, when I got to know BTS and my friend talked to me about guys' orientations and their relationships, it clicked for me, and I wasn't unfamiliar with those relationships anymore. Plus, when I saw how much respect boys have for homosexuals and how they support them, I realized who am I to insult them? I understood it's something completely natural that I should respect."

- "How are non-heterosexual orientations viewed among your friends and students?

It's become a lot more common, but I don't think it's because of BTS. Because actually, all the people I know who are BTS fans are girls, and a girl likes to look at her idol from eyes of a girl, you know what I mean? I mean, she sees them as her boyfriend.

- Do girls who are fans of Blackpink have same-sex attractions?

No, I haven't seen any of them be homosexual. But I see a lot of it in society, and it's increased a lot, even without them being BTS fans. It's really grown, and I'm curious why it's increased so much compared to two years ago!

- Do you think part of it is due to media, movies, and shows focusing more on LGBTQ+ issues?

Yeah, I think it's created a vibe. For example, a friend of mine who just a little while ago had a boyfriend suddenly says she's lesbian, or someone says

they identify as LGBT or queer, or another person says they don't even identify as male or female. I think part of it is the vibe; it feels trendy. It's something new. But another part is that these orientations have always existed, and now that people can talk about them more freely, it feels like they're being recognized, and they can accept it within themselves. But I still wonder why this media and advertising you mentioned were around two years ago, but these orientations weren't as common as they are now.

- What do your friends and students think about queers and LGBT people?

They say the same thing BTS does. They don't think it's bad and say it should be whatever you like.

Naturally, the acceptance of desexualization of love that BTS promotes has positively influenced some fans' views on the LGBTQ+ community, and they've shared how this has reflected in their social circles."

Shadi, 15-years-old and Shaghayegh, 19-years-old shared their thoughts on this topic:

- "What was the impact that their words or beliefs had for you?

Well, my view on LGBT people has become more positive. I wasn't like this before, and honestly, I didn't know much about it. I found some information more through them, especially in terms of appearance, like you see (pointing to her nose and lips) and my hair (pointing to her hair) (laughs). Now I really believe that clothes don't have a gender."

- "Do you think BTS wants to spread these orientations and cultures to other countries?

Well, I can say yes, they have a big influence. Now, among people in their 20s, unfortunately, I've noticed a lot more same-sex relationships at school. The reason is mostly the online space, which normalizes these kinds of relationships. For example, this group has made it more common, and now most countries have normalized it and made it legal. Sometimes you see kids pairing up at school (laughs). Two of our classmates who sat at the back and were fans of this band and have created a fan page for them, were dating! And during breaks, they would sneak off to the classroom and get all touchy-feely! That's just one example I know of; there are many girls in other classes who are together and doing the same things. Where does this behavior come from? From these groups, from social media, from same sex porn that pops up with a quick Google search, or Hollywood movies that

feature same-sex relationships and have been approved for release and have gotten tons of views worldwide.

In Iran, where sexual discharge isn't done properly, people justify it online and then act it out with their same-sex partners."

Negin, 13-years-old, in her interview, mentioned the idea that according to BTS members, everyone's beliefs (even if they're wrong) should be respected, and then talked about how her friends and some people around her have accepted this:

- "What's their religion?

They're either Christian or don't have a religion.

- When kids face the fact that religion opposes same-sex relationships, and the message from BTS is that these relationships are okay, how do you think kids will deal with these contradictions later?

They don't realize they agree with it; they say it's not a problem. They say you shouldn't be ashamed of it. For us, it doesn't matter if someone is in a relationship with their same sex; it's not a big deal because every person has their own value and character.

- So, this doesn't conflict with religious teachings?

To be honest, a lot of people don't have a religion. We think science is way better than religion. Science is about proven things, while religion is about unproven things. How can we be sure it's right?

- Do you still hold this belief?

Yeah. I've seen people who had really strict beliefs and were raised in very religious families, but when they became ARMY up, those beliefs faded away.

- Can you give me a more specific example of someone among your friends?

Honestly, yeah, but her beliefs haven't completely changed. Back then, she used to wear veil, but now she doesn't.

- How did she get influenced?

Well, she was really focused on her family. Since her family was very religious, when you grow up in a religious environment, you become religious too. When someone is born into a religious atmosphere, they grow

up with those beliefs and think any opposing belief is wrong. But BTS taught us that you can have any belief and you should respect it.

- Did your friend get influenced by this idea?

Yeah.

- What are her beliefs like now?

Now she believes in God; it's not like she completely rejects religion, but she's not as strict as her family anymore."

Fariba, 46-years-old, also talked in her interview about the importance of being free, living happily, and letting go of shame and modesty, affirming that she sees this reflected in her own behavior and her daughter's:

- "Let's go back to the topic of dancing. Didn't you say your husband doesn't allow it? So how do you dance in mixed gatherings?

I've become braver, I feel, I see a lot of dance clips on Instagram, and when I see girls and women dancing freely and posting videos, I think, don't they have husbands? I've learned a lot from BTS about standing up for what you want. One of BTS's songs is amazing; if you haven't listened to it, you should. It's called "Silver Spoon." In this song, they encourage us to be stronger and stand up against the increasing challenges we face every day. The idols are very determined to achieve their goals, and I've learned a lot from them during this time...

- Have there been other instances where BTS caused disagreements between you?

Yeah, a lot. My husband doesn't want my daughter to dance in public, but I think she should be free.

- How does this relate to BTS?

Our generation wasn't free enough. You know better than I do that the new generation has new role models too. My generation had role models who were miserable and always crying. Since we opened our eyes, we've seen hardship and suffering, but this generation looks up to BTS, who encourages kids to be free, happy, and enjoy life. I think it is right for kids to be happy, free, dance, and laugh- what's wrong with that? I love BTS for many reasons, and even if you don't ask in the interview, I'll mention it myself."

Encouragement of extreme individualism, not worrying too much, the idea that rational thinking isn't necessary in every situation, and acceptance of aspects of

Western culture (like Halloween) are other values that participants have mentioned . They noted that they've adopted these recent values from the boys in BTS. In this context, Reihaneh, 15-years-old, Marzieh, 19-years-old, Fariba, 46-years-old and Sana, 16-years-old shared examples in their interviews

- "Have you tried to adopt some of their moral qualities?

In the past two or three years that I've been following them, I've learned a few things from them, like being kinder to people or not caring too much about what others think and just do what I love to do.

- So you don't like to know others' opinions about your work?

I prefer to make my own decisions. I don't like it when someone keeps bossing me around. I don't want to keep things bottled up inside and let them turn into issues.

- When you're feeling sad or anxious, do you turn to their songs or videos?

Yeah, it's always been like that. It helps reduce my anxiety or makes my sadness fade away.

- Can you give me an example?

For instance, when I had my driving test, I was really anxious. Then I told myself, if it happens, it happens; if not, I'll just go watch BTS. I even thought about how the members do things they've never done before and face them bravely without fear. I told myself to be like that too. Or during the university entrance exam, I'd say, if it doesn't work out, the world isn't ending. BTS is here, so why worry?

Or when be lonely bothers me, I turn to them. I even have a folder in my Instagram saved messages where I named it "happiness" and tons of pictures and videos of the boys are on saved on it. Whenever I'm feeling down, I open that folder and look at them.

... They have another interesting and meaningful song called 'Permission to Dance,' and there's a part on it I really like. It says, 'I want to dance; music has helped me move forward; there's nothing that can stop us; yes, let's break ourselves and dance like fools.

- What does it mean?

It means to put plans and schedules aside, take some breath, and dance. You don't always have to be logical and serious, dancing and music have helped me progress, or I'd say they've helped me grow.



- Do you think it is right to put plans aside and just dance?

I think planning is a pointless effort because in the end, what you want won't come out right, and this song is spot on.

- Well, maybe the issue is with your planning. So you don't accept any kind of planning?

No, I'm not into planning, and more importantly, they don't believe in planning in South Korea, which is such an organized and structured country. Why should I believe in it here in Iran?

- I don't think the song means to never plan.

That's my interpretation, and I like that belief.

- How does listening to this group's songs make you feel?

It feels really good. It feels like freedom. When I listen to them, just like I read the meaning of a text to you, I feel like there's someone who cares about freedom, ease and salvation of me and my daughter's from the constraints of people like my husband. It makes me really happy."

- "Did you have any other opinions about appearance and beauty that changed after getting to know Jimin?

I didn't like Halloween and celebrating it because I thought the faces would look ugly and scary. Until I saw Jimin and his friends celebrating Halloween a few times and saw them wearing Halloween makeup, it attracted me.

- Well, weren't their faces scary?

They were scary, but I liked it; I mean, I was both scared and liked it."

The Depth of Influence of Role Models

In examining the various levels of influence of role models, three levels of influence were mentioned: superficial influences, behavioral influences, and value influences of fans from role models.

The observations made regarding the influence of fans from role models indicate that fans, after being attracted to the appearances of role models and copying and following these appearances, gradually move towards behavioral modeling and engage in repeating the behaviors they see in their desired role model. Subsequently, they often reach the point of modeling the values that the role model promotes, both directly and indirectly.

In the latter case, fans who adopt the values of their favorite role models in the BTS group sometimes display profound influences that astonish those around them and observers.

21-years-old Sayeh notes in her interview that after the release of one of BTS's songs, she spent 24 hours watching it on YouTube.

18-year-old Raha also stated in her interview that she and other members of their fandom translate the boys' live streams simultaneously while sharing them on social media.

18-years-old Parinaz also mentioned in her interview that she eagerly dances for 5 hours every day to prepare for auditions to join K-pop groups, aiming to improve her skills and reach the desired weight for the company:

- "Then you said you came to your senses and saw that a comeback had happened. What did you do next?

I didn't sleep for 24 hours; I was working on YouTube views.

- What kind of things did you post on your page, and what did your support look like?

Well, we were a news channel. I mean, a channel where you wake up in the morning and post the news, etc.

- Where did you check and get the news from?

Twitter.

- Aha, what pages?

Fan pages on Twitter.

- Is there an official and main account about them?

Yes, there is. Besides the main account, they also appear in other places daily. For example, if they go live, we have translator accounts that translate the live stream simultaneously, or if they are going to be candidate for an event, they announce it, or if something is trending, they announce it through these channels. We found the news through these accounts, translated it, and posted it in Persian channels."

- "Have you ever thought about traveling to Korea and joining this company?"

This question was really, really beautiful. Naturally, after I got to know South Korea and developed a strong interest in the groups EXO and BTS, one of my dreams was to travel to South Korea. I wanted to become a member of these groups in the future, I mean I wanted to go and become a singer. Of course, this is not just talk; I have made a lot of effort for this. One problem I had was that I was overweight, and according to the conditions set by these groups, my weight needed to be 59 kg. At that time, my weight was 69 kg. I think I really did my best to get my weight down to below 59 kg, and I even remember starting to learn the Korean language. Now, after about three years, I can say I have become somewhat proficient in this language so that I can connect more with their songs and support them more easily. I have done a lot to improve so that I can become a member of the company; I worked on my dancing. I used to dance for about five hours non-stop at home every day, and now my dancing style has completely become like BTS, and all my relatives recognize my dance as TikTok and K-pop styles. I even got the email addresses of the companies to email them and participate in their auditions because there was a time when companies were looking for trainees, and my age fit the conditions set by the company, so I could audition. I was really serious about it, but I didn't go through with it. As I mentioned earlier, after practicing constantly for two weeks and dancing five or six hours a day, I managed to go from 69 kg to 60 kg in four weeks, losing about nine kg in a month. It was really surprising for me and my family, and interestingly, I was doing this truly and deeply with all my heart and dancing without getting tired at all. I remember coming home from school, watching their music videos, and constantly dancing with them, losing track of time. When their songs played unexpectedly in different places, it's still the same for me now; if the song has a cheerful rhythm, I immediately get up and dance."

13-years-old Negin stated in her interview that she has a birthday countdown for each member of the group on her phone. Sana, 16-years-old also mentioned that she broke up with her lovely boyfriend because he insulted her favorite idol, and 18-year-old Pooneh admitted that if she were to be unaware of the BTS boys for a day, she would die because they have become her life:

"Well, a good thing is that two of the members are going solo and going to join military service. Then, the ARMYs living in Korea have a tradition that when someone's fiancé or boyfriend goes to do the military service, they buy and wear a specific pair of white shoes, meaning they are waiting for someone. Now, the ARMYs living in Korea bought purple shoes instead.

- Which members are going to do the military service now?

All of them. To be precise, let me see, Jin's birthday is in exactly 38 days. Look I have set an alarm for the birthday of each member (laughs). Taehyung's in 64 days, J-Hope's in 114 days, Suga's in 133 days, BTS's anniversary is in 229 days, the time when they were formed and their group was established, J-Hope's birthday is in 309 days, and Jimin's in 351 days.

- Do you do anything for the idols' birthdays?

We call our friends, buy cakes, buy cupcakes, Yazdi cake, and put candles on it. Then, since it has a specific time, we sit behind the cameras an hour before and talk for that hour, and with one second left, we blow out the candles and celebrate their birthday."

"... The incident that happened to me in the chat room, I will never forget for the rest of my life.

- The BTS chat room?

Yes, a year ago, my friend suggested that to keep us entertained, we should join a Telegram chat room where everyone was a BTS ARMY.

- Well?

Everything was going well until I met a boy in that group, he was about my age and a really nice guy. We talked about BTS together. I told him that I really liked Jimin, and he said he understood and had no problem with that.

- So you wanted to enter a relationship together?

We intended to get married (choking up and unable to continue).

- Take your time, and whenever you feel better, we can continue.

Thank you (crying).

- After a few minutes:

I loved him so much; I can't help this feeling I have. You might say, what does this have to do with BTS? Well, we met in the BTS group, and at first, we talked about BTS, and our opinions were very close regarding BTS and Jimin. I like someone who likes Jimin, and I dislike someone who dislikes Jimin.

- Even if the person who dislikes Jimin is a family member?

If they don't like him, let it go, that's fine, but they shouldn't speak badly about Jimin. Even my family members know how much I like Jimin, so they don't say anything.

- What happened with your relationship with that boy?

One day we had a fight; he told me to go to hell with your Jimin. I lost my mind and cursed his mother; I really didn't want to, but the night before, I hadn't slept at all because there was a fight at home. My sister is getting a divorce, and there was fighting at home until morning. He kept insisting we chat, but it wasn't just a normal chat; in that messy condition, he was asking me to send him a picture.

- At midnight?

He wanted a picture of me with makeup and half-open (doesn't elaborate further).

- So what happened?

Nothing; I didn't send him anything, and I started cursing. He cursed Jimin, and I cursed his mother. He blocked me and stopped responding to my messages. Then I called him; I even begged him, but it was useless.

- Do you think Jimin was worth ending your relationship over?

Yes, if he had any sense, he would respect the person I love.

- At the time you got into K-pop and Korea, were you still a fan of Persian rap?

No, when BTS came, I completely set aside Persian rap. I didn't like it anymore.

- Why?

Um, I really don't know. It wasn't that I suddenly stopped listening to it. At first, when I got to know the boys, I was still following Persian rap, but I became so engrossed in Bangtan that I didn't have the opportunity to look for other things. But gradually, my taste completely changed. There was a time when I really loved Iranian rappers. I followed them day and night, but I say, when I got to know BTS, it seemed like they no longer had any appeal for me, and suddenly I realized that I hadn't listened to their songs or followed their news for a long time. Well, when you no longer follow something, naturally, your interest fades away.

- What made Persian rap no longer appealing to you? I mean, what did you see in BTS that you didn't see in Iranian music and rap?

Everything about them is really more attractive. Their voices, their songs, their concerts, their fandom, their looks, but I never compared Persian rap with BTS or K-pop. They are not comparable at all. They really aren't. I know that Iranian rappers don't even have permits in their own country or aren't supported. I say it wasn't about the fact that BTS is much more famous, popular, and successful, so I should set aside Persian rap. Look, I didn't even realize that I no longer had an interest in Persian rap. I suddenly realized that I had been an ARMY for two years and had lived with them for two years, and the boys had become my whole life.

- In these two years, has there been a time when you felt your interest in them had diminished, or something made you feel that you weren't as intensely a fan of them as you were at the beginning and could set them aside like Persian rap?

No, not at all. My nights don't turn into days if I'm unaware of the boys. They are now a part of my life, and they are not just my favorite singers. I would die without them."

Shayda, 20-years-old who is a BTS dance teacher with nearly 200 trainee under her instruction, acknowledges that many of her trainees are die-hard fans of BTS. She notes that the boys' appeal is so great that even girls from sexual minority groups (who, for example, have embraced homosexuality) have given up their choices in hopes of marrying their favorite idol and have turned to relationships with the opposite sex. 16-year-old Sana also states that the members of BTS are so engraved in her heart that she doesn't allow herself to think about the negative points raised about them¹:

¹Earlier, in examining the psychological effects of the BTS on their fans, some of the cognitive distortions that arise in the fans have been discussed.

- "What about them, what is their sexual orientation?"

Many of them are gay. A lot of them also like the opposite sex.

- And do you think these sexual orientations have any connection to being a fan of BTS?

No. I haven't seen anyone become gay because of being a fan of BTS. On the contrary, I've seen many girls who are LGBT, but under the influence of being a fan of BTS, which are boys, have changed their preferences, meaning their type has completely changed."

- "Well, you have a strong interest in BTS, especially Jimin. My question is, has your strong interest in BTS and Jimin made you refrain from criticizing them, and even though you know criticism is necessary?"

You want me to do something really hard, I swear. You want me to think about something I've been avoiding thinking about.

- I don't intend to upset you, God forbid. Please answer the question if you feel comfortable.

It's okay; one reason is that they don't speak up and protest. I really hate it when someone wants to take my picture and edit it with Photoshop or other editing programs to make it look artificial or ugly or anything else. If someone does that to my picture, I get really upset. I think, 'God, look, I must not be pretty and attractive if my fans take my pictures and edit them.' Also, it's bad that they don't let us see the idols' innate beauty. They always do something to the idols' faces and hair. I don't want to think about it more than this. I've already gone too far."

At the end of the discussion on the influence of role models, it seems necessary to mention a few points.

The first point is the phenomenon of saturation. In psychology, the principle of saturation indicates that excessive presentation of stimuli leads to the audience becoming saturated with that stimulus.

Considering that BTS and other K-pop and pop groups rely on superficial appearances and emotional-behavioral stimuli to influence their audiences, the occurrence of saturation in them is predictable. Gelareh, 14-years-old and Raha, 18-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned their saturation from the initial groups they were interested in and their joining BTS:

- "Why did you think you would never become a fan of Koreans like your cousin?"

You know, when I was eleven, I only knew the only word of abroad, it just included America and other chic and classy countries (laughs), and I thought Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese were a bunch of ugly people, and I considered them like Afghans. I was just a kid at that age, and my taste changed later when I got to know these countries.

- What made you prefer to be a fan of BTS instead of following the group Blackpink?

In the beginning, I was only familiar with Blackpink for about 3 or 4 weeks, and I had even chosen my bias. One day, my friend sent me one of the music videos that had just been released by BTS. That video was the "Boy with Luv" (2019) official MV featuring Halsey. Then my friend, who sent me the music video, told me that she hated BTS. At that time, to prove that I was a cool and laid-back person, I said, 'Yeah, who are they anyway?' 'They are so ugly,' and things like that. After a while, because I got tired of Blackpink, I went back to that "Boy With Luv" music video and watched it several times, and then I moved on to the other BTS MVs.

I also searched for everything related to BTS on Google and watched it until I became a fan, meaning I understood what ARMY means and that fans are called ARMY. I learned the names of the members and was able to recognize their faces and choose a bias for myself. After that, I completely set aside Blackpink."

- "What attracted you to their performances? Their vices, their dancing, the visual effects, or other things?"

(Laughs) Well, the visual effects because they had one visual (the face of the group). The name... although I don't think he was the visual. But I thought he was very pretty. Because of that, I started following them. Then I listened to their songs, and I liked them. There was an interesting variety, and since then, I've been hooked (laughs).

- So the first fandom you joined was EXO-L (the name for EXO fans)?

Yes.

- Are there other groups you are a fan of?

Yes, yes. I'm not an EXO-L anymore, and I'm a fan of another group now.

- Why are you no longer a fan of EXO?

Because I think that after a while, groups' progress tends to decline. I mean, after seven years or so, or when they pass their first contract period, either

they separate from the company, or they don't produce good music anymore, or they become scattered, each debuting solo, and I lost interest.

- So you just didn't like that person or group anymore.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yes. I'm a very logical person. I can easily drop a group whenever I'm not feeling it.

- So you follow their work, but not them as individuals.

Yes. Their songs no longer had any appeal for me."

The next point to mention regarding role models is the necessity of providing a developmental explanation of behaviors of teenage fans. This means that although at the onset of adolescence, the transformations in the teenager's upper brain¹ and their sometimes intense reactions that compel parents and those around them to relatively react strongly to the young person, and the teenager feels a kind of confusion amid various judgments and threats directed at them, over time, with the completion of the young person's upper brain and their entry into society and facing new concerns, the young person may simply abandon their favorite group, which served as a support and guide during their period of confusion, and turn to other groups or topics that they have recently discovered a need for. Kowsar, 25-year-old, in her interview, mentioned the changing concerns of her adolescence during her youth and continuing life as follows:

- "Now, considering that you are no longer a fan of BTS in the same way as before, what do you have as a replacement? I mean, you still say they played a very important role at that time. It even seems like they held you up in a way. What is it now that keeps you grounded, and what has replaced that group and its content?

I truly feel the void left by them. I mean, with a few things, I've filled that void to some extent... not the void of BTS itself, but the void that was there before BTS came. I mean, BTS came and filled it, and then when BTS could no longer fill it and that box had become somewhat smaller for me, I filled that void to some extent with a few other things. It could be... for example the connections I make in the world, or it could be philosophy. Because what initially attracted me to BTS's music videos was their philosophical content. It was one of the main things that made their work truly worth watching and not cheesy, like most of the songs I had heard or the music videos I had seen.

¹ From the perspective of some researchers, the brain can be divided into two parts: the lower and the upper parts of the bridge of the nose. The lower part, which controls the vital organs of the body, is complete from the beginning, while the various circuits of the upper part of the brain are formed through family and social training until about the age of 20

In a way, I have held on to life with all my might. In the moment. With good moments. With the good feelings I try to experience. And I truly feel the void of having something or someone that I love so much that just the existence of that thing or that person is enough for me to love them. That void is really felt, and to some extent, it has been filled with things that are appropriate for my current age. Because now, even if I wanted to, I couldn't make an artist that important to me. You know, that was a reflection of my age or my personality at that time. Someone at my current age might have the same personality. But for me, it was during that time. For example, now, even if I wanted to, I couldn't give an artist or a performer that much importance to become the reason for my life. But that void was filled at that time by BTS, and now it has been filled to some extent, but not to the extent that BTS filled it, truly."

- Uh-huh.

But even though I know that the things I like now don't fill that void to the same extent, I can't convince myself to love an artist that much anymore."

3-12- Identity Transformations

Identity transformations are an important social phenomenon reported by the studied population of the BTS fans. The formation of robotic identity, group identity, network identity, the identification of individuals without identity, toxic identities, and finally toxic group identity are among the issues mentioned in the statements of the research population, which will be addressed further.

Robotic Identity

Robotic identity, resembling a robot or servile, refers to a submissive, obedient, and compliant identity in which the individual or individuals in question accept imposed matters unilaterally and without any interference, fully and precisely executing the imposed directives. In this identity, the individual is receptive to a one-way communication from top to bottom, without having the slightest right to protest for themselves. When faced with cognitive dissonance, they resolve the arising conflicts by resorting to initial agreements and commitments, while one cannot simply forget a person's human responsibility based solely on a prior agreement or promise and leave it to chance. For example, the company expects its idols to act exactly as instructed, without any objections. This means that, in line with recent demands, the company sometimes asks idols to show an inclination towards the opposite sex to attract a general audience, and at other times, to appeal to same-sex audiences, it asks them to embrace each other and kiss lips on stage in front of the audience. Naturally, ignoring one's overall

inclinations in these matters can be costly for both the individual and their community

Nastaran, a 19-year-old, in her interview, referring to the roles played by idols at certain times, mentioned the following recent case:

- "Well, BTS is now the most popular band among the groups you stan, do you have a special bias¹ among them?

Namjoon is their leader.

- Now, considering what you said about idols being controlled in K-pop, how can you trust and like them if they say something or do something? Do you believe them?

One thing is that I don't have complete trust in any of the people I like, even though I like them and value them, as they might have a significant impact on my life. I mean, I always say if someone comes tomorrow or the day after and says Namjoon did such and such, I won't say no because he's an angel, he didn't do that, I'll wait until he comes and proves it to me with evidence or later disproves it with evidence, because you can't completely trust someone. I don't either, but since you mentioned BTS, if I want to talk only about BTS, the more famous groups become and the more established they are, they no longer need those people in Korea, especially groups that become very famous internationally; their behaviors become more genuine. They no longer need to be validated 24/7, and then... they become a bit more themselves. In fact, I've seen this with BTS because I've been with them since the end of 2016, and I've noticed that their behavior changed once they became very famous.

- Exactly what change?

For example, I don't know...

- Now, exactly which change do you remember? Just say that.

(She laughs) How open can I be?

- Be comfortable.

Ok, one reason for K-pop's popularity is the intimate behaviors of its members. For example, group members interact closely with each other. Nowadays, in various industries, such as filmmaking, influencers, and singers with bisexual inclinations can attract a lot of audiences. This

¹ A person who is more favored by the fans than other members of the group is called 'Bias'.

phenomenon has also occurred in K-pop, and it has been happening for a long time. That's why most of them play roles; for example, they show fake intimacy."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, also notes in her interview that although the company has told fans and ARMYs to stop shipping idols, they have not taken any specific actions to prevent this issue, and the idols have remained silent on the matter. However, linking group members in same-sex relationships or creating audio fanfics that edit statements from an idol alongside statements from a porn star to create a two-way conversation undermines the human dignity of the artist in question.

- "Uh-huh. So, can you tell me about shipping?"

Shipping individuals means pairing each member with at least one other person; for example, the most popular ship among BTS members is V and Jungkook.

- What kind of shipping is that?

They make it seem like they are together, like they are in rel.¹

- Who ships them together?

The ARMYs.

- And what do the idols think about being shipped?

Well, idols... you know, they don't have a specific opinion; they don't react to it.

But their company has previously told their ARMYs not to ship them and such things. The ARMYs were quiet for a while, but now they've started again, and the idols aren't upset or opposed to it; they don't have any specific reactions either."

Sahar, 15-years-old, Negin, 13-years-old, and Golnoosh, 14-years-old, in their separate interviews, made the following statements regarding the slave-like identity that idols exhibit in relation to their company:

- "Despite BTS's slogan being 'Love Yourself,' how do you think they accepted to serve the company like slaves, with all their actions and behaviors, such as their relationships with the opposite sex, the food they

¹ Aka in a relationship

eat, the cosmetic procedures they undergo, and so on, being under the complete control of the company?

Well, this is a widespread issue in K-pop. All companies put this pressure on their idols, and to become famous in Korea, you have to accept certain things, especially regarding your appearance. Members may not have issues with their looks and bodies, but for the profession they love, they have to make some changes to themselves, whether it requires surgery or being careful about their diet. I think it's not just in Korea; in other countries too, when you want to become famous, you have to take care of your appearance. Regarding relationships with the opposite sex, I think the company wants to keep the members' minds at ease and not get involved in the challenges of a relationship, as it might distract them. I believe the company should guide and advise the members on these matters, rather than impose restrictions. But overall, when you choose to enter such professions, you have to do things you might not want to do, and I think this is not about self-love; it's about how important your goal is to you and how much you are willing to endure hardships for it."

- "How does the issue of surgery work among the idols?

Companies usually have to allow their idols to undergo surgery.

- I thought it was the opposite?

In certain specific situations, if the idol themselves is not okay with their face, they propose to the company, saying, 'I want to get my nose done; what do you think?' If there's no problem for permission, the company allows it, and they go ahead with it. If they don't allow it, then nothing happens. There are some surgeries that are done for the idol's own sake, to stay alive. From the moment they join the company, everything about them is under the company's supervision; they have to follow the company's orders and work in agreement with them.

- What kinds of surgeries?

For example, Namjoon had a respiratory issue, which is why he had to get his nose done. If it weren't for his breathing problem, the company wouldn't have allowed him to have the surgery at all.

- So if they decide to do something with their bodies, they have to get permission from the company?

Yes."

- "What kind of diet do idols follow to always stay in shape?

Their situation is completely different from ours; their lives are based on rules and regulations, and everything is controlled. They don't eat just anything like we do. Their diet plans are supervised by the best doctors. They even have exercise and skincare routines.

- Do you think this is good?

Well, definitely. These things keep them in shape. Even BTS needs help with this.

- So you don't think it's bothersome at all?

Well, all the cool jobs require some level of discomfort, but it's definitely necessary, and how nice it is to have someone to control you and look after you.

- Isn't it like what parents do? You said their opinions don't matter to you.

They are different. They are not like the people who help BTS. They definitely understand much better what needs to be done for success. They are certainly not like my parents from the previous generation. Everything they say is necessary."

Nastaran, 19-years-old, in part of her interview, recalls that the slave-like treatment observed in K-pop can also be seen in a diluted form in Hollywood and other Western areas. Her states in this regard are as follows:

"You can't really compare American society to Korean society; no matter how messed up (laughs) American society is, it's relatively more open. Much more open.

- They don't focus on appearance like Koreans do?

Of course, they do. Especially in modeling. But well it is obvious, models have to be thin, unfortunately, and follow strict diets. But it's less so for their idols. For example, I think it was Ariana or Lady Gaga who said they were forced to diet and wear certain clothes. But you know, it's rare. The number of such cases is small."

"There were some things seen in One Direction, but it was never confirmed. But for example, some very famous actors came out and said that our company forced me, as someone who was gay, to go on a date with someone, for example with a girl. Let's say, a female actress, to be seen in public. I said it was like the case of Harry and Taylor. Of course, Harry

didn't say this. Yeah. Then they said that to make our date newsworthy, that actress, for example, if she was choosing a role, it would have a positive effect on the sales of their movie or series, they seemed to be using their fame. They would say that the company forced me to go on a date with someone, even though I was gay and had no attraction to girls, but they made me do it. It exists in Hollywood too, but it's much less than in K-pop."

The mentioned robotic and slave-like identity leads fans to attribute any observable behavioral conflicts in the idols to the company, perceiving them as being in a superior position. However, it cannot be accepted that merely by signing a contract in their teenage years, idols would disregard their own human dignity and display behaviors dictated to them by the company without any ethical considerations, solely for the purpose of increasing profit.

Group Identity

If individual identity is defined as the response to the question "Who am I?", collective or group identity is the answer to the question "Who are we?".

Some of the interviewed individuals have noted that they consider themselves and other BTS fans as a single unit, as they not only share similar feelings and emotions but also engage in organized and extensive activities to support their favorite group, which creates a specific group and organizational identity for them.

Kowsar, 25, in her interview, mentioned the various activities she and her friends engage in to support BTS as follows:

- "Is this part of the company's promotion, or is it a personal or cultural choice that has become established?"

I think it's something the company does to keep the fans interested. Because, for example, the gap between this album and the next one means that to prevent the fans from forgetting about their love for the group, you need to provide them with some content. These contents are placed in between so that the fans don't get bored. The members have accepted this as part of their job and try to enjoy it, or at least from what I felt, it wasn't something that was forced upon them. For example, the seven of them going to an amusement park and filming it felt like a series I was constantly watching that never ended. Then, after these shows ended, they would hold concerts. There would be concerts for several days, and we usually watched them live. It link would be shared. One of the ARMYs who bought a ticket would share the concert link so everyone could see it. You would watch the concert live...

it's really enjoyable to experience the concert atmosphere live. Then there were the end-of-year K-pop festivals where all the groups perform, and then some are awarded. For example, Artist of the Year, Song of the Year, Album of the Year, which shows which artists were the most successful of the year... then there are voting events where fans vote for their favorite artist, and when the winner is announced, you feel proud because you feel like you contributed to that artist's success. In a way, you feel like you are giving back (payback) to them for the good feelings they have given you. It's like a long-distance friendship that has a give-and-take dynamic. They give you something, and you return it.

- So what do other ARMYs do for your favorite band?

The main thing is listening to the songs and watching the music videos, so that the views are recorded on the platforms. Then there are voting events. For example, if news comes out that there's a certain voting event, you go and vote. The votes are recorded, and then it shows how popular that artist is. When the artist wins an award, they get happy, and you feel like you've done something for them.

- So, when you say that a video should get views, can you really give it more than one view?

Yeah... there are ways. For example, you can have multiple accounts.

- Uh-huh.

You can view it with each of your accounts. You can... wait a few hours, then clear your history (clearing your system memory/cache), and then go back and view it again. We used to do a lot of that (laughs)."

Sayeh, 21, in her interview, mentions activities such as international division of labor for voting and streaming by fans, participating in voting on various websites and magazines, creating petitions, translating, editing, and uploading new content for BTS, and similar activities in groups that have only 30 translators and were collaboration 24/7 to support their favorite group:

- "Can you explain what a comeback is?"

Yeah, a comeback is when a group or a singer releases a song after a while; that's called a comeback. Now, that period can be two months, but it is anyway their comeback. This is also what makes the K-pop system different from other groups. Fans of other groups might just say yah, the group I follow released a song. Then one go and listen to it and done. Nothing more. But we are different; we say, for example, that a song is going to be released

at a certain hour. In the first 12 hours, we want to reach a certain number of views, and in the next 12 hours, we want to reach another amount, and so on. For example, there are specific view targets for countries that are awake and for countries that are asleep; all of this is specified. For instance, it says which countries need to do their views at which hour, and there are other countries that need to do their views at a different hour. For example, when during one of their came outs, we managed to be number one on iTunes in 70 countries, so for this comeback, we aim to be number one on iTunes in 80 countries. It's not necessarily that we will reach that, but it sets a goal so that when people are viewing, listening to the song, or listening to playlists, or when they do anything, there be a specific target for that individuals to reach. Often, they may surpass that target or don't reach it.

- Where does this coordination happen?

Every fandom has this coordination. I mean, no matter who you are a fan of, over time, certain pages and fan bases grow larger than others, I mean they will be bigger and will have much more members than others, and in these fan bases, the coordination and setting of these goals, as I mentioned, happens.

- Where does this situation manifest externally?

For example, one place is in voting events. After getting to know BTS, I realized how many voting events there are in the music industry. There are a lot of votes. Billboard has voting, this site has voting, that magazine has voting; there are many voting events. BTS fandom is one of the most last-minute fandoms. For example, you might be stressing out, thinking, 'Oh no, we're falling behind!' and then out of nowhere, the whole fandom rallies together and totally closes the big gap on the last voting day. After that, you really feel the difference you made, and of course, you get some awesome feedback too.

- So you have to always be on the alert for new polls that start, right?

Um... not right now. Not right now, honestly, because the societal pressure is very high, and it's hard to even have the patience to live. But before... and when I say before, I mean about two years ago, yes. Now, it wouldn't be accurate to say we were on alert, but we had our pages and anyway, kept ourselves updated. For example, we had reminders, and there are fandoms that have daily reminders, and when you're on Twitter, it constantly reminds you that there's a voting event, don't forget. While you're scrolling, you might go for a second and participate in that voting event. That's it. There's a

voting event called MAMA that you can vote in it every 24 hours, and there's a two-week voting period where you can vote too. For that, we made sure to vote once a day. Yes, in this regard, we had that alertness to go vote and not fall behind.

- Do you know Korean?

No. I translated from English. We were a group, and we all translated, and over time, we had to learn. We had to learn video editing so we could manage certain things. I learned a lot of these things out of interest because it was something I wanted to do, and I unconsciously got involved with it. That's why, at the age of 18 and 19, there were times when I would spend 4 or 5 hours a night working on these things because they have programs called Bon Voyage that are released suddenly and unexpectedly. For example, suddenly an 8-hour video comes out, and it's not usually available for free. It's usually purchased, but since we are Iranian and don't have money, we use files that kind fans make available to us. Anyway, when these videos came out, we would sit down to translate them, and I'm saying there were periods when I would sleep 3 or 4 hours at night to keep up with them and complete the translation.

- What is this program?

It's like the Run BTS, but has a bit different model. The format is such that they would send them on a trip once a year for a week to do whatever they want.

- Did they film them while they were on the trip?

Hell yes! They would send them with a team! But it's a necessary thing overall because when you think about it, you've worked for a year or two straight, and even your Thursdays and Fridays are not free, it's really tough to send you away for at least a week without working. Of course, they are addicted to work. I mean, if you see them, you'll notice that even during their break time, one of them is sitting in a corner writing something for themselves, and another is sitting in a corner creating a melody. There's a kind of work addiction like this in Korea.

In short, when they went on trips and such videos came out, we would sit down to translate, and there isn't just one translation team; there are several, and to keep up with the others, we would translate quickly so that we could pass our shift to another group for editing, and then another group would proofread, and so on until the video was ready and uploaded to the channel.

- Did you have work shifts?

Yes, you could say that. It was structured so that the translation team would finish by a certain hour, the editing team would complete it by another hour, and ultimately, we would deliver the video by a specific day. After we delivered the work, our job was done. We would take a break and sleep, but the editing team's work would just be starting.

- And your work could last from night until morning?

Yes. Night until morning. Even though there were only 30 people in the translation group I was in.

- Was this your peak time for support?

No, this isn't the peak. The peak is during comebacks (new releases).

- How was it then? Did you stay awake for 24 hours?

Yes, that happened. The first time I stayed awake for 24 hours during a comeback, I was really surprised because sleep is very important to me, and it wasn't that it felt like an obligation or a duty. Rather, you feel like you are part of a community, and I hadn't felt that identity before. They give you an identity, and you feel like you are part of a community, and in this community, when someone is messing around, no one cares about them, and they say, 'Do you think if you leave, it will diminish the value of these people? Go ahead.' And for that one person who leaves, there's a sadness, but the fandom knows how to account for that one person.

- How do they deal with it?

They ignore them, and that's it. No one brings it up. It's over. But the opposite is also true. When you are doing something, there's a kind of excitement happening simultaneously that I don't know how to describe. I don't know if you went on a spring camp during the year of your entrance exams or not. There's a kind of identity there that makes you sit down and study, or I don't know what example to give. You tell yourself, 'Yes, I am part of a community,' and when you see the final result, even if it's not big, sometimes the results are big, but even if it's not big, you feel that... you've achieved something. You've reached your goal. It's a collective goal that you worked together to achieve, and this sense of community is something that doesn't exist in Hollywood or Iranian music or anywhere else. But it does exist in BTS fandoms."

In other words, it can be stated that if group members, by presenting their viewpoints, theoretically establish a specific collective identity for their supporters, those supporters, in order to support the group, engage in organized and extensive activities that practically refine the aforementioned collective identity.

The communication among supporters regarding the release of songs, how to stream, and participate in voting on various music websites, publications, and festivals, as well as countering rival groups that may conspire against BTS, are among the issues that Marzieh, 19-years-old, mentioned in her interview, highlighting the formation of a hidden collective identity:

- "Do fandom members unite in supporting BTS and are they encouraged to vote and stream?

Yes, look, I personally didn't really know what streaming was at first, and the fan pages or channels I followed, they would talk about it, guiding us step by step on what to do and how to support, explaining the streaming rules or, for example, sharing links to sites for voting, which made our job much easier, and it still does... Some fans even provided Spotify subscriptions for other ARMY members who couldn't afford them, and they would share them. They also advised on physical care needed while streaming, like eating fruits, drinking herbal tea, and taking breaks for our eyes every half hour. One thing I encountered when I first became an ARMY was that I didn't know many terms and didn't know how to do this. At that time, I saw somewhere that it said, 'Right now, Taehyung needs our votes; if you don't vote, don't call yourself an ARMY!' I was really upset and thought being an ARMY was all about streaming and such. I often saw messages from some kids saying they liked BTS but weren't ARMY, and when I asked why, they said that an ARMY is someone who supports the boys on Spotify, etc. Because I... considered myself part of this family and kept telling others I was an ARMY, I would turn on my VPN during comebacks to support the boys. If my VPN didn't connect or for any other reason I can't remember, I would get really upset and think to myself, 'What kind of ARMY am I if I can't do anything to support my favorite idol?' There was a time when some people had created or bought fake accounts and followed Taehyung's page, keeping it for a month or two. According to Instagram's algorithm, if someone follows you and stays followed for a while, then blocks, reports, and unfollows you, your account will be considered spam, and your account gets shut down. So, they did this, and after a month or two, Taehyung's account started to drop. One of the fan

pages that was aware of this informed us and asked us to follow Taehyung if we had other accounts, and to send an email to Instagram. This way, we prevented them from achieving their goal and shutting down Taehyung's page.

- So, in a way, they influenced your emotions and feelings to participate in the voting?

Yes.

- And if there was a time you couldn't support them, did you feel guilty?

Uh-huh, and it's all because of those messages that some fans or admins would send."

Reihaneh, 17-years-old, describes BTS fans as separate seeds that, as Taehyung says, are brought together by the purple thread of BTS.

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Shabnam, 25-years-old, in their separate interviews, introduce the fans and members of BTS as a united family, emphasizing the deep emotional bonds that have formed between them.

The intensity of the BTS family's affection for one another is so great that fan services have been established to provide support to the group's fans in various areas. Banafsha, 20-years-old, mentioned in this regard:

- "Can you explain about fan services? If I'm correct, ARMYs have formed groups for themselves that include lawyers, doctors, and others who address their issues. Can you elaborate on this?"

Regarding fan services, I should say that there are some fans who provide specific services to you, and as you just mentioned, yes, ARMYs have formed groups that include everyone from lawyers and doctors to chefs and bakers, who really help each other. This is mostly seen on Twitter. Once, if I'm not mistaken, one of the ARMYs needed blood, I don't know if it was for their grandfather or another family member, and one of the BTS members retweeted that ARMY's tweet, asking ARMYs if they could go and donate blood to that ARMY."

Denying the values of other K-pop groups is another factor that plays a role in shaping the group identity of BTS fans. Golnoosh, 14, expressed in her interview:

"... I'm a real ARMY.

- What does ARMY mean?

ARMY refers to the true fans of BTS. We are like a family, like an army.

- Only BTS fans or K-pop fans in general?

No, only those who are fans of BTS are called ARMY.

- Do all BTS fans call themselves ARMY?

Everyone calls themselves ARMY, but not all of them are real ARMYs. Some just claim to be fans. They don't know anything about BTS. They don't understand what it means to be an ARMY. They just use the name ARMY to show off.

- In your opinion, what characteristics should a real ARMY have?

A real ARMY should support all the members of the group in every situation. They should love all of them equally. There are many who say they only love Jungkook or that they love Jin more than the others. They don't understand the meaning of being an ARMY at all. An ARMY should love all the members and support them all.

- What other characteristics does an ARMY have?

Well... an ARMY shouldn't be a fan of any group other than BTS, but they shouldn't be fanatical either.

- How can someone not be fanatical and still only be a fan of BTS?

A fanatic is someone who goes everywhere in groups and comments, insulting those who don't like BTS and doing foolish things. What I mean is that an ARMY should never compare any group to BTS if they are truly a fan of the group. They also shouldn't compare the members of the group with each other."

Building friendships with BTS fans on one hand and expressing disdain and distancing from non-fans on the other hand are other important aspects in refining and shaping the group identity among the fans of the Bulletproof Boys.

Sahar and Razieh, both 15-years-old, expressed their views on prioritizing relationships with BTS members:

- "Sahar, do you think being an ARMY has made you more popular among your peers and helped you find more friends?

Since there are so many ARMYs in Iran now, this method definitely works for making friends. When I want to befriend someone, at first, when we haven't broken the ice yet, I try to find common interests with that person so

we can talk about them and connect more. So, yes, being an ARMY has a big impact on finding friends.

- My dear, you mentioned that you don't participate in discussions about BTS, so if a discussion arises where they say another group is better than BTS, you don't participate in that discussion either?

No, the truth is clear; there's no need to argue. Let them deceive themselves with their words."

Sahar, 15-years-old, spoke about not forming friendships and distancing from non-fans in her interview:

- "Do you think that at your age, if someone isn't an ARMY or a K-pop fan, they face difficulties in finding friends and feel pressured to become a fan?

Well, not always. There are some ARMYs who say if you're not an ARMY, I won't talk to you. I'm not like that; I look for other common interests. But there are some who put pressure on non-ARMYs. Of course, not all non-ARMYs feel this pressure; it depends on their personality. For example, I have a friend who is neither a K-pop fan, nor an ARMY, nor even an otaku¹, but it doesn't matter to her what others say, and she remains friends with everyone."

Defending BTS friends who have been attacked by others or showing a very strong reaction towards opponents are other characteristics of the collective and group identity formation among BTS fans.

Sheida, 20-years-old, and Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, expressed their thoughts on this matter as follows:

- "You mentioned parents' concerns about their children's constant engagement with BTS. Have you personally experienced a very intense emotional conflict because of BTS? For example, have you ever gotten into arguments with those who hates BTS and have conflicts with them?

One time, one of my friends said that they find BTS really disgusting and something like that. I mean, another friend of mine was listening to a BTS song, and then this person said that. The friend I mentioned who was listening to the BTS song really likes anime too. Then the one who was against it said bad things about anime as well, saying how much they hate it

¹ Otaku is a Japanese word that describes people with consuming interests, particularly in anime, manga, video games, or computers.

and that it's nonsense and for kids. Since I don't like it when someone insults another person's interests, I got into a discussion with them and told them that just because you don't like something doesn't mean you can mock it. For example, I don't like the Tataloo who you like, but I wouldn't insult it just because of that. Then they asked, 'Why are you so obsessed with this stuff?' I replied that Iranian songs are all about sadness, like they say to cry, and crying is beautiful. But BTS songs are all about hope. One of their songs says, 'Don't cry, my dear.' Their songs always give positive energy, and I've even heard that they use words from the Bible in their songs. After that, our friend was convinced and didn't say anything else."

- "Are their fan pages filled with very fanatical people?"

Yes, unfortunately. Look, it's good to be a fan of someone and to like them, but this fanaticism is destructive and leads to disrespecting your fellow countrymen or others who are like you, all because of a Korean singer! You have no right to say someone has gotten worse or that they've lost their looks; they're just normal people, what are they anyway? (with surprise) If you say this, you'll get reported and ostracized.

I mean, they insist that these people are always perfect and are perfect crushes, and they want to force you to accept their opinion and say you were wrong. They get really angry, especially those who are younger, and it's really bad that they have such an impact on them."

Negin, 13-years-old, emphasized in her interview the use of plural verbs instead of singular ones, reflecting the formation of a new "we," which represents group identity:

- "It seems like you want to help the group in some way?"

Yes.

- What do you think makes you want to help them?

You know, I use the plural because all of us ARMYs are like this; there are certain special things about them that attract us. When we see someone making an effort and bringing smiles to millions of people, it's interesting to us, and we want to make a few people happy too. For example, when everyone in the group are like that and sees one person laughing, they start laughing for no reason, even if they don't know what it [the reason] is. This is what BTS or K-pop groups teach me is that you should always strive to reach somewhere, no matter the circumstances. Eventually, everything has a time to end; the world isn't always going to stay the same"

Network Identity

"... We believe that we are all a family, so when ARMYs learn about BTS's song records, especially Korean ARMYs who are aware of the voting, and international ARMYs, they spread this news. They constantly post stories and updates on various apps, and then all ARMYs become informed about how to view on YouTube or how to participate in voting. For new ARMYs, other ARMYs provide guidance on how to vote or how to stream. The fact that ARMYs announce, for example, that on a certain day and time everyone should go and stream, and other ARMYs try to spread this news because of their large numbers, helps them quickly catch up on the news since they follow the members and the company closely".

With the expansion and prevalence of the virtual space, people who previously got to know each other through face-to-face interactions in the real world now have the opportunity to connect with individuals they wouldn't normally encounter but who share similar interests and tastes. This allows them to form various networks and groups, thereby creating and shaping a new identity that can be referred to as network identity.

Golnoosh, 14-years-old, in her interview, highlights the new network identity she has found, noting that she and other BTS fans look out for each other even if they don't know one another:

- "So, BTS stationery has been made too?

Yes, they make everything you want for ARMYs. Until now, my mom would buy whatever school supplies she saw, but from now on, I want to choose and buy BTS supplies online. If I don't buy them, I'll save my money and buy everything at once for next year.

- Do you want everyone to know that you are a BTS?

Not BTS, it's better to say ARMY. I take pride in being an ARMY. This way, those who are ARMY will understand that you are one of them and will look out for you. This way, you find more good friends and always have a few like-minded people to talk to. From the very beginning, we can tell who likes what, and those who don't like BTS won't come to us. Also, my cousin knows my taste and respects it. If everyone were like that, it would be great.

- So you don't want to be friends with someone who isn't an ARMY or is against BTS?

Not at all.

- Well, don't you think you're missing out on a lot of friends this way?

I don't care. I prefer to have a few friends like me rather than a lot of friends who are different from me and always oppose me.

- How many ARMY friends have you found online?

Oh, so many. ARMYs are so kind, emotional, and spirited that when you talk to someone you don't even know, they respond very well, and if you ask for help, they will help you. I told you, we look out for each other. It's very easy for ARMYs to become friends. Of course the real ARMYs."

Mahtab, 18-years-old, also noted in her interview that they coordinate internationally for streaming and to avoid being recognized as bots, dividing tasks among themselves to ensure that BTS receives the majority of votes in various polls:

- "Are you a fan of any other non-Korean groups or artists?

Yes, I am. How could I not be? But my mind isn't just filled with BTS! I also follow Harry Styles and Katy Perry, and they have songs I like, but the way I support them is definitely different. The difference is that I think supporting idols is more fundamental and serious.

Then, I don't know why it is this way, but I might sacrifice several hours of sleep to boost their views on Spotify or YouTube, or I might join various Telegram groups or follow different fan pages on Instagram, but I don't do that for them. I don't support them as heavily; I just enjoy their songs and listen to them sometimes. But I don't gather with other fans to support them like this or follow their news every minutes. It is not like that at all.

- Why is the support for K-pop groups so much stronger than for non-K-pop groups? And why is the streaming for ARMYs much more pronounced than for fans of, say, Western groups?

The unity among K-pop fans is much greater because it represents the power and authority of a fandom. The higher the streaming numbers, the more it indicates the popularity of that K-pop group and the stronger their fandom. In this context, there are some fans who dedicate their entire lives to streaming music videos. This can significantly impact other aspects of their lives, such as staying up at night to stream a particular song or music video because it's their turn to stream, or not studying because they want to post stories and engage with the fandom. As a result, their academic and social lives may suffer.

- Why do these streaming sessions usually fall at night for Iranians? Is it because of the time difference with Korea?

No, it's not necessarily at night. But for example, a fandom might decide to stream that very night the song is released, and there are certain accounts, like a Twitter accounts, that guide the fandom on what to do to reach a certain number of views for a specific song. Then, base fandoms categorize countries based on their time zones to determine the best times for streaming. Additionally, they try to avoid detection as bots or to prevent it from being obvious that everyone from a certain country is viewing the video.

- So, in this scheduling, do they not consider whether it's day or night in that country?

They do, but someone might stay up and stream at night because they want to quickly show their support until morning, and finish her job. For example, like me.

- Does the pressure to reach a certain number of views for a video create any other issues for the fans?

Yes, sometimes anxiety can arise for the fandom because when they set a goal, like saying they need to reach a certain number of views by a specific time, if they don't reach it, the group feels disheartened. For someone who finds streaming very important, it feels like a loss, and they can be psychologically affected."

What Mahtab refers to is the formation of an international network identity among BTS fans.

Identity formation of the Identityless individuals

- "Do you generally think this collective spirit of ARMYs attracts individuals?

Absolutely! Being part of something is very enjoyable, especially for teenagers who often don't have many good friends in the real world. That's how it was for me at one time." (Maryam, 18-years-old).

Erikson, in his theories on identity, notes that individuals who do not achieve their desired identity may join various groups (even radical ones) and follow them to somehow gain and experience their lacking identity through collaboration and alignment with these groups.

Mahlagha, 19-years-old, in her interview, recalls that she and her friends felt a sense of pride and honor when BTS won an award due to their previous support, and in a way, they felt a sense of identity through the group.

Mahtab, 18-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old, also mention fans who see themselves as defenders of idols, allowing themselves to react strongly against those who criticize their idol (who in a way provides them with identity):

- "This sense of acceptance you said, was it fulfilled by the group or because there are other people who are fans too?

Both. When they talked about their fans and expressed gratitude or received an award, it made us proud. On the other hand, we always wanted to talk about them in front of everyone and show them who we are fans of, and when others were also influenced, that sense of pride and acceptance was fulfilled again."

- I've heard that some fans are very fanatical about the group or a specific member, and sometimes there are even fights among fans of the same group. Is that true?

(Laughs) Yes, these things happens.

- What activities do the fanatical BTS fans engage in to support them?

When you think about it, at first glance, they don't differ much from non-fanatical fans. They also stream on time, tweet, and participate in voting. But they are also active in other areas. As soon as they see a negative comment, that's when they start trying to convince others that the comment is wrong, often resorting to insults and offensive language. They might even encounter a valid criticism, but since they believe their idol and the group they follow are flawless, they can't accept it. They see these aggressive reactions as a form of support for their idol. It doesn't matter who or which fandom the criticism comes from, whether it's from a fellow fan, another fandom, or even a local; they must invalidate that opinion and criticism.

Another thing that I need to explain is the term "bias" in K-pop, which refers to someone you like the most in a K-pop group. Sometimes a fan can be so fanatical about one member of the group that they ignore the other members and only support their bias. They might even argue with others who share the same bias because they believe that member belongs only to them."

"I used to really love BTS. It was to the extent that my whole life revolved around reading their news and stuff like that... But in recent years, I distanced myself from the environment where the fans were together. The

reason was that the environment had become toxic. When I say toxic, what do I mean? It means, for example, that no one has the right to express their opinion, and the smallest wrong comment someone makes leads to a flood of people who... just like now, where social media has become toxic, or for example on Instagram or other places, you see someone says something, and they get a ton of hate comments saying you are not in a place to talk, you're talking nonsense, who do you think you are? It became the same in the K-pop fan environment.

It means when online space became toxic, it affected that too, and the warm and friendly atmosphere that used to exist was no longer there, except between you and your friends who already knew each other. The circle of friendship had become much smaller than before. For example, when I say that companies are strict, let's say an incident occurs. For instance, an artist or celebrity says something that may or may not be wrong, but it is perceived as wrong, and suddenly all K-pop fans, not just the fans of that group, as fans of that group usually don't say bad things and defend their artist, come under attack from fans of other groups. They all suddenly attack this artist and say, 'Why did your artist say that?' Then they attack their fans, asking, 'Why are you a fan of this damn singer?' This way."

Considering the disputes that occur among fans of different K-pop groups, the prominent role of individuals who seek their own identity through a specific idol or group is very evident.

Golnoosh, 14-years-old, in her report about her and her friends' encounters with critics, and Sahar, 15-years-old, in her report about the clashes between the fandoms of Blackpink and BTS (which are referred to as fan wars), say:

- "How many ARMY friends do you have?

There are many, but the main ones that I'm really close with are five.

- Do you have in-person or virtual connections with these five?

One of them is my childhood friend; we've been friends since preschool, one is my online friend, and the other three are my schoolmates.

- Have you ever made friends because you were an ARMY?

Yeah, all my friends are either ARMY or we convert those who aren't into ARMY. So definitely all my friends are like me.

- Why do you convert everyone into ARMY? What do you gain from it?

Well, the more of us there are, the better it is for us. A strong army needs to be numerous. When someone says something bad about BTS, we all rush to defend them so that no one thinks BTS is alone.

- How do you rush to defend them?

We stand by each other. If someone insults one of us or one of the idols, especially if they say something stupid about our biases, we all go after them.

- What do you do when you go after them?

If it's in person, we convince them not to say such things anymore; if it's online, we all message them together, threaten them, and remind them of our power. Some of them, who are mentally unstable, intentionally want to bother ARMYs; we report and block such ignorant people so that their page gets deleted and they are punished for messing with the BTS army."

- "Can you give an example of these fan wars that caused some people to leave the fandom?

For example, at one point, Blackpink was even more popular than BTS, but some ARMYs started hating on them, and they continued this to the point where many people's views on Blackpink turned completely negative.

- What did they say that changed people's views on Blackpink?

They came and said that Blackpink's views aren't real and that they buy their views, or for example, Jennie has been with everyone in K-pop, and they spread a bunch of lies to bring Blackpink down.

- What do you think the reason for this was?

I don't know. Maybe it was out of jealousy, because ARMYs are generally like that and always have a headache for fighting and create a lot of division among different fandoms, and I really don't understand what the reason is."

The 19-year-old Tina mentions in her interview individuals who, for example, simply refer to their high level of participation in voting on music sites as a badge of honor:

"...I have another friend who is also an ARMY. She actually listens and streams much more than I do. Because... well, no, she doesn't actually stream, but she listens to a lot more than I do. For example, I listen less, even to other people's songs. She is much more into this, to the extent that her Spotify for the end of 2022 told her that she is among the top 0.05% of

people who listen to BTS. And that's a pretty crazy thing. Then she took a screenshot of it as one of her achievements."

As is evident from the recent report, some identity-less individuals exploit the slightest excuse to use such instances as evidence for their nonexistent identity.

Niko, 15-years-old, also notes in a similar report that identityless individuals, who have created an identity for themselves by clinging to their idols or groups, do not even feel a deep commitment to their idols or groups. They attempt to make themselves known by engaging in actions that attract attention (even if these actions conflict with their idol or favorite group), in an attempt to alleviate their pain of lacking identity:

"I never wanted to be a shipper because I thought it was a kind of insult to BTS. Of course, for a while, under the influence of one of my friends, I shipped Yoongi, but after a while, I gave it up because the members might be disgusted by being shipped, not just BTS, but other groups as well. They might also get hurt, and even Taehyung mentioned in one of his interviews that he read some fanfictions about himself and Jungkook, and it really upset him. He pleaded that they shouldn't write these and shouldn't ship. When they themselves say this, I find it strange that many ARMYs still ship and write or read fanfics. I think if the person themselves is not comfortable, then even reading the fics loses its appeal."

The feeling of ownership over the idol is another consequence observable in individuals who seek their own nonexistent identity through groups like BTS. These fans, simply because they have defended their idol against a few critics or participated in fandom wars (fan wars) in favor of their favorite group and insulted fans of other groups as much as possible, feel entitled to interfere in the most private and minute aspects of the life of their beloved idol.

Hadith, 14-years-old, Sofia, and Raha, 18-years-old, in their separate interviews mention fans who, simply because they support an idol, feel a sense of ownership over them and believe they have the right to intervene in the idol's life and express their opinions:

- "I heard that just as the intensity of fandoms' love is high and often quite fanatical, the haters are also very intense. Tell me a bit about the impact these hate comments have on the group's activities or work.

Most of the hate comes from these fanatical fans who have unreasonable attachment to their idol. For example, when BTS first installed Instagram, Taehyung accidentally followed Jennie, and on one side, BTS fans started hating on Jennie for no reason, while on the other side, Blackpink fans

started hating on Taehyung. Then they ship them together, photoshop their pictures, and the poor idol, unaware of everything, gets a lot of hate in the middle of it all. Then, in such situations where the idol is receiving so much hate and is under pressure, the company provides no support and even fuels the fire of rumors because it benefits them and makes the idol more famous, which brings in more money for the company. So, the only thing that doesn't matter to the company in this situation is the idol's mental health. Sometimes the intensity of the hate is so high that it has driven several idols to suicide."

"...some had interviews in Korea, and everyone was saying if my idol gets married, I will unstan them. It's really strange. It's as if I'm using my idol like a commodity, and they do these things to satisfy my needs and mental pleasures. "

- "What do you think about the personal lives of idols, like news of their marriages? Are you sensitive about this issue?

No, (laughs) it doesn't concern me what their personal life is. But I can't say I won't be surprised. I mean, I'm not prepared for the day when this man, the idol I like comes out and says, I love someone. Congratulations. I'll be happy for him. However, I think liking some idols is like having a crush; you have a crush on someone, and then suddenly he go and date someone else. I know they're not going to come and marry me (laughs), but at first, it feels a certain way. However, it's not like we can't get over it. These Korean fans really seem crazy to me (laughs). They reject idols over this issue, or for example, when the news came out that Chen was having another baby. Chen is a member of EXO. His tweet was in Korean. And I read all the Korean comments, including things like 'kill yourself, why did you have a baby?' and 'you're a disgrace to the country for thinking about this and made a baby while you're in the military.' And I think Korean society is an incredibly closed society in terms of humanity, while at the same time being incredibly advanced in terms of technology."

Toxic Identity

"The most dangerous sasaeng fan of BTS was a 25-year-old girl who was obsessed with Jungkook. Once, she threw herself naked in front of Jungkook at the airport, then sent him threatening messages on Weverse, saying, 'You have to marry me, or I will kill you. I don't know, she was saying I have a gun I have this I have that. But I told you, some people ship Taekook, meaning Jungkook and Taehyung together, and she sent a message to Jungkook, she said 'If you

really have a relationship with Taehyung, I will kill Taehyung.'" (Zahra, 21-years-old).

The virtual space, due to its specific characteristics, such as being virtual, the possibility of remaining anonymous, the ability to evade the legal consequences of one's actions in this space, and similar factors, has created a new arena for the psychological release of individuals who are filled with frustrations, tensions, and unresolved complexes. In this way, the virtual space has provided an outlet for emotionally unstable individuals, and some rely on this possibility to use the virtual space as a platform for releasing their repressed emotions.

In the context of K-pop fandoms, these individuals are referred to as toxic fans.

Therefore, in describing toxic identity it can be stated that some healthy individuals and some unstable individuals, by choosing the virtual space for their psychological release, effectively create a toxic environment, and these individuals can be referred to as individuals with a toxic identity.

Individuals with a toxic identity can be categorized into three groups: "ordinary" fans who are mostly swept up in the atmosphere or are seeking emotional release and psychological gratification, "haters" or those who spread hate, and "sasaeng fans."

The first group, or "ordinary" fans, are individuals who belong to the BTS fandom but are either caught up in the atmosphere or focus their fandom on satisfying their inner needs and repressed emotions.

Some fans, at the beginning of their fandom, feel obligated to defend BTS with all their might and to deny and reject rival groups. These caught-up individuals often step out of the bounds of fairness in their actions, and in the relatively free and uncontrolled environment of the virtual space, they resort to attacking rival groups. However, over time, they somewhat moderate their behavior and cease their inappropriate and toxic actions.

Maryam, 18-years-old, in her interview, mentions new fans who, at the beginning of their fandom, engage in denying and rejecting rival individuals and groups:

- "Do you know anyone among your friends who is fanatical and participates in fan wars?"

Yes, there are many such cases among ARMYs, but not among the older ARMYs. Those who have just become ARMYs and are not even considered real ARMYs yet, usually have a more intense fire because they are new to the fandom and are not familiar with this environment. They think that

anyone who says anything about their favorite group must be responded to and put that person down. However, after spending some time in the fandom and witnessing the fights, you realize that responding is completely pointless, and you should just show no reaction so that the other party understands that their words don't matter to you and do not diminish the value of the group you love. Someone who insults others or their interests is actually belittling themselves because this shows that they have low social intelligence and have not yet reached the understanding that people are different and have different interests. As long as these interests do not harm anyone, there is no right to interfere or insult. If you want to participate in fan wars and constantly respond to others, you should know beforehand that these discussions will never reach a conclusion and will never end.

Ultimately, no side will back down from their position, and they will not accept the opposing fandom's words; the insults will just keep escalating until both sides get tired and eventually give up the fight. For example, I had a friend who would post a ton of stories on her fan page every time a fight broke out and respond to everyone. I kept telling her, 'You're reacting so much; you're actually paying attention to their words and giving them importance, even posting their words in your stories to respond, and this makes their pages more prominent and famous. This is a benefit for them, are you okay with that?' But unfortunately, she wouldn't listen...

- Maryam, does being an ARMY require any special talent or ability?

Of course, it does. All this tension and fighting that the fandom ARMY has with other fandoms, do you think it's for no reason? It's because of the group that has just become ARMY and thinks it's a big deal; they want to fight with everyone in every way. Well, these actions tarnish the reputation of real ARMYs because someone who has been a K-pop fan for a long time has already gained the understanding that they should not participate in fan wars and should respect other groups. But new ARMYs think that if someone says 'BTS sky is blue,' they should go and tear that person apart.

- Earlier, you mentioned that some people get tired of being ARMY after a short time and leave the fandom. What do you think the reason is?

The reason is that they didn't become ARMY out of a genuine love for BTS; they were drawn in because everyone has been talking about BTS lately. They see that the majority of ARMYs are excited under the influence of their friends and the atmosphere on Instagram, thinking they like it, and they come in and follow BTS intensely for a while. Their enthusiasm is even more intense than that of older ARMYs, but after a while, after watching

BTS music videos a hundred times and creating a half-hearted fan page and finding a few virtual ARMY friends, they get tired and their interest diminishes."

Other fans, focusing on their inner emotions, try to use the virtual space for their psychological release. As a result, these individuals may create fan fictions about their relationships with the members or the members' relationships with each other, which depict relationships based more on conventional or unconventional sexual issues rather than a pure and innocent friendship. This overall reflects the toxic identity that these fans have manifested. Negin, 13-years-old, in an example in this regard, states in her interview:

- "Do you think every fan fiction is valuable?

It usually depends on what kind of fan fiction I've read. There are many fan fictions that are very uplifting; for example, if you are an idol, you wouldn't have any problem with them. But there are some fan fictions that can really cause emotional harm, and if someone brings out such a story, even if it's fictional, from your life, it can completely destroy your spirit.

"Haters or those who spread hate" are individuals who are fans of other K-pop groups or are not fans of any group at all. However, for their amusement and perhaps for their own psychological release, they simply attack the members or the BTS group (and other groups) with any excuse they can find, insulting them in a way that attempts to alleviate their own inner distress. The result of the actions of these individuals is the poisoning of the environment in which idols and other fans exist."

Taranom, 18-years-old, Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, and Elnaz, 12-years-old, in their separate interviews, refer to haters as individuals with a toxic identity:

"Regarding the hate directed at the members: for example, Namjoon received a lot of hate at the beginning of their debut, with people saying he didn't have the looks to be an idol. And also he was an underground rapper and they used to say to him you aren't a good leader, you can't compose a sentence, how you write songs? You are ugly and many more insults. Yoongi has a very fair skin, to the point where I can say he was whiter than milk. At the beginning of their debut, they said your skin is too white, like a ghost, or they said you are disgusting like a cat. They told J-Hope not to smile, smile doesn't suit you, your teeth are too big, and that you are ugly do you really want to be an idol with that face? They told Jin you are too skinny and too tall and too old to be an idol, as he was around 18 or 19 years old at that time. They called Jimin chubby and told him you are fat, you lips are too

big, you are talentless, and you look like a girl. They told Taehyung that you sold out your friend to become an idol, you are heartless and you deserve to live in a village and do rural work. They told Jungkook you are too young to be an idol and why you don't go do your homework, along with a lot of other hate. There are still haters, of course not in the same way, but haters find new excuses every day to spread hate. For example, solo stan haters, who are only fans of one of the members or a specific ship, spread hate by shipping Jin and Namjoon. If Namjoon go toward and touch Jungkook or J-Hope's shoulder or hugs him or take his hand, they say, 'Why did J-Hope do that? Maybe he wants to start a fight between Namjoon and Jin,' even though it hasn't been confirmed that such a relationship exists or not. All of this happens while BTS values every religion, belief, race, language, and skin color, but they still receive a lot of hate based on their skin color and appearance.

Overall, at the beginning of their debut, the hate was much more intense, and Namjoon and Jimin received a lot of hate, but now BTS is the biggest boy band in the world and has the largest fandom in the world, and no one can really hate on them that much anymore.

... Another type is the haters who are not fans; they dislike the idols and wish they didn't exist at all, that they would die. Anti-fans dislike both the fans and BTS, they are among the worst.

- What group are they?

They are the ones who threaten BTS and their fans, and sometimes they really harm some fans and even kill some fans

- Has anything like this ever happened?

There was an incident in Iran where a girl and her friends were wearing BTS clothes outside, and four boys came and slurred of them because of BTS. They responded naturally, which led to a confrontation, and those boys ended up hitting the girl with a rock, causing her to need eight stitches on her head.

- Were they among the anti-fans?

They were among those who disliked BTS, somewhat like anti-fans.

- Why do you think someone would dislike others so much? How does this level of love and this level of hatred develop?

Anyway, some ARMYs really lack maturity; they mock some other singers and say BTS is better than them, while some say BTS is better. There's another group of fans who mock those who like anti-fans, which leads to more conflicts.

- So there's always a serious fight going on?

Yeah.

- Where do they fight with each other?

Sometimes they confront each other face-to-face, sometimes on Twitter, in the comments, anywhere."

- "You said the company said they want to confront the haters; has this been just talk, or have they taken action?"

For example, they said they would sue those who are really bad haters. There was a hater who would make the members look very scary, and they named their page "Bankook." Many ARMYs said to block this person and report them to Big Hit so they could file a complaint. It even got to the point where they would come and read words of death and say it was for Jungkook, and when asked why they did these things, they said they were bored with him."

Sonia, 17-years-old, in her interview, points out that the simplest excuses (like an idol getting hurt during a performance) become a pretext for the haters to spread their hatred. Narges, 21-years-old, also mentioned the uncontrollable nature of haters in her interview, noting that these individuals even justify their actions that contradict the guidelines of the company or the members of the group and continue their hate campaigns:

- "Is there a possibility of injury during their performances?"

There definitely is. They practice a lot, but the possibility exists. Just like professional athletes can get injured, they can also face injuries.

In K-pop, it's pretty much the same, but big groups that are very successful and famous have a lot of haters. If something happens during a performance, the haters create a lot of funny content about it and mock them, especially on Instagram.

- Why do some people dislike a group and mock them?

Hating in the arts is generally prevalent, especially in K-pop. For example, someone really loves another group and then hates on other groups and singers to bring them down so that the group they love can rise. Or in

everyday life, if we don't receive a good feeling from someone, we try to avoid him, which can also lead to hating on groups."

- "When did you feel good about fighting with others, or did it make you angry instead?

Overall, those fights and conflicts made me angry. I mean, when you go and disrespect an artist, the fans of that artist come back at you and disrespect your favorite artist, which is annoying, and it's clear that it makes you angry. But that feeling of destruction and making the other person angry somewhat alleviated my anger. But overall, it was bothersome; if it weren't like that, I might have stayed in the fandom. You know, in a way, everyone knows that BTS has toxic fans. I realized this late because I was part of those fans. It has a toxic atmosphere. Even if nothing happens, the fans create stories and stir up drama and start fights. I'm not saying all fans are like this; many try to calm the fandom and prevent fights. They constantly say to just support the artist. Your behavior can tarnish their image. But a large percentage of fans are toxic and fanatical.

- Did you ever try to be like that small percentage?

No, because I thought I was doing the right thing by fighting with everyone for them. That small percentage believed that our idol tells us to respect each other, and they tried to listen to the boys. They somehow saw themselves as representatives who had the duty to show others what kind of fans the boys have raised through their good behavior. But my perspective and that of people like me was not like that. We said, well, the boys can't defend themselves. So we have to come and support them against the things said to them."

"Sasaeng fans" are fans who are obviously mentally unstable and invade the privacy of idols, seek out their confidential information and expose it, engage in unconventional actions that endanger the physical or mental health of the idols, or even threaten to kill the idols to satisfy their psychological needs.

Hadith, 14-years-old, describes sasaeng fans in her interview as follows:

- "What is a sasaeng?

A sasaeng fan is someone who wants to sneak in the private life of an idol, for example, they stalk the idol and create rumors, like saying he married me and we have a child. And things like that. But it's not just that; some of them cause serious harm to the idols.

- What do you mean by serious harm, physical or psychological? And isn't this rumor-making by sasaengs beneficial for the company?

Both psychological and physical harm. Psychologically, for example, these rumors and other things - like once a sasaeng took a photo from under a female idol's skirt. With this act, they can threaten the idol, saying, 'Do this for me, or I will release your photo,' or they might just release the photo without any threat. Sometimes they even bump into idols hard at the airport. Sasaengs are very dangerous and are not beneficial for anyone, not even the company.

- So, is a sasaeng the same as a hater?

No, look, a hater is someone who disrespects an idol online and insults them. But a sasaeng seriously stalks the idol and causes real harm."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, Sonia, 17-years-old, and Reihaneh, 21-years-old, mention in their interviews sasaeng fans who wish to kill the members of BTS:

- "Have they ever made unusual requests or asked specific questions?

These are sasaeng fans, meaning they are fans who love their idols so much that they show their affection in a way that causes the idols to suffer greatly. They are usually present in every K-pop group, and they cause harm to K-pop.

- What kind of fans are they?

For example, when BTS goes to the airport, they go in front of them naked or chase them to find out their home addresses, doing all sorts of dangerous things. Sometimes they even threaten them.

- What do they threaten with?

They threaten them by saying, ' yeah, I have obtained a lot of your personal information; if you don't come and meet me in person, I will release it.' Or sometimes, some BTS members have been threatened with a gun, saying, 'I will come to the concert and finish you off with a gun.'

"...There is a sasaeng fan known as the most dangerous K-pop sasaeng. He were a very extreme fan of EXO, and his original nickname is 'the idol killer.' he have tried to kill some idols several times, and when asked why they wanted to kill them, he said it was because they were rivals of EXO, and I wanted to free EXO from them."

- "Can you explain about sasaeng fans?

Sasaeng fans are those whose interest is very intense and unhealthy, and these strong feelings lead them to constantly try to attract the attention of the artist, get close to them, be aware of all their actions and movements, and invade the personal life of that artist, even putting their safety at risk. These individuals are few in number, and most of them are recognized after a while, and complaints are often filed against them by the artist and the company, and efforts are made to control them in any way possible.

- In these conflicts on Twitter and Instagram, what do fans usually do? Does this conflict remain limited to insults and negative comments, or are there worse actions?

Sometimes these conflicts target the idols themselves and cause psychological harm to the artist. Sometimes it even leads to threats against the artist, and of course, I should mention that these threats are never acted upon. However, even virtual threats are harmful and endanger the artist's safety. Like when Jimin was threatened with a gun and murder during one of the concert tours on Twitter, which created a lot of problems and disturbed many fans and even the BTS members themselves."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, in another part of her interview, mentions a female fan who divorced her husband to have a potential chance to marry her favorite idol:

- "Are the fans you mentioned who want to be with them the same ones who divorce their husbands?

Some of them, yes, but generally, these are usually among the most dangerous fans, and idols have no security from them at all.

- There are different types of fans, and as you said, these ones are dangerous.

Yes.

- Please tell me about them.

The name of these types of fans I mentioned is sasaeng fans.

Fereshteh and Mahtab, both 18-years-old, also describe other aspects of sasaeng fans in their interviews:

- What do you think about sasaeng fans or those individuals and fans who cause distress to the members?

Sasaeng fans are one of the most hated groups of people in the world because they are useless and idle individuals whose intention is to harass

idols. Some of them are crazy and mentally unstable because when you love someone excessively, you become obsessed, and you do anything for them. You seek attention, you harass them, and you completely lose your normal state. Some sasaeng fans are like this, they have such intense love and affection that they engage in crazy behaviors, sending sexual messages, harassing them psychologically, and sending disturbing messages - actions that make idols feel unsafe. For example, it has even been proven that BTS members received many calls from sasaeng fans because they knew what their phone numbers were, where their homes were, and where their locations were. They would call them to say things like, 'Yes, we have your number and we can bother you.' Some would even go to extreme lengths, for example, creating theories and rumors about them.

- What do these harassments mostly include?

They include sexual messages, sexual behaviors, psychological harassment, sending disturbing messages, and actions that make idols feel unsafe. For example, they might say, 'I know where you are right now, which hotel you're in, and what your room number is.' In that moment, the idol's mental state is shattered, as they feel they are under constant attack. And how can one be sure that this person, who has so much information, hasn't plotted a murder? This is why it causes not only the sasaeng fan, who seems to have been psychologically abused beforehand, to inflict psychological harm on others as well.

- Now that you mentioned these hardcore fans, I wanted to ask you about sasaeng fans. Who qualifies as a sasaeng fan?

Sasaeng in Korean means 'private life,' and sasaeng fan means 'fan of private life.' These are fans who dedicate all their life, money, and energy to obtain personal or confidential information about BTS. For example, they spend a lot of time and money to find out the seat number of one of the BTS members on a flight from one place to another so they can buy a seat next to them and talk to them during the flight. Because they are crazy and think that if they go and talk to their idol, the idol will fall in love with them, marry them, and they will live together and make children. It goes that far, and then they also sell information and make money this way.

- Do they really sell information, and do fans buy it from them?

Yes, there are some who buy it. For example, they want to know when their favorite idol will be passing by a certain place. Just recently, an Iranian sasaeng caused a disturbance for Taehyung at the airport, where they went

and put their camera in Taehyung's face and pulled his clothes, and of course, they quickly took him away and put him in a car.

- Does the company just sit back and let these sasaengs do these things?

No, the company also takes actions to stop these sasaengs. For example, one thing they do is identify sasaengs and no longer allow them to attend concerts. They put them on a blacklist. This Iranian woman also ended up on that blacklist after her actions, ruining whatever reputation Iran had. Or there was another sasaeng fan named Lin Yao [Lu Yao is correct], if I'm not mistaken, who once followed them at the airport without pants and tried to talk to them. This person became famous because they had come several times with various makeup styles trying to win the heart of one of them. I really don't know how they can do these things. Afterward, bodyguards are supposed to come and push them away, and the idols themselves are upset about this. There was also someone who once jumped over the barriers there and tried to forcibly kiss one of them. How can someone be so foolish and pathetic? The actions of these sasaengs really upset ARMYs. I just want to hit them."

- Toxic Group Identity

Toxic group identity refers to a collective identity characterized by denial, violence, aggression, and generally toxic interactions that are prioritized by the members of that group. The nature of the group is recognized through their inappropriate and unconventional behaviors. The primary factors contributing to the formation of toxic group identity include anonymity in the virtual space and the minimal threat faced by individuals engaging in such behavior. Secondary factors include the highly charged atmosphere of K-pop and the dominance of emotionally driven interactions within the BTS group. Together, these elements lead to fans who are either anonymous or have gathered around toxic identities related to BTS, engaging in aggressive, confrontational, and character-destroying group behaviors.

Pooneh, 18-years-old, and Marzieh, 19-years-old, have provided evidence of toxic group identity in their interviews:

- "Why were you voting on Twitter?"

There were a series of polls between different bands and groups organized by some famous American programs and radios. For example, between BTS fans and Blackpink or One Direction fans, or among various artists. Then we

would unite to vote for BTS to win. We had shifts. We would have three shifts: some from night to morning, some from morning to noon, and some from afternoon to night, and we always won. Other fandoms would get so frustrated and angry, cursing us and the boys, you wouldn't believe it. But we would ignore them and do our thing. A couple of times, there was a very intense fight between One Direction fans and ARMYs, and they would curse each other for days. But it ended, and the memories remained.

- What were most of the fights about?

Look, wherever you see BTS's name on Twitter, know that there's a drama and a fight going on. I'm not talking about international and local ARMYs, but in Iran, there's always been drama in the fandom. ARMYs have conflicts with Olivia Rodrigo fans over the Grammys.

Olivia won the Grammy, and many said it should have been BTS's. After the Grammy and Billboard incidents, they have been hating on this girl. They even mock her name, calling her "Olivieh¹," and have conflicts with One D fans over many things. For example, as I mentioned, during the voting, both fandoms would insult each other for a while. Of course, there are people who are fans of both One Direction and BTS, but they are not very many, or they argue about who the biggest boy band in the world is, BTS or One Direction. ARMYs say One Direction is gone and won't come back, and they start mocking. On the other hand, One Direction fans say that BTS is nothing compared to One Direction, and that One Direction was able to rise without much advertising. If they were around now, BTS wouldn't have anything to say. This is the conflict with One Direction fans.

Then the biggest enemy of BTS and ARMYs is Blackpink. I wish I could express in words the level of hatred and animosity ARMYs have towards the members of Blackpink. They have clashes in many issues together. For example, ARMYs say that Jennie is using Taehyung to elevate herself, or during several polls held in Korea, both fandoms clashed.

Aside from these fans, many Iranians on Twitter also hate BTS fans and the boys, and there isn't a day that they don't insult us and the boys. They genuinely hate the boys, and I'm sorry to say this, but they have often called the boys buggers and said things like this. They are buggers so this is why they wear makeup and look like girls, and they insult the fans a lot. The hatred that some Iranians have for BTS and ARMY is indescribable."

¹ They call her 'Olivieh' to ridicule her name and demonstrate their lack of respect

- "Dear, why did you dislike ARMYs? Can you tell me the reason?"

Because I had heard so much that ARMYs are fanatical, that they are 14 or 15-year-olds, and they are mostly in many groups and have a lot of friends. I had seen that when one of them had a problem with another or even with someone outside that group, they would put that person's ID in the group and tell their friends to go insult them and block and report them. I was so scared and didn't dare to talk to them; it wasn't that I was afraid, but I didn't want to see a flood of nonsense from them.

- Has this happened to you that one of the ARMYs put your ID in a group?

Not to me, but to my friend, yes. One of them had a conflict with my friend and did that, and I heard about it from my friend, and for a long time, I didn't like them until I got involved with them myself and changed my opinion...

- Marzieh, do you have a particular fanaticism towards the members of BTS?

Yes, I do (laughs). Well, having a fanaticism for an idol is something we all have, but to a certain extent.

- How much is that extent?

In my opinion, it's important not to be so fanatical that we harm others or even the fandom with our fanaticism and create a bad perception of ourselves. This fanaticism can lead to fights, hate, and breaking hearts. If I want to be fanatical, I would be fighting every day and jumping into other fandoms, which wouldn't give me peace. That's why I say okay; I have fanaticism, and I even have fanaticism for my family and friends. If someone hates them, I defend them and stand by them, and this applies to my love for BTS as well, but it's not like I would fight and pull hair. In the end, I would tell myself that this person understands this much, and do not argue with them more than that.

- So it's okay to that extent, and if it goes beyond that, it's problematic?

Uh-huh.

- How do fanatic fans behave?

They quickly block and report you, and they might even use vulgar insults. And, aha, one thing is that they don't just block you; they tell their friends and share your ID with others, leading to your account or Telegram page being destroyed. For this reason, you should never engage in discussions with them, as you receive a massive amount of negative messages that ruin

your peace. I myself am an ARMY, I don't dare to say anything to these individuals because the part of their brain that should understand and resolve issues through conversation is burnt out. I even have a fake account for this reason, so if I ever want to say something, I don't use my main account to avoid losing it.

- Are you afraid of receiving negative comments from this group?

Uh-huh (laughs).

Now imagine how much the idols suffer when they receive a lot of hate; it affects their mental health.

- Can you give me an example? Has there been a situation for you or your friends where there was a discussion with fanatic fans, and if so, what was the reason and topic?

Not for my friends, but I've seen some fans say that Taehyung is my husband and I will go to Korea one day and marry him. And if someone else makes a similar claim, they end up fighting over their future husband from the other side of the world?!

Or there are fanatic shippers who hate other ships and only accept the ship they support, and if it's anything else, it leads to the same cycle of hate and insults, like some women shippers or Taekook shippers who have a lot of conflicts among them."

Narges, 21-years-old, in her statements, while providing an example of toxic group identity, notes that the limitless aggression of the group she was part of had reached a point where she would lash out at any minor issue at home, and in her own words, she had become a "savage person":

- "What made you distance yourself from K-pop?

Well, after the entrance exam and going to university, that feeling of mine diminished a bit. There were some events that influenced my decision to not follow them anymore.

- What events?

I had an account on Twitter for a while and was in touch with other ARMY members. I used to tweet, and my main goal for installing Twitter was to share the dance videos I made to BTS songs with others and mention the official BTS account, hoping that one day they would see my videos. In the beginning, I didn't have much confidence, but one of my school friends encouraged me to definitely do it, and I did. My videos went viral among

ARMY members. I mean the Iranian fandom, not abroad. They liked it and kept encouraging me to post videos. After a while, I made some friends on Twitter and became close with them, and since our communication was virtual, I felt much more comfortable. In person, it's a bit hard for me, but overall, I didn't really like the Twitter environment. It was all about fights and conflicts, and since I wasn't feeling very good mentally, it actually made me feel worse.

- What were the fights about?

About everything. The Twitter space is very free and unlimited, where anyone can say whatever they want. They would easily insult each other. There were fights. Fans of different groups would come and clash with each other. They would argue about everything, and I, being a person, naturally got influenced by the atmosphere. After a while, I got caught up in these fights and events. You probably noticed that I was an extreme fan. At one point, I thought of Yoongi as solely mine. Imagine with such a background, I went into a Twitter space that was filled with extremism.

During that time on Twitter, I was really bothered. I mean, one of the reasons my interest in BTS decreased was the Twitter environment, which was no different from a zoo. Then my biggest mistake was that I went on Twitter and became friends with a group that was very toxic and extreme. This group was among the most extreme on Twitter. They were extremely biased and irrational, like blind people who accept nothing but what they want. They would insult artists other than BTS day and night and didn't consider anyone other than BTS worthy of success and progress. I became more biased by going on Twitter. I lost a bit of my logic too. It was enough for someone to say there are eyebrows above the BTS boys' eyes, and I would destroy that person. Now, this was in the virtual world. This aggression and bias affected my real life to the point that I was constantly angry at school and at home. I was always fighting with my mom; my little sister had just been born and was crying, and I would get angry. I had become like a savage animal. Those were really terrible days."

3-13- Transformation of Social Relationships of Fans

The K-pop scene is an excited space, and it seems that the atmosphere surrounding the BTS group within the K-pop groups is significantly more excited. This is due to the efforts of Big Hit Entertainment in emotionally processing BTS concerts and producing a multitude of exciting side programs

(such as Run BTS, Bon Voyage, BTS In The Soop, fan meetings, fan signs, Festa celebrations, and similar events). Additionally, the fans of BTS have entered the scene, creating pages, websites, and fan organizations (fandoms and base fandoms) to maximize their efforts in elevating their favorite music group in various music festivals. On the other hand, they feel obligated to confront and even engage in conflict with potential critics and haters who, in their search for identity, have attempted to latch onto this group or that group to establish a sense of self.

Therefore, it seems that the involvement of teenage and young fans in this environment primarily facilitates social relationships among like-minded supporters and, secondarily, restricts social interactions between BTS fans and non-fans, and at a higher level, critics of BTS.

Sana, a 16-years-old, notes in her interview that her fan organization and her friends at school have passed a rule stating, "If a fan does not like all seven members of BTS, she is a traitor!" In other words, some fans, by establishing regulations based on their love for BTS, personally rush to either facilitate or restrict their social relationships with others:

- "Why can't you express your interest?

Because they say anyone who only likes one of the idols is betraying the group.

- So you mean a loyal fan must like all the members of the group?

Yes, let me put it this way: we formed a BTS fan group at school, and Sara the Savage is the leader of the group.

- So you have a fandom at school?

Yes, and this fandom has rules like other fandoms. The most important rule of our fandom is that no one is allowed to like a specific idol and must like all of them equally.

- But if that's the case, you will be considered a traitor.

Yes, but I don't think of it that way. I said that because you asked what the opinions of my other friends are. The rest of my friends, except for one or two, are much worse than me. Besides Sara, no one has the right to set rules.

- Why don't you leave the fandom?

One out of fear of Sara, and one because I am helping BTS.

- What help?

We formed a group for BTS and are recruiting members, and our group has just started to grow.

- Even if this commitment to the group leads you toward humiliation?

I have been humiliated so far; I have endured it so I will endure this one too. Every ideal has its own troubles.

Nikoo, 15-years-old, and Parinaz, 18-years-old, in their separate interviews, have stated that based on the criterion of love for BTS, they choose their friends and organize their social interactions:

- Do you think BTS has made it easier for you to find friends?

Yes, absolutely, especially at our age, this is very common, and I found my best friend this way. For example, when you go somewhere and see someone has a BTS bag, you go up and ask if she is a BTS fan, and she say yes, and you become friends over that. I have found many of my friends this way, both in language class and in school, which is a lot, and also in outside remedial classes."

"If all these ARMYs, whether shippers or non-shippers, whether fanatical or non-fanatical, if they all realize that BTS has a problem, if they understand that something is causing distress to the members, they have such unity that I can say it can be scary for anyone. ARMYs consider each other family; if you see an ARMY somewhere and both are ARMYs, they have such intimacy that it feels like they are siblings, and that unity is very beautiful."

Contrary to the facilitation that supporting BTS creates in establishing social relationships among BTS fans, a lack of support and, at a higher level, criticism of BTS disrupts the social relationships of BTS fans with others and provides grounds for restricting them. In the latter case, it is expected that if the fans are younger, their emotional reactions will be more intense, and as they age, their opposing reactions will be less severe. For example, Elnaz, 12-years-old, stated in her interview that during a discussion with opposing individuals, she even resorted to hating them, while Sana, 16-years-old, labels anyone who is not aligned with her as an extremist and admits to cursing at critics of BTS. In contrast, Shabnam, 25-years-old, in a milder reaction, refuses to maintain social relations with them simply because, in her view, there is judgment behind the critics of BTS.

- "Has there ever been a time when you stopped following a certain singer because they insulted BTS?

Yes, some people have come and given them hate and treated them badly; I felt like that person was dead to me.

- Has this ever happened with your friends as well, where they have given hate?

Yes, it has happened, and I cut off contact with them.

- Do the rest of your friends who are ARMYs do the same?

Yes, they are like that too...

- As an ARMY, have you ever had to argue or fight with someone because of your fandom?

Yes, there have been many people who said things like, "What's with these Chinese people, why are you following them, what do they have that Iranians don't? I had to argue and fight with them, and it really stressed me out.

- Can you give an example of arguments you've had so far?

Well, one of my relatives, when I told her I like Korean singers, from that point on, she calls me a dirty Korean, and whenever I try to convince her that they are good, it feels like I'm talking to a wall.

- So, do these kinds of situations make you upset?

Yes, exactly.

- Would you like to cut off contact with that relative?

Yes, but since she is close, it's not possible.

- Well, regarding the discussions you've had, aside from that topic, do you do the same thing when discussing anything else?

Yes, I approach discussions the same way as I do with BTS, and even if I get really angry, I might hit someone."

- "Is anyone who disagrees with you extreme?

Exactly, because I'm not extreme; anyone who is not on my side is extreme.

- Have you ever cut off a relationship with someone over this issue?

Yes, I had a falling out with my cousin. She insulted Jimin, and I insulted her favorite idol, and then we didn't talk for a few weeks until my aunt and mom made us reconcile.

- Has there been another instance like this?

One of my friends used to really like BTS, but now she doesn't care much.

- Why did your relationship end?

She said nonsense about Jimin, and I ended up arguing with her.

- What did she say?

She said Jimin looks like a monkey, and I said, "You look like a monkey, why are you insulting? The rest of our conversation was too rude to repeat (laughs).

- Do you two talk now?

Yes, we talk, but not about BTS because we end up arguing. She has become arrogant; she used to really like BTS, but suddenly her opinion changed, and I don't like people who keep changing their stance.

- So, no one has the right to change their opinion?

I don't know. Can we drop this topic? (laughs)."

- "Well, don't you think this issue causes you to distance yourself from real people, and isn't it a heavy cost that you are paying again for this interest?

Well, if people respect each other's opinions, this wouldn't happen. The important thing is that they don't respect my opinions.

- Aside from those who mock or insult, what about others who ask you questions with no disrespect in their goal or behavior? In fact they are expressing their own opinions, which differ from yours.

Maybe. But even they have judgment behind their words, tone, and looks. There's a condescending look, and that bothers me.

- Don't you show that same condescending look to them by ignoring or reacting harshly or rejecting them?

Um... Yes. This bias may have caused me to isolate myself in many places and distance myself from people who don't think like me."

Ehsan, 17-years-old, influenced by the less emotional reactions of men, admits in his interview that his relationship with classmates who criticize BTS has somewhat deteriorated, but due to the value of those individuals, he hasn't completely cut them off:

- "How is your relationship with your other friends who are against BTS?

They argue with me every day and try to dissuade me from being a BTS fan. They make their efforts, but it remains fruitless. That's why we see each other less, except at school.

- How do they try to dissuade you?

They talk about the bad things and flaws of BTS. They mention sexual deviance and homosexuality in the group. They talk about BTS being feminine and androgynous.

- What is your reaction?

I don't believe the accusations they make against BTS. Most people in Korea are skinny and have no facial hair, and their faces look like girls; there's no reason for them not to be masculine and to label them with homosexuality. That's why I try to interact with them less. But I won't lose my valuable and educated friends."

3-14- Feeling Committed to Supporting the Group

- "So, Mohammad Reza, have you participated in streaming and supporting activities?

I was really a streamer for a while (with great excitement), a professional streamer. I was very active in streaming; I was following them 24 hours a day. Because I didn't have much to do before, I supported them a lot. As for streaming, don't even ask (laughs). I was just waiting for them to release something so I could support it (laughs)." (Mohammad Reza, 21-years-old).

BTS fans often view the group with a sense of gratitude and appreciation because BTS has addressed issues relevant to teenagers and young adults, sometimes appearing as a hopeful and motivating reference for youth. They show acceptance towards teenagers and young adults without judgment, and in return, fans strive to express their gratitude through their support.

The interviewed fans described how they show their support through various actions, such as listening to BTS songs to boost their global rankings (streaming), voting for BTS in various music festivals, voting for live events, trying to break existing records on social media (like the fastest time to reach one million likes, the highest views on posts, the most followers, etc.), buying albums, photobooks, electronic light sticks, and other BTS-related merchandise, celebrating the idols' birthdays among themselves, holding gatherings to discuss

the group members, and other activities like surprising the idols or creating human chains at airports to facilitate the idols' movements.

Golnoosh, 14-years-old, mentioned the necessity of repaying BTS in her interview, while Banafsheh, 20-years-old, noted that BTS's songs have given her hope during a time of great pressure, emphasizing the importance of appreciating the group:

- "I'm curious to know what BTS has done that you love them so much and that they matter to you enough to fight with others over them?"

We don't just love BTS; they love us just as much. Otherwise, they wouldn't be singing so many songs for us or spending so much time on their pages for ARMYs. The only reason they fight and keep going is their love for us ARMYs. Just as they motivate us, we motivate them."

- "Can you explain how they helped improve your emotions?"

Honestly, I wasn't okay mentally in the tenth grade. I was in a situation where I didn't care about myself, didn't care about others' opinions, and didn't like the circumstances I was in. I couldn't tolerate it, and it wasn't an interesting position for me because it wasn't what I wanted, I wasn't doing what I wanted to do. In all these problems I had, in the second half of the tenth grade, after December, we found out that my mom has cancer. My situation has become much worse because my parents were busy with treatment, and it was just my sister and me. I had to handle my sister, and it was a really tough situation for me. Really bad. I was under so much pressure that I did things that, looking back now, really upset me. I even started smoking, and now when I think about it, I feel sad. I thought that when tenth grade ended and I went to eleventh grade, I would be okay. During the summer before eleventh grade, I got to know BTS, listened to their songs, and read meaning of their lyrics. Their words were interesting to me, like when they said to love yourself or that it doesn't matter what you're doing or what your past is; what matters is what you're doing now. There was something Jimin said: even if no one understands you, know that someone in South Korea always understands you. That had a huge impact on me, and there were many other words, not just these. Other things stood out to me, those days passed and I continued smoking until twelfth grade. In twelfth grade, I worked a lot on myself, and I quit smoking because of one of the members. Now it's been two years since I haven't smoked at all."

Sayeh, 21, distinguished between the terms "fan" and "ARMY" in her interview, viewing a fan as an ordinary supporter, while an ARMY (as the name suggests) is seen as a protective army for BTS:

- "Is a fan the same as an ARMY, or are there differences?

No, no, an ARMY is much more radical.

- What characteristics does an ARMY have that a fan doesn't?

Let me give you an example. Before I became an ARMY of BTS, I was a fan of Michael Jackson from ages 4 to 5 until I was about 9 or 10. Then I became a fan of Katy Perry, then of Sirvan Khosravi, and then I became a fan of BTS. But during all those previous periods, it wasn't necessarily a big part of my life. I was more like, "Yeah, they have nice songs or beautiful music videos," and that was all about it, while it's not like that at all for BTS."

18-years-old Taranom also states in this regard:

- "Do you know the meaning of the name BTS and ARMY and why these names were given to them?

BTS stands for Bangtan Sonyeondan, meaning 'Bulletproof Boys,' and ARMY means 'Army.' The theory behind these two names is that BTS and their ARMY are bulletproof, and when haters attack BTS, the ARMY defends them. Similarly, when the ARMY faces hate, BTS defends us. In the photo concept¹ of their last album, there is a picture where they are hit by bullets, and the bullets have fallen to the ground, which perfectly illustrates the meaning of their names. Once, an American celebrity said that ARMYs are wild, and then Namjoon replied to that celebrity that our ARMYs are very smart; when they realize someone wants to insult us or upset us with their words, they defend us, just as we do for them. In fact the main theory is that all ARMYs face hardships in their lives like any ordinary person, and some get tired of fighting these hardships and feel hatred towards themselves and feel inferior due to the words of people around them. However, ARMYs, with the help of BTS and their idols, can defend their rights. They learn that before anything else, they must see themselves and learn to love themselves."

¹ The word 'concept' refers to a general idea of something. It is usually mentioned when an album by a star or group is released. For example, the concept of a group's album can be dark, cute, attractive, or girl crush, and the photos taken with that overall theme are referred to as 'photo concept'

Masoud, 20-years-old mentions the 65 million Instagram followers of BTS, which, along with their followers on Twitter and other social media, paints a picture of the vast number of BTS fans:

- "One of the reasons for BTS's success has been their extensive advertising role. What do you think about this?

The members of BTS know very well how to use social media to their advantage. This group has been very active on Twitter and has been in contact with their fans from the very beginning. They have over 65 million followers on Instagram, and their fans feel a duty to promote the group, each in their own way and by any means they can."

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, also mentions in an interview about fans who have become immersed in supporting their favorite group and, in this process, have even suffered from academic decline, financial loss, or even physical harm:

- "Were you able to manage this part of your life well, or do you know someone who couldn't?

I think I managed it well. The K-pop world is very vast and full of color, excitement, and diversity, and if you don't have control over it, it can completely engulf you. Personally, I don't have an inherently impulsive, emotional, or diversified personality, and I can maintain the boundaries I set for myself. What else can I say... Each person's boundaries differ based on their logic. According to my criteria and mental limits, yes, there are people who, considering my red lines, I feel may have gone too far.

- Can you say what you consider to be overdoing or going too far?

Unnecessary dependencies on the singer. Excessive daydreaming and forgetting the real conditions the person is in. Neglecting ordinary and daily life matters. Performing poorly in studies and learning and other responsibilities. Financial or physical harm due to uncontrolled and emotionally impulsive time investments. All of these stem from excessive interest, diversity orienting, and a lack of planning in each person's life."

The BTS fan army, in a part of their supportive activities, strives to break new records or improve previous view records by listening to new (or old) BTS songs. Therefore, members of this army try to stream on various platforms (such as Spotify, SoundCloud, YouTube, etc.) to set new records for BTS. As a result, some fans feel obligated to listen to the desired song dozens or hundreds of times instead of just once to increase its view count. 25-years-old Kowsar mentioned in her interview that she spends 5-6 hours a day streaming, while 18-

years-old Raha talks about fans who go without sleep for 48 hours to stream, and 18-years-old Taranom reports that to increase her stream counts, she streams using her phone, tablet, laptop, her grandmother's phone, and any device that connects to the internet, even involving her grandmother to help her increase her streams:

- "Uh-huh. Now a question about yourself. When you were a huge fan of BTS, for example, how much time did you spend during the day following them or trying to increase their view rates?

I think, um... it depends. For example, in those early years when I had just gotten to know them and hadn't established a deep connection with them yet, I might have listened to their songs for about one or two hours a day at most. Just like now, I listen to their songs for one or two hours a day. It was like that. But after a year or two, when I established that deep connection with them and felt that their presence in my life had improved the quality of my life and increased my hope for life, I felt like someone was taking care of me. Especially after that song about self-love, 'Love Yourself,' I felt that I loved myself much more after that album; it had that effect on me. I felt like I wanted to give back the goodness and the good feelings I received from them. So, I started to stream, to increase the view rate and at that time, it might have taken about five or six hours of my day.

- Uh-huh. After how long did it become this much...?

I became engaged with them around 2014, and I was very involved until 2018. Then gradually, it decreased. The older I got, it seemed like I started to look at things with a more mature perspective, and my distance from them increased a bit. But my love for them didn't decrease. I just felt that I had done what I needed to do. Just as much as I received good feelings, I also gave back good feelings."

- "I used to see some fan pages that would set times to stay awake and stream until a certain hour. Is there anything like that among your K-pop friends?

Those people are idle; so they do these things. I'm not idle. I don't have time. Thank God, there's nothing like that among my friends.

- Are there many of these people among fandoms?

Yes, there are a lot. Many people do this. For example, someone might not sleep for 48 hours. They stream¹ simultaneously with several accounts and phones and computers. It's ridiculous (laughs)."

- "You said you also spend time streaming; please tell me about the conditions for streaming.

Yes, I stream. When I don't have important work, I sit and watch their new music videos that have been released on YouTube. When I have work, I play their songs and listen to a playlist I prepared in advance. Even at night when I sleep, I turn on the music and listen with headphones. When I have no work at all, I sit and stream with my phone, my grandmother's phone, the computer, the tablet, the laptop - basically with any device that connects to the internet and is at my disposal. It has even come to the point where my grandmother helps me; for example, when I open the music video on both our phones, I let her watch one of them. She sits and accompanies me. The conditions are that you have to watch the video in full screen; you shouldn't watch it in a playlist. You have to click on an option at the top of the YouTube page. After each video, it automatically plays another video, and you have to turn that off. You have to watch the video with the sound on; of course, you can use headphones, but the volume has to be above half. You have to search for the name each time and not watch it anywhere else except the Bangtan TV channel. By the way, your YouTube account has to be linked to your email. The video has to play for at least about 5 minutes before you like it, and the screen brightness has to be above 15, and the quality above 380. If you follow all these rules, you can stream a million times with one account, but if you fail to follow even one of them, it won't count as a stream. There's also one more thing: between every 10 times you watch a video, you have to watch another video from different channels so that YouTube doesn't think you're a bot. If this happens, it will delete 100 streams. The first day is very important for streaming; if the song ranks first

¹ The round-the-clock efforts of Iranian fans to stream are taking place amid concerns that the streaming activities of Iranians are not being counted due to Iran's sanctions. In her interview, 15-year-old Sahar mentioned this point:

- How much time do you usually spend streaming?

To be honest, I personally spend one minute. I don't even stand to watch a complete three-minute music video. I'm quite the rule-breaker; I go on YouTube, copy the link, and download their new video. Because my internet is weak, it frustrates me when it keeps cutting out, so I download it to watch it comfortably. Maybe I won't even stream at all. I really want to stream for them, but in the streaming statistics that their company showed, Iran wasn't included, and I thought to myself, why should we put in all this effort when they don't even mention our name because of a few ridiculous sanctions? That's why I said I won't do this anymore. Of course, the members of BTS have mentioned Iran several times; for example, Jimin once said he loves Iran. Overall, the members themselves are not like that, but their company doesn't count the streams from Iran due to the sanctions, so I don't invest my time in it

on the first day, YouTube will recommend the video to everyone in the world to watch, and this way, everyone sees it, and the music video becomes more popular and gets nominated for awards in voting."

14-years-old Gelareh also mentions in her interview that she plays her desired songs while managing her own work so that she doesn't fall behind in her own tasks while streaming BTS songs.

"You know, streaming has certain conditions, for example, the sound shouldn't be below a certain level, because then it won't count as a stream. The people I know are careful about this; they always make sure to turn the volume up, or many times they just leave their phone to play the song or music video, and then they go do their own tasks, and this is just to ensure that the stream definitely happens (laughs)."

Zahra, 24-years-old- mentioned streaming for live events, and 18-years-old Raha talked about participating in voting for various music festivals for the BTS group:

- "How does streaming work?

When BTS releases a new song, fans support that song on various platforms, like YouTube, Spotify, and SoundCloud. Each fan listens to the song multiple times to increase the view count. Of course, it's not just about the songs; it can be about anything. For example, when they post on Twitter or Instagram, fans go and like and comment to set records for likes and comments for BTS. The same goes for live events. There's streaming for all the content the group shares.

- Do you have a fan page for K-pop?

I'm on Twitter, but I don't have a fan page. I've never had one.

- So how do you support your idols on Twitter?

Each fandom is different from another. For example, ARMYs are constantly voting or trending hashtags for various things. They are also voting on Twitter because it's the end-of-year awards season. Someone tweets and says, 'Reply with this hashtag for voting,' and so on. That's how it is. Of course, other groups aren't as famous as BTS.

- Does voting have an impact?

Just like the American Music Awards, Billboard, and Grammy and some other events, Korea also has its own awards, like MAMA¹, Melon², and another one that I can't remember right now, along with a few others. But the main ones are MAMA and Melon. Then there's another one that as I said I can't recall. Well, for these, some of the voting is done by the fans on Twitter. They vote. Some are chosen by judges. Those on Twitter are the ones we vote for.

- So do you participate in that?

I'm not as serious about it as many others are. Because some people take the voting issue very seriously, and they don't consider anyone who doesn't do these things a fan. I used to think that way when I was younger - that anyone who didn't do this wasn't a fan. But now, I gradually see that it's not just about these things. No, I'm not serious enough to dedicate my whole life to Twitter. But yes, for example, if we're supposed to vote once a day, then it's just one tweet. It doesn't take much. We can take five minutes to tweet and then get back to our lives (laughs)."

16-years-old Ghazal, in her interview, mentions the efforts of other fans to set records such as the fastest one million likes or the highest view count for posts or live streams:

"... Now they've come to Instagram for a few days. They have their updates on Instagram.

- So they weren't on Instagram until now?

No, they weren't on Instagram (laughs). Look, they suddenly attacked. They came to Instagram (excitedly), and on that same day, they broke many Instagram records. You see, the day the boys joined, the Guinness page on Twitter came and said, 'BTS has arrived,' and even posted a GIF to indicate that. The Guinness staff was busy recording records that day. Then they broke the record for the fastest one million likes, which was previously held by Billie Eilish... in just four minutes. They got one million likes. Then in less than an hour, their account reached one million. They broke the record for the most likes on a comment. They shattered several records that were previously held by other Hollywood celebrities. Now they've been here for a few days. They have 26 or 27 million [followers] (laughs). The other

¹ MAMA is one of the important music award ceremonies in South Korea, which is currently broadcast internationally.

² Melon Music Awards is a famous music program in South Korea, recognized as the sole calculator of digital sales and online votes to determine the winners.

members also broke follower records. All seven of them. But Taehyung broke more records than the others."

Zahra, 24-years-old, in her interview, mentions people who buy BTS albums in dollars to support their favorite group. Reihaneh, 17-years-old, talks about fans celebrating birthdays for their idols, and 13-years-old Negin mentions organizing gatherings centered around BTS with her friends:

- "In your opinion, how impactful is BTS?

I don't consider myself a big fan; I'm quite ordinary, but I've seen a strong interest in this group among my friends, like their continuous streaming, buying albums in dollars to support, and other things like that. That's why I say their impact and attraction are extremely high."

- "My dear, I saw on your page that you celebrated a birthday for one of the members. Even though they are not here with you, can you tell me why you do this?

I didn't celebrate it myself; the kids who are follower of the page sent it, and I shared it in my story. But it really depends on the person; some pay more attention to their bias. It often happens that ARMYs, especially those who are abroad, want to celebrate the members' birthdays and gather together for the occasion."

- "What app do you use to communicate?

Right now, since there's no internet, we use Google Meet, but normally we were on WhatsApp.

- What do you talk about during that one hour?

We talk about our day, how our week went, how we feel, what we're upset about, what makes us happy, things like that.

- I thought maybe you talk about the person whose birthday it is? One-shots and such matters.

No, you see, one-shots aren't a topic we discuss because everyone has their own taste in one-shots, and it's different for each person, so it's not something we want to talk about. But we do talk about the members themselves, about the person whose birthday it is.

- For example, what do you talk about?

We say we're happy it's their birthday, do you remember when he did this or that at a certain time, do you remember that birthday of him, or the members did this for him, things like that."

16-years-old Rokhsareh and 20-years-old Baran talked about other actions taken by Korean fans, who, due to their proximity to the BTS group, have access to some special activities:

- "... What else do you think ARMYs do in relation to the idols?

ARMYs surprise BTS during concerts.

- How?

For example, during one of the concerts, there were seven seats on stage, and BTS was sitting in those seven seats and was about to start. The backstage was dark, and the ARMYs were coordinated with someone who organized the group. The backstage was completely black, there was no light during the concert, and they were sitting on stage ready to start. Suddenly, the stage lit up, and behind the curtain, there were a lot of images, mostly of ARMYs, that were put together, showing that the ARMYs were singing for them. They were really surprised."

There was even an incident, which is a bit old now, and I don't remember it very well, but I think it was at the airport where the ARMYs made a purple ribbon for BTS to pass through easily without being disturbed and without anyone attacking them for photos and autographs and etc.

3-15- Efforts to Increase the numbers of Fans

The BTS group has attracted a significant number of fans. Some fans are drawn to the group for superficial reasons, such as the idols' looks, makeup, and fashion, while others have more serious reasons, such as the change the group has brought to their perspectives on surrounding issues.

The examination of the opinions of more serious fans indicates that these supporters often feel obligated to support the BTS boys, as the group has brought a new perspective to their lives, giving it a fresh color, and in this way, they seek to repay their debt to the BTS group.

Earlier, some of the actions taken by fans, such as streaming, voting for the group in various music festivals, and efforts to enhance the idols' records in the virtual space (number of followers, viewers, participants in live streams, etc.), were mentioned.

BTS fans, in another aspect of their support for their favorite group, have made it a priority to increase the number of fans and are actively working to increase the number of BTS supporters both directly and indirectly.

These individuals often start their efforts with their families, then invite friends, classmates, and relatives to support BTS, and ultimately, to encourage the community to support the group, they try to indirectly persuade others to join BTS by showcasing the fan army in front of them.

Negin, 13-years-old, in her interview, pointed out that she is trying to convert her family members into ARMYs to increase the fan base of BTS:

"... My friend's whole family is ARMY; her mother, father, brother, and sister are all ARMY.

- How did the whole family become ARMY?

Some families are quite open-minded about everything, and gradually they watched the shows together on Namava. At that time, not all family members were familiar with the group, but they were watching the shows, laughing, or the meanings of their songs were such that when the parents heard them and didn't just focus on their appearance, they realized that they are really good people and do a lot of good things, so the whole family became ARMY.

- How do other families react?

I talk to my mommy and dad about them; they know the idols, they know how I dress and what I wear, but they always want to say something negative about them. But almost all of our moms know them. They've seen how interested we are, and whenever we have a chance, we watch something about them, so they've become familiar. I think now most moms cooperate to some extent, meaning they don't mind how we dress or the things we buy or the photos we hang in our rooms, or for example, when they didn't still lose their minds, they watch a video with us. We're more comfortable now, although some still keep it hidden from their families. Now families don't have a problem with you liking them [BTS]; you just have to make sure it doesn't interfere with your work and life. My dad isn't really into music, but when I showed my mom a song with subtitles, she liked it; she finally understood what I meant by the meaning of the song. Overall, my parents don't have a problem with me being a fan of someone. One of my friends called me and said that Blackpink will have a concert in Dubai, and my dad said, 'Do you want to go?' Now we've planned to go together.

In general, I think the problems families have had over the years have decreased.

- Do parents themselves become ARMY?

In Iran, many parents haven't become ARMY yet, but abroad, it's quite common.

- How do you know this?

For example, there's a video (laughs) where a mother is going to a BTS concert and forces her child to take her to the airport to make it to the concert in time."

Fereshteh, 18-years-old, in her interview, notes that she cleverly finds common ground between those around her and BTS, focusing on these shared interests to engage indifferent individuals with the group:

- "What explanation would you give about BTS?

Well, when I show them a music video or the relevant video, they realize the group's talent themselves (laughs), and I have a way of influencing others, like pointing out interests or commonalities between that person and BTS, or I try to remind them of things about BTS that might change their opinion, like what? That is their leader, he could learn English in a year, or for instance they read books, or for example, my dad's favorite director is Christopher Nolan, and I connect these dots. How? The favorite director of Suga is Christopher Nolan; he has seen all his movies. This way, for example, my dad realizes that their movie-watching style is high-level or that they somewhat share the same views. In fact, I touch on their weaknesses, just a little trickery and clever (laughs)."

Elnaz, 12-years-old, mentions her efforts to turn her sister and classmates into ARMYs in her interview. Masoud, 20-years-old, and Shirin, 22-years-old, also talk about their attempts to encourage classmates and relatives to support BTS:

- "Is there anyone in your family who is an ARMY like you?

I'm turning my sister into an ARMY, and now she's a new ARMY.

- Well, how did you turn her into an ARMY?

I made her an ARMY by showing her BTS videos and photos.

- Besides your sister, have you turned anyone else into an ARMY?

Well, I used to attend an English class where there was a girl in my class whom I turned into an ARMY.

- How did you turn her into an ARMY?

I told her about BTS; she didn't know them, but when I mentioned them, she went and searched for them and became an ARMY."

- "Masoud, didn't you try to introduce BTS to others?

Yes, I did this a lot. When I was in my second year of high school, I introduced BTS to my friends and classmates, and later when I entered the job market, I found new friends and introduced BTS to them as well. When we went to our hometown during the New Year holidays, we introduced BTS to our cousins and relatives. When I say we did this, I mean we were promoting BTS as a family. For example, my sisters would tell the girls in the family, and my brother and I would introduce BTS to the boys in the family.

- Why did you promote BTS so much?

Our family's familiarity with BTS allowed us to have joyful moments amidst the despair, loneliness, and alienation, and we felt a sense of responsibility towards each other without feeling ashamed of doing anything. BTS taught me the feeling of helping and respecting parents and elders. So, in return for all the kindness from BTS, as a fan, I feel it's my duty to introduce BTS to others so that they can have more fans and others can experience my feelings.

- How did you feel about promoting BTS?

I felt good, a sense of responsibility, sense of reciprocity and I considered it my duty to pay homage to the group.

- Did you also try to introduce BTS to your friends?

After I became fully acquainted with BTS to the point where I was convinced that I knew them well and loved them, I introduced the group to my classmates and relatives, and I was somewhat successful in this regard.

- What was the reaction of your friends and classmates?

When they saw the members of BTS for the first time, they really liked them. When we played their songs together, we had a lot of fun, and out of a class of 25, about ten people liked BTS and kept up with their new songs and videos."

Fans of BTS, in another effort to encourage others to lean towards the group, have tried to draw the attention of non-fans by displaying symbols and emblems of BTS in society.

Negin, 13-years-old, mentioned the actions of Korean fans wearing purple shoes (the color of BTS), and Reihaneh, 15-years-old, talked about her friends' insistence on using BTS merchandise. In her report, Reihaneh emphasizes that her fan friends have pointed out that anyone who doesn't use BTS-related items is not a true ARMY and is just pretending:

- "You said the ARMYs agreed to wear purple shoes?

Now, they wearing them, anyone living in Korea and is wearing them is an army; it's become a thing that it's very nice for anyone to wear purple shoes, meaning they are waiting for something, of course in Korea, not in Iran.

- What are they waiting for?

They are waiting for the two-year military service of the BTS members to end."

"... I just followed that page; I haven't ordered anything from it yet, but I saw some photo cards. You can get a photo of any of the BTS members you want, and you can order it and make a phone case with it. I want to order with Jimin's photo. Then, something interesting is that each of the idols has his own special lip balm, for example, one type is for Jimin, one for Jungkook, and you can order it, and they will send it to you. It's German. There are also some necklaces with the names of the idols on them; if you like any of them, you wear it around your neck. My friends bought them; they say anyone who is a fan of BTS in our group must buy it; otherwise, it shows they are just pretending to be fans

- So your friends consider wearing BTS necklaces a sign of being a true BTS fan?

Yes, I have to buy one too. I want to get Jimin's. My friends even bought BTS bags and stickers. Fatemeh says if someone doesn't have these, they should leave the group. I once told my mom that I need to buy one, and she said you have a bag you just bought it, its new. I ended up arguing with my friends over that bag. I promised I would buy it next year.

- Well, if you don't buy it, will they kick you out?

Yes, it might happen.

- So just because you didn't buy the BTS bag?

Well, they say it's a sign of a true ARMY. Anyone who isn't a true ARMY gets kicked out of their group. Even if it's someone's birthday, they go out and celebrate together and get a cake. They have most of their merchandise too.

- Do they buy from the same page you mentioned?

Yes."

Maryam, 18-years-old, recalls a recent phenomenon called "the trend of being a K-Popper among teenagers".

Indirect promotion of BTS is another aspect observed in encouraging people to engage with the group.

Since classmates often form peer groups, fan individuals directly and indirectly compel non-fans to align with the group. Therefore, some interviewees noted that the indirect pressure from friends, along with the environment created by friends regarding BTS in class and school, encouraged them to become fans:

- "Since when did you become familiar with K-Pop groups?

I got linked to Blackpink when I was 10 and stayed linked until I was 12, but then one of my friends started talking about BTS and introduced them to me. At first, I didn't know what BTS was and didn't think it was like Blackpink; I just thought they had more members and were boys, not girls. Well, my friends usually do something that makes you feel compelled to go towards something" (Negin, 13-years-old).

- "What made you more attracted to BTS than other K-Pop groups?

First, I got to know them before anyone else, and they were the group that introduced me to all of K-Pop. Then, when I became a K-Popper, BTS was the most famous and popular K-Pop group. Their name was very bold among my friends and in school, and they were talked about more than anyone else" (Hadis, 14-years-old).

- "Dear, what made you a fan of BTS?

Well, I was 15 and going to school. At school I would see that before the teacher came in, the kids would write BTS songs on the board in Korean. I mean, in fact they knew their language, but I didn't. They would say it was their song, and after their concert, they would talk about it all the time. Until then, I only knew their name, which I had heard occasionally, but I didn't know them at all, and I hadn't seen their songs or even them. When I saw how much the kids were fans of them, I said I would go watch their clips to

see who they were. Then I went to their fan pages on Instagram, and they had snippets of their songs and concerts. I watched a few of them, but I don't remember which songs they were. Gradually, I felt, yeah, they are so cool. Then I found the rest of their songs and listened to them, but to be fair, I was initially attracted to them more because of their appearance. I thought their songs were nice, but their cute looks and colorful hair attracted me, and that's how my interest in them started.

I gradually started watching their concert songs; of course, the kids also played a role in encouraging me to become a fan. They would bring their phones to school, and during breaks, we would watch them together, and they even sang along because they had learned their language, and I learned little by little alongside them. Of course, I kept repeating the rhythm and pronunciation of their songs at home until I gradually learned their language, albeit in a broken way, not completely" (Shaghayegh, 19-years-old).

Another new phenomenon observed with the expansion of social media and advancements in artificial intelligence in this area is the use of content related to BTS by fans on platforms like Instagram.

Since Instagram's Explore feature operates based on artificial intelligence, it sends content related to BTS to a third party (who is not a BTS fan) based on the fact that the user's friends are engaging with BTS content (because their friends are users of this content, and according to the logic of artificial intelligence, they should logically show interest in this group like their friends). The exposure of non-fans to the suggested content on Instagram's Explore may lead to their interest and inclination towards the BTS boy group.

Saba, 16-years-old, reports in her interview that the Explore feature brought her so many similar posts due to her friends' engagement with BTS posts that she eventually became interested in the group:

- "So how did you get to know BTS?

Well, I can say I became familiar with them at school about two years ago. My acquaintance was like this: there were a few kids at school who followed them and sometimes talked about them during breaks or brought their phones and listened to their songs in class. This made me get a general acquaintance with them, but the way I became a fan was that I was scrolling through Instagram, and in the Explore section, since the kids were liking their posts, their posts would come up for me too, whether it was a clip or a photo of them. I would catch sight of their faces, and I thought they looked really adorable with their colorful hair (laughs), and they reminded me of

cartoon characters. Then gradually, their photos kept coming up, and I would see them, and sometimes I would go to their fan pages and follow their other stuff, like their clips or concerts. That's how I gradually followed their fans and became a K-Popper."

3-16- Fanaticism in Fandom

Field findings gathered through interviews indicate that there is extreme fanaticism among notable segments of BTS fans, especially among younger fans.

From the emotional atmosphere created by the company, the emotional interactions of BTS members, the emotional responses of fans, and the formation of imaginary love among a significant number of fans towards idols, as well as the overall emotional behaviors of teenagers and young adults, it can be expected that the interaction of fans with BTS results in more of a blind and fanatical fandom rather than a logical one.

Big Hit Entertainment has transformed the K-Pop music industry into an entertainment industry and designed a plethora of entertaining, comedy, and exciting programs, effectively creating a highly charged environment for BTS.

The idols of BTS also create an emotional and passionate atmosphere between themselves and their fans through their slogan-like support (slogans such as "If someone doesn't pay attention to you, know that someone in Seoul is thinking of you," "We love you and adore you," "Always feel us behind you," and similar phrases) and amplify this excitement with performances filled with lighting and dance.

As previously mentioned regarding imaginary love, the young, newly-matured mind is ready to experience love, and with the discovery of appealing, smiling, friendly, and kind idols, love between fans (especially girls) and idols easily forms, and girls may hold onto the passionate love they feel for idols in their minds for years.

The emotional interactions of fan groups in denying other rival groups and affirming BTS, participating in fan wars, streaming BTS songs, voting for idols in various festivals, and trying to increase likes on posts and views of individual and group live streams of BTS members, among other activities, heighten the excitement in the scene.

Ultimately, the characteristics of the emotional and highly emotional behaviors of teenagers, whose emotional centers in the brain develop faster than their

cognitive centers, play a significant role in intensifying the fanatical behaviors of fans.

An examination of field data suggests that while a few fans engage in realistic and logical analyses regarding their favorite group, most analyses by teenage and young fans are fanatical and biased.

Shaghayegh, a 19-years-old BTS fan, allows herself to critique some of the group's behaviors:

- "Do they sing motivational songs?

Yes, they gather a lot of fans with the same theme of loving yourself, but they themselves contradict this; I mean, they have to follow strict diets and dyed hair, etc. I say their behaviors contradict their words.

However, as mentioned, the majority of fans, due to the intense atmosphere surrounding the company, BTS, and the fans, turn a blind eye to the criticisms directed at the BTS boys and have made it their mission to support them unconditionally and fanatically."

Negin, 13-years-old, emphasizes in her interview, "We will take care of our idol under any circumstances":

- "You mentioned there were some bad news and some good news?

Oh, there's no bad news; it's nothing special, I mean, for our generation, it doesn't matter if it's like that; you know, we're okay with it.

- What is it?

I have to say this, I am sorry to talk about this things, but I don't know; maybe you've heard of bisexuality, like Jimin has released some photos that have an LGBT family theme, and when blue and pink are together, it means bisexual. Jimin's costume designer is also an Iranian gay designer, and (laughs) Jimin tweeted before releasing the photos that he took these photos from his heart and based on his life; it was his choice, and no one forced him. Now, we're not saying for sure, but some people say he might be bisexual.

- What does this mean for you and your friends?

Well, to be honest, it doesn't matter to us; we knew from the beginning. I mean, if you go for any idol, there's something like this about them, and we have no problem with it. Before we became ARMYs, all my friends promised that we would support them under any circumstances; it doesn't

matter what their orientation is, how they live, or what they do with their looks."

Sonia, 17-years-old, believes that the intense support for idols stems from fans' love and affection for them:

- "What can cause this extremism and fanaticism?

An extreme level of love can cause it. For example, if I see someone getting too close to my boyfriend, I really don't like it, and I will definitely say something to her (in a louder voice) because I love my boyfriend a lot; it's out of great affection. I just want to be with him and see that he's okay. A lot of love can lead to hating others."

An examination of the positions of fanatic fans indicates that in some cases, these individuals engage in illogical defenses of their favorite idols.

Some other fans, by questioning the critic, effectively bypass the criticism without providing any response, but the majority of fans, in most cases, try to justify and dismiss the criticisms directed at the stars.

In such cases, sometimes fanatic fans justify their stance by questioning South Korean culture, and at other times, they justify their actions by questioning Big Hit Entertainment. However, what is important in this context is the vigorous defense of the stars after providing half-hearted responses to the criticisms directed at the group members.

Negin, 13-years-old, and Sheida, 20-years-old, openly engage in illogical defenses of the idols in their interviews:

"... Well, to be honest, it doesn't matter to us; we knew from the beginning. I mean, if you go for any idol, there's something like this about them, and well, we have no problem with it. Before we became ARMYs, all my friends promised that we would support them under any circumstances; it doesn't matter what their orientation is, how they live, or what they do with their looks and appearances.

- What about those who don't think like you? What is their way of thinking?

There are also some comments on these photos, on these rumors, saying things like "No, Jimin is purer than that and doesn't do such things at all".

"One more thing that BTS has done and continues to do is send this message to their fans: do what you want, or what you're currently thinking about, or as we say, what you're in the mood for, do not worry about the consequences

and don't be afraid of who might stand in your way and try to stop you. In a way, they say go into the heart of the adventure. For example, regarding those who have decided to undergo gender reassignment surgery, I really dislike it when some people say let's talk to them or send them to a counselor in the hope that their minds will change. I believe no one should stand in their way."

Sheida, 20, in her comments, has also denied scientific experiences and has defended a fan who (perhaps in an impulsive decision) is seeking to change her gender.

In other cases, fans, instead of providing a reasoned response, try to avoid the effort of answering criticism by questioning the critic:

- "Why do you think some people hate the BTS group?

Because they don't want to see that there are famous people and benevolent personalities on this planet who are superior and better than themselves. The more attractive and famous the members are, the more enemies they will have, and the enemies will do anything to destroy them.

- Can you give some examples of the accusations made against BTS?

For example, if two members go to a café together to spend time, photographers are lurking to capture potentially controversial photos. These two friends, who have lived together like brothers for years, might get excited, hold each other's hands, tell a joke, laugh and pat each other on the shoulders, or hug each other brotherly or kiss each other. This is when the lurking photographers take scandalous and romantic photos of them and sell them to newspapers and magazines in Korea, thus ruining the idols' reputations and labeling them as homosexuals.

- How do you assess the impact of these accusations on the fans?

Fans who have been familiar with BTS for a few years cannot believe that this group, with all their charitable works for those in need and all the time uttering benevolent messages, is subject to these allegations. However, there are new fans or fans who still do not have complete information about the group, who believe these allegations and as a result either give up on being a fan or continue their fandom with doubt."

Justifying the criticisms is the most common way for devoted fans to deal with criticisms directed at BTS.

Negin, 13-years-old, Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, Zahra, 24-years-old, and Shabnam, 25-years-old, in their separate interviews, have tried to address the issues raised regarding the group and its idols by justifying the criticisms:

- "Does BTS care about the environment?

Very much (with emphasis), they support animals, and they all have pets at home; they are all very fond of animals and care a lot about not harming them.

- What kind of actions do they take?

For example, they have financially supported some channels that are dedicated to environmental preservation.

- Have you seen them support any?

Not a specific campaign, but the news has been almost everywhere.

- What else do they do?

Honestly, they have mostly shown their support; if I sit down now and count down one by one, I can compile a long list of such actions.

- Last time we talked, you told me that they have a lot of clothes. How does someone who wants to care for the environment buy so many diverse and new clothes?

Well, they don't buy them by themselves; the company buys them, I mean they have no role in it and are forced to wear whatever the company tells them to.

- Someone told me that she is very upset because she can't buy and wear clothes like them? What is your idea about it?

Well, you have to see who is telling you this; they are billionaires, after all. When someone is a billionaire, of course, he can buy and wear them.

- So, do they buy a lot of clothes?

They don't buy them themselves; the company buys clothes for them with the money they make. Besides their home clothes, the rest of their clothes belong to the company. Moreover, they don't actually buy clothes; they usually have a tailor who makes clothes for them, and their fabrics aren't usually from the kinds harmful to the environment

- Where do you find this from?

Honestly, when one of my friends was supposed to make me an ARMY, they read it on Wikipedia and said that it was written there. But you see, when you are in that situation and position, you have to dress diversely; there's no way around it."

- "Why do the members of the group whitewash their photos and videos, distancing themselves from their own race?"

This issue has nothing to do with racism; they are not racist at all. They have tried to talk about racism even in the White House, and that's why they are appreciated for their comments. This can be a beauty standard in Korea, not because of racism. What the company does is not something they want; this whole program is made under the company's supervision, and idols have to be seen in a way that the company approves, which increases their fan base.

- If they are seen with their own skin color, will their fans decrease?

Honestly, I don't think so. For me and my friends, no matter what color they are or what shape they have, they are equally valuable. But I don't know why the company wants them to be seen as whiter; I think it's because of the standards in Korea; they like it this way.

- Don't you think this means they have an issue with their own race?

No, I don't think they have an issue with their race. Race is not limited to skin color; I think their entire being shows they are Korean. The makeup and the little use of these editing programs that make them look whiter are all because of the company, to be seen a bit better during performances. I don't think there's any other reason.

- It seems that the company is trying to show them as whiter than they are?

I don't know; maybe it goes back to the fact that they have fans all over the world, and everyone is watching them. Maybe if they are seen a little whiter, more people will like them. Or maybe in their country, their self-confidence is low, and maybe they want to boost it somehow with such actions. But again, I say this issue has nothing to do with racism. All this work for racism doesn't negate their actions just because they are seen a little whiter."

- "The advertisements that the group has usually cover famous and very expensive brands, and a significant number of people may not be able to buy them. What kind of policy is the company considering!"

Yes, their being expensive means they are not for all segments of society. Maybe only a few can purchase them, but they can buy fakes.

- Does buying fakes version give them the same pleasure?

Not really, but following fashion requires a lot of money. I think not everyone follows fashion; maybe they imitate their style of dressing, but many don't go to buy the same branded clothes."

- "Shabnam, another topic you mentioned is that the members of BTS strongly oppose the rules of their contracting company and do what they want. But I have information that says their contracts are so heavy and strict that they don't even have the right to choose their hair color, or the company decides where on their bodies they should have surgery, and they have no right to protest or refuse. Also, regarding free expression and the right to marry, they can't make any decisions without the company's permission!

Well, that's the case, but I don't think it's to that extent. Because sometimes they say things that seem against the company. But in a way, it's a choice between popularity, success, and money, and that's something they pay for."

In the process of justifying the criticisms raised regarding BTS and its idols, some fans hold Korean culture responsible for the criticisms, while others consider Big Hit Entertainment the main culprit, exonerating their favorite idols in the process.

Kowsar, 25-years-old, in her interview, questioned Korean culture, considering it responsible for the pressure idols face from the company:

"If I want to say in general, the pressure on K-pop artists compared to, for example, Hollywood artists is much greater. But this is solely due to Korean culture. I think it is more stemmed from their culture. Why is there no such issue in Hollywood? Why, for example, when a group is formed in Hollywood, like One Direction or some other groups, do they not experience such pressures? Why don't they try to change themselves to please their fans? Why are they just as they want to be, and fans still love them the same way? Yes, this is because Koreans think that all people in the world are like them and try to be people pleasing and they want to act according to the taste of the audiences. They completely instill this idea to all, and in a way, they make K-pop fans, their fans to get used to this.

- Uh-huh.

They convey to fans that yes, we will change our artists align with your desires. While, in reality, K-pop fans are not just Koreans; they are from all countries of the world, and many are totally disagree with the way

companies behave. But they have no control over it; it's a mindset that exists in their culture. One is an extreme respect for superiors, and another is to gain the satisfaction of the other party. These two items are very bold in K-pop culture, I mean it is bold in Korean culture as a whole and in K-pop. If you pay attention, for example, in their dramas, their work environments are shown to be very much based on the idea that employees should gain the satisfaction of their superiors. That's why I think this is a deep-rooted issue in their culture, and it has manifested in K-pop."

Masoud and Sheida, 20-years-old, and Mohammad Reza, 21-years-old, in their interviews, question Big Hit Entertainment while forgetting the human responsibility of the idols, trying to ignore their favorite idols' neglect of their human responsibilities.

- "Have you ever had disagreements with your friends about BTS?

Yes, a lot.

- Can you give an example?

For instance, a while ago, one of my friends criticized the makeup and feminine appearance of the BTS group, saying that they have no flaws themselves, so why do they wear makeup and try to look prettier? What's the reason other than to provoke others? I kept telling her that BTS doesn't have control over their looks; their managers instruct the makeup artists to make a certain idol's makeup pink or red, and my friend just wouldn't accept it. She said that even though she loves them, they shouldn't wear makeup and should be simple like most boys.

- Were you able to convince your friend?

I tried to explain to her that the BTS boys have no right to protest because they are under contract and have to comply. She said they shouldn't do something against their will; they have so much talent, so they should come out and work for themselves, and we would support them.

- Who do you think is right in this situation?

It's true that all her points are valid, but BTS is in debt to the company due to education costs and dorm expenses, and as long as they haven't paid off their debts, they have to continue. I told my friend this, and she was convinced just like I was.

- Have you ever felt that they do something that is morally gray?

Yes, I think so. For example, global brands like Starbucks or McDonald's are both American, but they have branches all over the world, and the main profits go back to America. However, in different countries, many people work for these brands with low wages.

BTS has advertised for both McDonald's and Starbucks, and there are other brands like Coca-Cola, but let's focus on McDonald's and Starbucks because they generate the most profit for the home country. The people working in other countries for these brands don't have good salaries, benefits, or job security. BTS just promotes these brands and doesn't care about that. Of course, if it were up to them, they might protest against the situation of these workers, but they have to do what the company says. In my opinion, the kind of work they do is exactly the example of the gray area you mentioned. They don't harm anyone at all, but they also don't defend the rights of those workers I mentioned."

Erfan, 21-years-old, in his statements, after condemning the company, concludes that we should support the idols who have become depressed due to the pressure from the company and defend them unconditionally, regardless of the criticisms directed at them:

- "What consequences does all this interference and pressure from the company have on the idols?

Idols, despite their cheerful and smiling appearance, have depressed and restless spirits. Sometimes, to cope with all these restrictions, they turn to anxiety medication.

- So why do they continue?

Because from the beginning, they were made to commit that they wouldn't have the right to marry and must be completely obedient to the company. If they back out, they have to pay a lot of compensation to the company. On the other hand, idols know that if it weren't for the company, they would be ordinary people like their classmates, and there wouldn't be this level of fame and popularity worldwide... Therefore, they experience two contradictory feelings; they like this position, but they are disgusted by the pressures from the company. They have no way back or forward, so they continue.

- How does this dual behavior of the idols affect BTS fans?

Aware and knowledgeable fans understand this and love them even more because they realize the hard pressure the group is under and promote the group even more."

Given what has been discussed, the passionate defense of many fans amidst the excitement generated by Big Hit Entertainment, the BTS group, and the enthusiastic fans of BTS seems to be a normal occurrence.

3-17- Adopting emotional interactions with in-group and out-group individuals

- "The fact that BTS receives a lot of hate, I think it also applies to ARMYs. Has it ever happened to you?

For example, in comments and such, they call us "harmies" (laughs). Thankfully, it hasn't happened to me because I don't get too involved in these matters.

- Harmies?

Yes, because ARMYs annihilate anyone who hates them, and even though they start fights themselves, they call ARMYs rabid [Har in Persian] and savage." (Reihaneh, 17-years-old).

In the previous section, the excitement generated by Big Hit Entertainment, the passionate behavior of the BTS group, the dominance of emotional methods in fan communities (fandoms), and ultimately the emotional behaviors in teenagers and young adults due to brain development and the prevalence of romantic emotions in youth (especially girls, who are more emotional than boys) were mentioned.

The placement of fans in the emotional spaces that surround them causes them to naturally adopt emotional methods in their social interactions and address their issues through emotional means¹. Perhaps that's why Sahar, 15-years-old, notes in her interview that many people say, "ARMYs are bunch of savages.

Many BTS fans not only interact with fans of other K-pop groups and critics of BTS in an emotional manner but may also engage with their like-minded peers using emotional methods based on denial and aggression.

¹ In the literature of psychology, problem-solving methods are referred to as coping strategies based on logical problem-solving and coping strategies based on emotional problem-solving. Individuals, when faced with rational problem-oriented challenges, seek a suitable solution to address the problem in a logical and reasoned manner. However, in emotionally-oriented problem-solving, individuals confront issues through emotional reactions

Ghazal, 16-years-old, in her interview, describes the fights that occur between different K-pop groups:

- "... So, do fights happen among K-pop fans too?

A lot. A lot (laughs), most of the fights are among K-pop fans themselves.

- For example, what kind of events?

You see, fan wars are always there. The bigger the fandom, the more fights there are. For instance, the ARMYs and BLINKs (the name for BLACKPINK fans) and EXO-Ls (the name for EXO fans) have a lot of conflicts compared to others because there are so many fans. Among them, there will definitely be some troublemakers who come to stir things up. Because idols themselves never have problems with each other... even if they do, they don't show it. Now, these fan wars can be over some... even silly things. It's not like the entire fandom, meaning all fans, fight with fans of another fandom. Some fans just love to fight and have no logic. They keep arguing. In the meantime, they also insult the idols. In the last two or three weeks, there were two bad fan wars between ARMYs and BLINKs. Honestly, it wasn't our fault as ARMYs at all. In both incidences. We were neither at the beginning nor the end of it. They started it. They always have a habit of starting things themselves. Then they come and play the victim (laughs), saying ARMYs are savage. Go search for it. Type in "the most toxic fandom", and it will bring up BLINKs.

The boys had just come to Instagram, so they didn't know how to use it well. Instagram has a section that suggests other accounts for you to follow, the suggestions section. The BLACKPINK members already had accounts on Instagram. So, they appeared in the suggestions for Taehyung. On the same night that he joined Instagram, those suggestions came up for him. He accidentally clicked and followed them. Later, he came to Weverse and said (laughs), the kid was scared, he said, "Instagram is really scary. Does anyone know how to delete these suggestions so they don't come up for me anymore?" my dear baby knew there would be drama. He explained the situation subtly. Then, believe it or not, within a few seconds, Taehyung immediately unfollowed them. But in those few seconds, because people were lurking on Taehyung's page (laughs), they saw that Jennie was in Taehyung's following list. Look at me that night was chaotic and a big war (laughs). BLINKs were saying, "Your idol is stalker. He is obsessed with our idols. Then their solo stans... I mean, for example, the BLACKPINK fans are famous for having a lot of them who, instead of stanning the whole group,

only stan one or two members. Among themselves, they insult their own idols too (laughs). Then these same people came... mostly these people came to Jennie's page. They were hating on her in the comments, saying, "You and Taehyung are definitely together. Leave him alone." While this wasn't the work of ARMYs. Maybe a few troublemakers from ARMYs said something too, but mostly it was their own solo stans. Then they came to Twitter, playing the victim. They were saying really bad things about Taehyung. We ARMYs came in to defend Taehyung. A fight broke out among us. Of course, I didn't get involved. I just showed that the hate they were giving was from their own solo stans, not us. But I didn't insult anyone. A few days later, my baby Suga got COVID, and you wouldn't believe how ignorant they were; they were tweeting that it was our fault. What kind of fault, stupid! How ignorant can you be to joke about a virus that has killed many people and left many in mourning? Don't you think they see this? For example, they were saying, "Yeah, there are still six of them left. I hope all seven of them get COVID and die so we can conquer K-pop." They meant BLACKPINK. May their tongues be tied, God willing (laughs). Yeah. That's how it was. They gave Suga so much hate. They didn't hold back on the insults. Thankfully, when Lisa got COVID a while ago, that wasn't our fault! That was their doing, and they had so many insults. You might think I'm exaggerating, but even with Lisa's COVID, their solo stans came and hated on Lisa for getting COVID (laughs). In short, there are a lot of ridiculous people among them. I have many EXO-L friends. I have STAYs (the name for Stray Kids fans). I have Ahgase (the name for GOT7 fans) friends too. I have many friends from other fandoms. But I can never be friends with a BLINK. They are so messed up and clueless. Every BLINK I've seen in these past few years has been worse than the last."

Nikoo, 15-years-old, in an interview, recalls his emotional encounters with some local celebrities who made derogatory comments about BTS:

- "Nikoo, do you participate in fan wars?

I've participated in three fights because it really gets on my nerves.

- Can you explain more about the fights you had?

For example, Sasy Mankan went to their concert in Los Angeles and recorded a video of himself sitting right in the front row, directly in front of Jimin, who was performing. Then he recorded a video saying, "Who are these people, and what nonsense are they saying, and what are they even singing?" I was really angry about this because he was infringing on the

rights of other ARMYs, because some ARMYs come from different countries, work hard to earn money, and go to the concert. This means you are infringing on the rights of others when you are not a fan of them; just stay home. Because of this, many ARMYs went to Sasy Mankan's page and commented on it. I also wrote to him about why his action was wrong.

The next incident was the fight between Hamid Hiran and BTS, which was because Hamid Hiran copied the teaser for his new concert in 2018 directly from the teaser for the Wings album. It was exactly the same video as BTS's, just with Hamid Hiran instead of the members, and they didn't change anything. The fandom was very upset about that, and they even showed it on the Manoto channel, and in the end, Hamid Hiran didn't apologize at all. From that point on, ARMYs really started to hate Hamid Hiran.

The last issue in the dispute between Mehrad Hidden and ARMY fans was that he wanted to create a symbol for himself that would represent his fandom, and he had copied it directly from the BTS symbol, making it very similar. This upset ARMY fans, who came to argue and said that this symbol belongs to BTS. Mehrad Hidden then posted a lot of stories, insulting BTS and sharing their photos while using vulgar and offensive language against them. After posting numerous insulting stories, he changed his symbol, which again resembled the ARMY symbol, leading to even more anger from ARMY fans and escalating the situation. In the end, he released a two-minute song where he insulted BTS again and said bad things about them. I felt very upset and angry; my friend told me that we didn't even know this guy and had never heard his name before. He did this to become famous, and now, because of his actions, we all know him. I realized my friend was right; we were unnecessarily getting worked up, and he was actually doing negative publicity for himself. I participated in these kinds of disputes, and for example, if a hashtag against Hamid Hiran was trending, I would try to comment a lot on that hashtag."

The passionate reactions of fans towards supporters of other groups have escalated from relatively mild interactions to fights and physical confrontations.

Razieh, a 15-years-old, stated in her interview that she initially debated with haters to bring them to a rational discussion, but after noticing their inflexibility, she decided to let them go:

- "Honey, I've seen that ARMYs are often insulted. Have you ever faced such situations?"

Yes, I have. For example, they say, 'What's this Chinese things you're listening to? How do you recognize their faces? They all look the same; you follow these girls, it's really ridiculous,' and that's just a small part of what I hear daily.

- It must upset you a lot.

At first, yes, but now it doesn't matter to me; it has become normal.

- So, did it come to a point where you would argue with them and try to convince them that their way of thinking is wrong?

At first, yes, I tried to make them understand that it's not like that, but then I received more insults and mockery, and later I just stopped caring."

Gelareh, a 14-years-old, noted in her interview that she had a falling out with a friend over a disagreement:

- "What was the topic of your argument that led to the end of your friendship?

Well, at that time, we were much younger, and that person wasn't really my close friend from the start; she was just the only one I could chat with when I first got a phone. After a while, my friend messaged me, and I told her I had become an ARMY, and she said no, you shouldn't be a fan of BTS; they're not good. I supported BTS and said, 'no they are good and I'm a fan of them, and this is none of your business' In short, she said no, only BLACKPINKs are good, and that was one of the reasons I became disillusioned with BLACKPINK, and that's how it ended."

Hadith and Gelareh, both 14-years-old, mentioned the sarcasm and disdain that some fans show towards supporters of groups that cover BTS songs or dances:

- "Do they dance to their own music?

Yes, but they also have performance and dance covers of songs that aren't theirs. Then those songs go viral, and everyone loves them, or for example, a group comes and covers another group's dance.

- Do they not protest against this?

For instance, if EXO covers a dance to a BTS song, fans who support both BTS and EXO are very happy and welcome it, but for example, hardcore BTS fans come and say, 'Yeah, EXO did this to cling to BTS and become more famous,' or vice versa, EXO fans say, 'No, EXO is way better than BTS, and BTS doesn't deserve to have EXO cover their dance.' But overall,

EXO fans are much more logical and calmer. They don't attack opposing views. Plus, their age is generally older than other fandoms. Most BTS fans are teenagers."

"... or for example, on Pinterest, under one of the posts by an ARMY about BTS and the cover of the song 'We Don't Talk Anymore' that Jimin and Jungkook had covered, someone wrote, 'I think this cover is much prettier than the original.' Then others came and wrote, 'What are you saying? This song has ranked high in the world, and Selena¹ is a princess and a queen; Charlie² has a beautiful voice; the original is much prettier; you and BTS should go away.' Then ARMYs also wrote, 'If we're talking about comparisons, BTS is number one in the world,' and they were exchanging things like that and all insulting each other."

Marzieh and Mahlaqa, both 19-years-old, provided examples in their interviews of the jabs and sarcasm that BTS fans direct at fans of other groups:

- "Is there a kind of competitive excitement among fans of different groups regarding streaming and such?

Absolutely it is so, every fandom wants to break records and see the one who are stanning (supports) at the top, so there is competition.

- Do these kinds of competitions lead to conflicts among them?

Sometimes, and of course, it also stirs up the jealousy of haters and fans of other groups (laughs).

- Can you give me examples of this?

For instance, they say they have bought votes and such, or they feel pressure and saying someone has no talent and bought their votes.

- What about the other fans? How do they behave?

To summarize, fandoms insult each other and their idols, questioning all the abilities, achievements, and personalities of those celebrities, claiming that their idol is the best."

Sarina, 13, and Hadith, 14, mentioned in their interviews the insults and derogatory remarks made by BTS fans towards fans of other K-pop groups:

- "Overall, what is the reaction of ARMYs towards BTS haters?

¹ Selena Gomez is an American singer, songwriter, actress, and television producer.

² Charlie Puth is an American singer, songwriter, and music producer.

The first group considers them unimportant, I mean they don't care what haters say and just do their own thing. The second group responds to haters and proves that the members are good. The third group consists of the die-hard fans who get very worked up and just want to fight.

- Which group do you belong to?

The first one. The answer to foolishness is silence.

- Have you seen anyone around you who belongs to the second or third group?

Yes, many. I have friends who usually get into arguments and become very agitated.

- For example, what kind of exchanges happen during these arguments between ARMYs and haters?

Haters throw shade and talk about the flaws of BTS, and ARMYs deny everything and support the members. For instance, in the discussion about homosexuality, ARMYs, like me, say that their orientation is their own business, and our interests are our own business."

- "What did they say about them at school, and did they have opposing views?

We talked more about the videos they released, their dances, and their outfits, or events happening in K-pop. There were opposing views, but ARMYs were very passionate at school, and if someone hated, they would react very negatively. It even escalated to insults. But this is typical for newcomers to the K-pop world, where everyone is very enthusiastic and thinks that this is the ultimate coolness, and there shouldn't be any opposition to it."

Ghazal, 16, reported in her interview that after cursing at critical individuals, she asks her friends to collectively report them to facilitate their blocking on social media:

- "K-pop tries to show that clothes have no gender. Do you think the same?

Yes. Everyone is like that now. I think it's not just in K-pop; they're trying to do this everywhere. Why should there be a rule in the era we live in that tells me, because I'm a girl, I have to dress this way... unfortunately, it is like that here.

- You must know that many of the haters who are not into K-pop criticize K-pop for this reason, saying that their boys dress like girls or that they look like girls. When you see such criticisms, what is your reaction?

Look, my dear, that's just their jealousy (laughs). Before K-pop became famous, they had still sparse beards. They looked like that. Many of them were very good-looking. This is a result of their success that has put pressure on them; they're bursting. Let them burst.

- So you don't show any reaction?

Of course, I do! ... Anyone who comes at me like that gets a round of insults from me. I apologize (laughs). Then I block and report them myself. I let the other kids block them too. I want their account deleted so they don't do such things again."

Ultimately, fights and physical confrontations are the last peaks observed in the interactions between BTS fans and fans of other groups:

"Some kids, after curseing at the fans of other groups from head to toe, tell them, 'If you're brave, come to this place to fight' (Masoud, 20-years-old).

If we overlook the passionate reactions of BTS fans towards rival groups, it is also noted that BTS fans sometimes engage in heated and confrontational behaviors among themselves

Erfan, 21, talks about the verbal conflicts among fans of two BTS idols in their class:

- "Was there any debate or argument among your classmates because of supporting the BTS members?

Yes, they argued a lot.

- Can you give examples of what they argued about?

For instance, some of them were fans of an idol named Jin and talked about him every day, while two or three were fans of Taehyung, and it turned into a situation where everyone praised their own idol, and that was the discussion.

- What did Jin's fans say?

They would say things like Jin has the title of "Worldwide Handsome" or that the members of BTS call Jin the "mother" of the group because he sometimes cooks for the other members or cleans their living space, which

elevated Jin's status and created a division between Jin's and Taehyung's fans in our class."

Taraneh, 18-years-old, and Reihaneh, 15-years-old, also mentioned in their interviews the fights among fans that sometimes escalate to physical confrontations and hair-pulling:

- "Have you encountered any fanatic fans?

Yes, for example, if they were interested in one of the idols and found out that you liked the same idol, they would put up a guard against you, which I found strange. I had to explain that this is an artist and can have many fans. Gradually, I had to get closer to them to connect more with them. Usually, those who shared an interest in an idol would form a group, and if someone insulted BTS, they would really confront that person. However, since BTS always tells ARMYs to behave kindly, even towards haters, now when ARMYs want to defend BTS, they try to speak politely and provide logical reasons. But if a hater acts very badly, ARMYs will set aside their manners and respond harshly."

- "You mentioned that you and your friends argue about them. Can you tell me more about what you argue about?

For example, Dorsa is in love with Namjoon, but I really like Jimin, and we have a rivalry over them. A couple of times, there has even been hair-pulling between Fatemeh and Dorsa at school. Our principal found out and warned them. We mostly talk about them in our school group. There's a girl in our class who isn't into this at all; she keeps saying we're crazy, so we cut off our relationship with her. Dorsa even puts Namjoon and BTS as her profile pictures or has cut her hair like theirs. Overall, I don't like Dorsa; I'm always looking for ways to annoy her, and it's really fun. Another friend, Helma, seems to be in a delusion; she says her dream is to marry Jimin and go to his concert with him (laughs), but she doesn't realize they don't get married."

Mahlaqa, 19-years-old, reports that after switching from EXO to BTS, she witnessed so many heated and fanatical interactions in BTS fandom that she regretted her change of allegiance and returned to EXO:

- "What did you mean when you said you briefly supported BTS?

The first group I supported was double S [SS501], then it became EXO, and in between, I got to know various groups or would slightly enter their fandoms. But now I've seen many bad things from BTS fans, especially towards EXO and EXO fans, who behaved with much more fanaticism,

which really turned me off. It made me want to go back, and since no one could replace EXO for me, the more I got to know other groups, the more I returned, and EXO was the only group I consistently stan."

Razieh, 15, also noted in her interview that with the announcement of BTS members going to military service, fake fans have left BTS, thus purifying the fandom:

"... Then the news about military service and the solo activities of the members in the music industry has led to a purification of the fandom.

- What do you mean by purification?

It means that all the fake ARMYs in the fandom have left.

- So these people who aren't real ARMYs don't follow BTS anymore because they are going to military service?

They say BTS should always be active and shouldn't go anywhere, as if they want to keep the BTS members on a pedestal."

The prevalence of passionate interactions among BTS fans is so significant that sometimes heated confrontations occur even among the fans themselves.

Mahtab, 18-years-old, mentioned an example in this regard:

- "Have you ever liked other K-pop groups but didn't follow or support them because you are a BTS fan, even though their songs are good?

Honestly, yes, I have. Now, this is just my opinion, and many don't share it. I have many ARMY friends who also follow other groups in K-pop, but I feel it's not right to support another group in this genre while I'm a fan of BTS. I feel a sense of betrayal. Because the music industry is somewhat competitive. If I support another group, they will rise. But it's not like I don't listen to anything else other than BTS; I just don't support them, even though, as you said, their songs might be really good."

3-18- Critique of Big Hit's Policies

The allure of BTS, combined with fans' obsession with the idols and the group, leads fans to closely monitor the behaviors of their favorite idols. Sometimes, in their observations, they encounter conflicting situations that leave them confused. Recently, fans have sought various explanations to resolve their mental conflicts, which may arise from these contradictions.

Field evidence suggests that in some cases, fans escape the conflicts by stating that it is common for artists to exhibit contradictory behaviors. Other fans may attribute the arising conflicts to Korean culture, but many fans point their fingers at the company, arguing that the economic efforts of the company to maximize profits or its cultural efforts to promote its desired cultural policies are responsible for the conflicts they witness.

Sarina, 15, in her interview, notes that she and other fans scrutinize the behaviors of their favorite idols:

- "Besides the issue of marriage, are there any other unreasonable demands from fans that infringe on their freedom?

For example, they say idols shouldn't be overweight or shouldn't date anyone, or that female idols like HyunA, if they show their bodies, are just seeking attention, or they shouldn't go out and have fun and should focus entirely on their work, like Jungkook, who was given hates for going to an amusement park.

- What is your personal opinion about these demands and the fans' views that question the idols' freedom?

I think it's not the idols' fault regarding body representation because the company tells them what to wear. As for being overweight, sometimes it's not the individual's fault; for example, Jeong-yeon from TWICE gained weight due to her illness and received a lot of hate, but it's really not her fault at all."

Fans who closely monitor the various behaviors of their favorite idols often find themselves questioning the strict dietary regimens imposed by the company, the prohibition on marriage or having romantic relationships, mandatory cosmetic surgeries, efforts to make idols of yellow/Asian descent appear whiter, extravagant birthday celebrations (while the idols promote equality among people), the obligation to engage in behaviors that may conflict with the idols' sexual identities (such as displaying attraction to the same sex while also showing attraction to the opposite sex), the exposure of personal conversations of the idols, and the dissemination of private information about them (such as sharing videos from their bedrooms and bathrooms). They wonder whether these recent behaviors contradict BTS's slogan of "love yourself" and many similar slogans from other idols, and fundamentally, why this should be the case.

Sonia, 17 years old, in her interview, discusses the "cup diet," criticizing the strict dietary regimen of idols. Idols have sometimes mentioned their diets and

food restrictions, or they have shown chocolates or cakes they picked up during their own or their friends' birthday celebrations, highlighting their strict dietary regimen (even though the food prizes from many of BTS's competitions evoke similar meanings):

- "Have the stars or fans done anything specific to address these restrictions?

People! (laughs) not really, many are just looking to listen to songs or see photos and videos, so I haven't seen or heard anything about fans doing anything specific for them.

I've heard many say they have a lot of money, so what more do they want? But they don't consider these restrictions. If someone, not just anyone, but even I, were told that I'd get sixty million to just stay in this room for a month and do what we tell you, I would never do it. I wouldn't give up my space and freedom, even for a month.

- So, are the stars in such an environment?

Well, they're not in a room (laughs), but when they are in training, they really face a lot of hardships. I don't remember which group said this, but one of the girl groups in K-pop mentioned that they were given one meal and told they had to share it among four of them, or there's a famous diet that is very hard. I think it's called the cup diet. The food they get is the size of a cup, not even a large cup, but exactly the size of a disposable cup. They also have to do a lot of work and physical training, but they are only allowed to eat that much."

Shokufeh, 18-years-old, in her interview, mentions the restrictions on BTS members regarding marriage or dating and having romantic relationships with the opposite sex:

- "Why are fans sensitive about their stars' relationships with the opposite sex?

As I am a fan, I really understand. My favorite idol is Jungkook, one of the members of BTS, and I really like him. When I find out he has a girlfriend, I get upset; I might even become disillusioned with him. Jungkook was in love with a girl named IU, who is also a singer, but due to certain circumstances, Jungkook couldn't coordinate his situation with hers, and now that IU is with someone else, fans feel relieved because Jungkook has said many times that he loves IU. For example, when one of them fell in love with a girl around the age of 18 or 19, and the company wouldn't allow him to be with her, he

had to distance himself from his love interest, and they completely separated."

Shirin, 22-years-old, in her interview, describes the cosmetic surgeries of stars as actions contrary to BTS's slogans

- "Idols themselves also undergo cosmetic procedures. Why do you think they act contrary to slogans like 'love yourself'?"

Idols themselves have no shortage in beauty and attractiveness; it's the company that produces the group that instructs them to undergo certain cosmetic surgery for more appeal, and the cost of the procedures is covered by the company. With this, the company makes the idols act against their slogans, creating a question mark for everyone."

Mohsen, 22-years-old, criticized the use of makeup and whitening programs that lead to idols appearing lighter in their images and videos. Masoud, 20-years-old, questioned the extravagant birthday celebrations of idols (which are not limited to their own country but take place in many countries around the world, with images of idols even projected on the Burj Khalifa in Dubai), considering these behaviors contradictory to the equality that idols mention in their songs:

"... I oppose these whitening products they apply to their faces.

- Why?

Because it gives me the feeling that to be good or beautiful, you have to be white. I haven't heard anything about ethics and humanity from BTS. I've read a lot about this; I'm really attracted to their beauty. What does it mean that anyone who isn't white isn't beautiful? Sometimes I think they are racist."

- "Masoud, what difference do you see in these birthday celebrations?"

The difference is in the expenses, whether it is spend by the company or by the fans. It's completely different from the birthday celebrations of ordinary people.

- Besides the material aspect, what other differences do you see in these celebrations?

I see the difference in their slogans compared to their behavior and actions during the birthday celebrations. In the lyrics of their songs or in the messages and slogans they give, they talk about the equality of humans, but

they ignore this equality in their birthday celebrations, holding extravagant and noisy parties.

- Masoud, do you think all this contradiction in their slogans and actions makes you reconsider your fandom?

I always think about these differences and I hate their repetition, but I feel that the idols themselves are not to blame; it's all the fault of their company heads for other goals they have."

Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, Sofia, 18-years-old, and Shirin, 22-years-old, have criticized behaviors that sometimes portray the sexual identity of idols as leaning towards the opposite gender and sometimes their behavior as leaning towards the same gender. According to these individuals, when someone is attracted to the opposite gender, being forced by the company to kiss the lips of a same-gender person in front of a crowd at a concert is considered an exploitation of their sexual identity:

- "You said the members of the group are very close to each other; does society accept this?

Shaghayegh: "Well, Koreans and generally Westerners have more open relationships, so they accept many things that we don't. But not to this extent. I even learned their language, and in the comments, their people wrote that this behavior is not appreciated and that you are not gay, and it's even mocking them. So they themselves are not very okay with these actions unless someone is really gay, which they are not, because they also have non-gay behaviors. For example, you see the company has told them to sexually compliment a certain famous girl and say how attractive she is, which is to attract non-gay individuals. But their audience isn't just Koreans; they have fans all over the world, in Asia, in the Middle East, and they know it because they are constantly tagged. The contradictory behavior of kissing in front of the camera and then not being like that in reality, it will feel disgusting for them, definitely is the case. I think this inconsistency between behavior and mindset is very damaging to themselves first and foremost. The contradiction drives anyone crazy."

Sofia: "One thing about K-pop is that it was good up to a point. I mean, it was really like, 'Wow, it doesn't matter what the boys wear.' It's very beautiful. They wear makeup, the clothes they wear, the earrings they put on, they grow their hair long. But when you see someone who is really a K-pop

fan, you realize that in some places, queer individuals become queer bait¹. They are very close to each other, and everyone knows that Koreans, for example, girls with girls, boys with boys, are all close. They hug, they are intimate. But when you go deeper, you see that what K-pop presents is something that is okay with LGBT, or they often joke about it, like, 'Oh, so-and-so is dating so-and-so,' or 'I don't know, they kiss each other or something.' When you go into the core of Korean culture, homophobia is very prevalent, and I think this comes from the same sexism and is very toxic. They show it beautifully, but when you go inside, you see that it's not as nice as they show, and there are many bugs (gaps). There is empty inside but harmful at the same time. For example, many people like Hwang who came out as a gay idol said: 'many like me are in this industry but can't do it... to come out, and many exploit it, and it makes me sad.'

- "Does the company behind BTS play a role in the accusations of homosexuality against the group?"

Shirin: Oh, the company is very guilty; all the accusations started from the company's authoritarian actions.

- How? Can you give an example?

The company has forced the boys of BTS to dance like girls while singing their songs. The dance is mixed with feminine grace. Their facial features and beauty are also like girls, and the delicacy of their girl-like dance, and in the meantime, they hang a lot of gold, rings, bangles, and chains on themselves like women, which astonishes all viewers, and no girl is allowed to enter their group, and BTS members are not allowed to have any contact with any girl. All seven members of BTS even have no right to marry. All these actions of the company have led BTS's enemies and rivals to accuse them of homosexuality."

Nastaran and Shaghayegh, both 19-years-old, have questioned the disclosure of idols' private chats and the publication of videos from their bedrooms and bathrooms, evaluating these actions as more planned and intentional rather than accidental:

- "Well, I saw something about the Dispatch website that has access to idols' chats and exposes them.

Yes.

¹ A state that is shown by an individual or media where the individual or the relationship between two individuals is queer. However, it is never seriously confirmed or denied

- Can't they file a complaint against this? It's a complete violation of privacy.

Nastaran: Exactly (laughs), that's what I'm saying. Recently, Dispatch¹ has started this new trend of exposing chats, and I really don't understand how they have access to people's phones and chats and how they expose them. But I feel like, since there's no way to access people's phones... I think, for example, the very actor or singer involved in that scandal might be the one giving these chats to Dispatch. Dispatch should clarify the matter for the public because chats are very private. I don't think anyone can access it in terms of phone security.



Of course, since many of these scandals and commotions are to cover up a political event in their country, it's not unlikely that it's the work of their own security agencies. Because as far as I've heard, privacy is very important to them in their society, or they have so many security cameras that if someone leaves an item somewhere, I don't know, like in a café, no one picks it up because it's recorded on video. I mean, I want to say this is important to them. And since I haven't seen anyone come out and protest after their chat was leaked, I think maybe this whole apparatus, like their government, is doing this.

- Well, can't idols sue the company?

¹ One of the most famous tabloid media outlets in South Korea, which has gained prominence by exploiting controversies and playing on people's curiosity, is called Dispatch. This magazine started its work in 2011. The translation of your text is: "On the first day of January 2013, Dispatch published news about two artists who were secretly dating without the knowledge of others. Then, on the first day of 2014, they released a new list. This practice continued to the extent that it is referred to as the Dispatch tradition. The Dispatch tradition means that every year on the first day of the year, news of at least two artists who were secretly in a relationship is revealed. News about new couples and Korean idols is also published by Dispatch and other news agencies throughout the rest of the year. However, the reception of Dispatch's new move on the first day of the year was so significant that in 2020, when this media outlet did not publish any news, it faced protests from many people. Dispatch cited the new wave of the coronavirus as the reason for not publishing news. The annual tradition of Dispatch involves infringing on individuals' personal lives. However, the information that Dispatch publishes is not limited to revealing idol relationships; they also investigate the past lives of idols to find exclusive news.

I don't think so. I'm not sure about their legal issues, but initially, they sign some kind of agreement stating that they voluntarily joined and no one forced them, and they are entirely at the company's disposal. Their appearance and behavior are not in their control, and they are monitored everywhere, even in their own bedrooms (surprised). I don't think they can file a complaint."

- "So, videos from their bedrooms have been leaked?"

Yes, everything about their lives is shared, even their sleep (mockingly). There are cameras in their rooms, and they act in front of them, pretending and laughing to attract attention, being intimate, and basically acting, and then the company broadcasts it.

- So, the bathroom videos you mentioned, have they been released too?

To some extent, yes. For example, when they are in front of the mirror getting ready and putting on makeup, those videos keep coming out, but I won't name names."

In explaining the reasons for the conflicts mentioned, various explanations have been provided by the interviewed individuals. Referring the conflicts to the norms of artists, the culture of South Korea, and pointing fingers at Big Hit Entertainment are among the explanations observed in the statements of the interviewees.

Sheida, 20-years-old, in an attempt to justify the conflicts mentioned, believes that the norms of artists involve engaging in sometimes contradictory behaviors and creating various controversies to keep themselves relevant:

- "So, do you believe that BTS has completely deviated from the guidelines set by the company for them?"

It can't be said that way. Maybe this defiance of the company's orders is a kind of policy that has been coordinated between the group and the company.

- Well, that's exactly what I'm saying. It's contradictory to me that they give rebellious slogans and encourage their fans to follow what they want, regardless of societal norms, but at the same time, they themselves adhere to the norms set by the company. Isn't that right?

No, well, in Korea, this has become normal; it's no longer considered rebellious for them to dye their hair or wear specific styles. Many people, from ordinary citizens to artists and actors, look like this now

- What about the Iranian audience for whom these things are still considered taboo?"

Look, they don't come out and say, 'You must be like me.' They say, 'Be the way you want to be.'

- But it seems that despite these company rules, they can't be the way they want to be?

(reluctant to reponse)¹ ... Look, BTS has always wanted to become global, but the things they said were meant for their audience, meaning Koreans, and they never thought they would become so famous that we would come and interview them about it. Even RM said in one of the interviews that he never thought he would have so many fans in Iran! I myself am a music and dance teacher. I see this in my students. For example, out of the two hundred students I have, 190 of them are in love with BTS and say they only like BTS, and their style of dressing and everything is like that."

Raha, 18-years-old, and Mahlaqa, 19-years-old, in explaining some of the existing conflicts regarding BTS idols and K-pop in general, attribute these conflicts to Korean culture:

"... Of course, Koreans are generally racist.

- So, do they have this problem with all countries?

No, no. For example, they get along well with Americans, Europeans, but not generally. They usually have issues with Japanese. For instance, they don't have a problem with Thailand. But when it comes to one of those foreigners to come and let them behind in something, it really pressures them. Like Lisa, who is in BLACKPINK. She became the best female K-pop artist. They gave her a lot of hate, saying she should go back to her own country, while Lisa has been very important for the international popularity of K-pop. Yes, she should go back to her own country. Go back to that whorehouse! They say a lot of terrible things about her life. Ridiculous and silly stories, like saying Lisa's mother had a job related to that, but it wasn't true at all. In short, they really harassed her. Then, for example, with China, it also depends on the relationship between their governments. There are often fights between them. When there are issues, the Chinese members of groups usually don't participate in activities for a while. Like Lay, who is a

¹ I feel that she has become upset. She has composed herself and taken a defensive stance, avoiding eye contact and remaining silent. To ease the atmosphere, I point out that I am only expressing the criticisms that have been made against BTS and that these are not my personal opinions. As a result, the interviewee feels more comfortable and returns to the flow of the interview

member of EXO and is Chinese. During the time they didn't have a good relationship, their company tried to keep Lay less involved in group activities. Of course, they didn't directly say it was because of that issue. They would say he was studying, sick, busy, and all that. But everyone knew what the reason was. Generally, people discriminate a lot between foreign idols and their Korean ones."

- "So, the fact that you said Chinese members left the group, does their mistreatment indicate racism in Korea?

Yes, Korea has a very racist population (emphasizing). One of the bloggers who went to Korea is Iranian; he went to Korea to live and work and always talks about how much he was harassed at first, being treated badly as an Iranian, as a foreigner. They have a bit of a guard up against someone coming from another country, from another nationality. And the fans, being very fanatical, have treated the Chinese members badly, but the company's behavior has been much worse, and they harassed them a lot more. They couldn't even make a simple phone call to their family members, and some had underlying health issues; one of them had a heart problem, or each of them had some issues. They didn't pay attention to these at all, and the company would work them hard despite all these problems, giving them no rest. Not that I'm saying they treat Korean members very well; no, but they treated Chinese members much worse, which is why they really saw it as best to leave the group."

Many of the interviewees pointed fingers at the company in explaining the conflict between BTS's slogans and their actions, holding the company responsible for the contradictory behaviors exhibited by the idols due to economic or cultural reasons, or both.

Raha, 18-year-old, referring to the media play that is also common in the West (for example, before Taylor Swift's new song comes out, her date with Harry Styles¹ is publicized), considers Big Hit's actions to be similar:

¹ ... Do you remember that this kind of thing happened?

Yeah, totally. It's still happening. For example, Taylor Swift. Well, her voice is good, but she's really not likable. Now, if she didn't talk nonsense about Harry, no one would care about her. That woman has promoted her songs with everyone. She's been with everyone (laughs). Then the funny thing is, after breaking up with everyone, she sings a song. Then she portrays herself as the victim. Ugh. It's all an act.

It seems like you really hate her. I really hate her (expresses strongly).

Well, what did Taylor do about One Direction that made you so angry? Oh, well, back then Harry was still in the group. And the group is managed by the company. That Simon (the creator of One Direction) forced them to date other celebrities. One of them was Taylor, whom he chose for Harry. Then Harry had a contract with the company, so he had to accept. They were together. Like (in a mocking tone). After they broke up, Taylor came

- "Well, Raha, you said that when the date of your favorite star is leaked, you're just surprised...

Yes. But I think most of these are media plays. I mean, someone sets up a date with another famous person so that there's some exchange happening, and fandoms are forced to come together. Of course, some people also hate on it. For example, they say, 'Your idol made our idol be taken advantage of,' and all that nonsense. But to me, these cases are exactly media plays. That's it."

Maryam, 18, in her interview, referring to the concept of fan service by Big Hit, notes that the company does not shy away from any actions to gain the satisfaction of fans and attract more audience:

- "Maryam, do you think the moments between the members are real or staged and planned?"

In K-pop, there's something called fan service, which means fulfilling the desires of fans by idols. To keep fans happy, idols often have to do things they don't want to do and have no interest in. They do these things to win the hearts of fans and show them that they hold them in special regard. I think some events, like these moments, are part of fan service, and idols are forced to do these things just to keep the fandom alive and make the fans happy. Companies also put a lot of pressure on idols to attract audiences, and of course, the fandom is not without influence in this matter. Some fans have an excessive focus on the personal lives of idols and consider it their right, which I think is not right. A person gets on a plane, using the pilot's skills, but do they know the intricate details of the pilot's life? Or, for example, a person goes to a doctor to benefit from their knowledge but doesn't interfere in the doctor's personal life. The same goes for BTS; we, as their fans, only have the right to enjoy their art, and the other aspects of their lives are essentially none of our business, and we have no right to interfere. However, some fans confuse interest with curiosity and, due to their strong affection for the members, feel entitled to have a say in the emotional lives and relationships of those idols. Companies, seeing the reactions of fans,

out with a song. Then she made it seem like Harry was the jerk. After that, there was a fight between the fandoms. We never got along again.

So why did you think this was just for publicity? I mean, this was a romantic relationship between Taylor and Harry. Dude, it was so obviously fake. Like, so obvious.

What do you mean and on what basis? For example, they always had lovey-dovey looks in crowded places. Ugh. We're so in love. (mockingly). Most of it was from Taylor's side. It wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last time (laughs). And it was just like, why is it that every time Taylor and Harry are out together, the paparazzi have to be there? It was obvious they coordinated to get photos and moments out. She was desperate to say we're in a relationship.

pressure the members to do things that please the fans, like these moments that are clearly fake and are done just to please the ARMY, even if the members themselves don't want to engage in such actions with their friends."

Nastaran, a 19-year-old, is also trying to exonerate the idols from the accusations of engaging in behaviors that contradict BTS's slogans, directly holding the company responsible for the incidents that have occurred. By providing an example, she has affirmed her statement in this way:

- "Don't you think the boys are acting contrary to the message of 'love yourself'?"

People in Korea are a bit peculiar; for example, their intelligence is in their eyes, and they all want to see beauty and have a set of really ridiculous beauty standards. Because of that, they feel compelled to do certain things to fit in among the people in Korea. Because of that, they have to do certain things to fit in with the people of Korea. Certainly, some of their words contradict their actions. But most of these actions and, for example, the regimes are forced upon them by their companies, so I don't know how much they play a role in it. Of course, to some extent, they can act against it. For example, there was a BTS program that was like a reality show¹. They were at an amusement park. Jimin is the main visual of BTS. He was screaming on one of the rides that supposed to be thrilling, with his mouth was wide open. Then the company put an emoji over his face and censored it (laughs), but Jimin posted the original photo without the emoji."

Sonia, 17 years-old, also points to the company's failure to appropriately defend its stars as a mercenary act:

"When the boys supported the homosexuals, there were haters who started saying they themselves are gay, which is why they support homosexuals. After this incident, the group didn't respond to the things that were said. This made those statements to gain traction.

- So the members remained silent about these comments?

Yes, they didn't say anything.

- Could their silence have a specific reason?

To me, it's a kind of sacrifice they made. First, they supported homosexuals, then they accused boys to be gay, and then they didn't respond to these

¹ A reality show is a type of program that showcases parts of real people's lives

comments because if they wanted to say, 'No, we're not gay,' it could have diminished the impact of their support. Others might say that being gay is bad, and when a few haters called you gay, you reacted and said we are not, otherwise who cares about what these haters say? In fact, when they supported homosexuals, they left themselves no way out. I think either they shouldn't have done it from the start, or once they started, they should have stood by it until the end.

And besides all this, in Korea, for example, men hold each other's hands because it's a sign of intimacy and friendship, and it's not a sign of being gay at all."

Saba, 16-year-old, states in an interview that the company actively engages in creating controversies to attract new audiences for the BTS group:

- "Dear Saba, do you think they might create controversies for them?

Yes, a lot. Sometimes they even do it themselves or the company does it. For example, they stir up fights among fans, using some trivial comment that someone else made, which upsets their fans, and they turn them against others. It's all part of their game to attract more audience and followers. Sometimes the fans even collaborate with them, even the big names among them. They create controversies like someone being hated or feeling bad, or they say something to us, they hate us, solely to their fans go and fight with others. I'm a fan of theirs too, but I'm not fanatic or extreme. However, most fans are extremely fanatical; you can't even say that they have some bad attribution. BTS will flood you with their reports and insult you to no end.

- Do you think involving fans is humane?

Well, no. As I mentioned earlier, I think they don't care about being humane at all; they only care about the profits and money they make from these controversies.

- What money?

Well, creating controversies online attracts more followers. Suddenly, everyone becomes interested and follows them unconsciously... and that leads to fame, which in turn brings in more money."

Shaghayegh, 19-year-old, describes the company or idols' behavior as dictatorial in her interview, while Maryam, 18, emphasizes that the company only pursues its own goals, showing indifference towards the physical and mental well-being of the idols:

"...They don't have any freedom of action, not even regarding their own bodies, sexual behaviors, or interests.

- What interests?

For example, I remember one of them saying a long time ago that he wasn't satisfied with his hair; he said, 'What color is this? It looks like poop.'

I mean, I want to say that their interests are not respected at all, and what they want is disregarded. Of course, that person was penalized by the company and maybe banned from several songs."

- "Why do you think some ARMY members feel entitled to interfere in the personal matters of the members and even hate them?

Look, when your interest in someone or something becomes excessive and unhealthy, it creates a sense of ownership within you, making you feel like you need to control that person completely, and whatever they do must please you. However, true and healthy love isn't like that; you need to give the person you love freedom, you need to give them the right to choose so they can be happy and live well. You liked that person in their normal life, and if you start controlling and restricting them unnecessarily, they will no longer be the same person, and perhaps your own interest in them will diminish for that reason. A person should accept and love their favorite as they are. ARMY members think that by restricting the members from dating or marrying someone, they are increasing their chances of being with them, while we all know that such a thing is impossible. If BTS decides to remain single forever because of us, they will suffer from all sorts of mental and physical illnesses, and they definitely won't be able to work with the same quality as before, and they won't be the usual BTS. They've managed so far because they are still young, but eventually, a person can only endure to a certain extent, and at some point, they will crave love and relationships. This is one of the essential needs of human beings, and it cannot be ignored. I'm surprised how companies don't pay attention to this and think they can keep their idols single and away from relationships forever while expecting their work to maintain its quality. You can apply pressure up to a point, but after a while, all of what you have piled up falls apart. Ultimately, the mental health of the idols is important for such a demanding job. The company takes care of the idols' appearance, physique, dance, and everything, but they are always oblivious to their mental state".

Individuals who hold Big Hit Entertainment responsible for the contradictions between some of BTS's behaviors and their slogans, have considered the

company's motives as sometimes purely economic, sometimes cultural, and sometimes a combination of both.

Fereshteh, a 19-year-old, notes in her interview that the company presents its idols as appealing to both heterosexual and homosexual audiences to keep all audiences satisfied (ranging from those inclined towards the opposite sex to those inclined towards the same sex):

- "Most of the content produced by BTS fans is about gay couples, right?"

Unfortunately, yes.

- Why unfortunately?

Well, because it's neither real nor based on reality. It's a bit insulting, even because no matter what they say, it cannot be denied that the company dictates certain things to be done to send signals to the audience. It's a good way to attract an audience, but it's really unethical.

- Why do you think it's insulting?

Can I speak freely?

- Absolutely.

It can be said from two perspectives. First, the company exploits the concept of homosexuality to attract audiences, especially when this issue is genuinely part of some people's identities and in many countries, like Iran, their lives are at risk because of it. They are even unwilling to officially announce anything about their artists, such as whether someone is gay or if someone is in a relationship with someone else. They want to please everyone without taking a clear stance just to have the cake and eat it too."

Mohammad Reza, 21-year-old, emphasizes the company's focus on profit when explaining the lack of serious action against those who discuss the most obscene sexual matters regarding idols during shipping¹:

¹ Sarina, a 13-year-old, has confirmed the exploitation of stars by other K-pop groups, considering this issue to be quite common in the world of K-pop. In this regard, she stated:

- What is your personal opinion about some stars being very young and working?

It's really bad. For example, a 13-year-old should be studying and having fun at that age, not suddenly becoming an idol. First, they are away from their family; second, the training is very hard for them; and third, at that age, they have to endure the hardships of a full-fledged idol, like the hates they face and the diets and all that.

- Can you think of an example related to the dark side of K-pop that you mentioned in your talk?

For sexual harassment, I think it was Irene who had a Chinese man constantly touching her during a show, and then Jackson came and separated them. Or for example, one of Joy's outfits from Red Velvet during a performance was very, very short, and she was constantly pulling it down during the performance, feeling uncomfortable.

- "So why these shipping scenarios happen, and what do is their purpose?

Look, it's similar to fan fiction. Fans create them for entertainment; there's no specific goal, but there's also something else that seems very beneficial and profitable for the companies. For example, when Jimin and Rosé are shipped together, Jimin's fans - let's say BTS fans, since Jimin has a lot of fans among these seven - go read about Rosé and listen to her songs. Then Rosé's fans go read about Jimin and BTS and listen to their songs. Their fans transfer to each other, you know, like a virus, and their fan numbers increase significantly, which is great for the company."

Erfan, a 21-year-old, views the company's exploitation of idols more from a cultural perspective, emphasizing that the company ultimately seeks to advance its cultural goals (such as desexualizing makeup, clothing, and love):

- "What is the general public's opinion about the actions of the BTS production company regarding the boys in the group?

Most people see the company's actions as interference in the personal matters of the idols and condemn it.

- How does the company react to this public opinion?

The company that created BTS tries to distract the minds of the public and fans so asked idols to touch each other's hands or exchange meaningful glances while performing on stage.

- What could this action by the company mean?

People are deceived into thinking that the idols are gay, which is why they don't get married.

- Does this action by the company harm the idols?

Idols will suffer from severe psychological and emotional damage. Their reputation and dignity are at stake. Some become depressed and resort to taking anxiety medication, but since they have contracts with the company, they continue their work.

- What harm does this action by the company cause to the fans?

Some, like me, who know that the idols are pure and innocent, become very upset and try to reveal the true faces of the idols to everyone. But some don't understand the company's trick and think the idols are deviant and gay. This group also becomes upset about who their role models have been and

withdraws their support. There are also those who are completely out of touch and actually enjoy it, getting led astray."

Shaghayegh, 19-year-old, in her interview, identifies both economic profit and the advancement of cultural goals as the company's objectives that have a relation with the contradictions between some behaviors and slogans of BTS:

- "Did the companies do anything after these suicides?

No way, the companies' only care about themselves; they don't care about what happens to these idols. Each company says I want to be famous and I want to ensure my profits through them. Well, if they didn't like it, shouldn't accept to become our singers. The company acts like a masters, and these idols seem like their servants. They are after money, and these idols are just tools for them. They don't care what happens to them!

- So the company is only after money?

Mostly, yes, it's a capitalist world, but cultural promotion and imposing beliefs and many things like that are also part of their goals, like promoting homosexuality or consumerism, etc."

However, what has been overlooked in these explanations is the individual role of the idols, who, merely due to the existence of a contract (often signed at a young age), should not auction off their human dignity and, in doing so, provide misleading and incorrect information to the multitude of fans who love them dearly and are influenced by them to some extent.

3-19- Other Social Issues

So far, under the title of social effects, we have discussed issues such as: criticism of the limitations within Iran, criticism of the professional and ethical weaknesses of Iranian celebrities, the onset of fandom at a young age, idols addressing youth issues, deepening the relationship between idols and fans, viewing the group and its members in a multidimensional and multifaceted way, encouraging migration to South Korea, both in-person and virtual dating, altruism, globalization and global thinking, modeling after idols, identity transformations, the evolution of social relationships among fans, a sense of commitment to support the group, efforts to increase followers, fanaticism in fandom, engaging in emotional confrontations with insiders and outsiders, and criticism of the policies of the BTS group's company. However, it should be noted that the aforementioned points do not encompass all the social effects of the BTS boys on their fans, and the social impacts of BTS on their followers

extend beyond these mentioned issues. Some other social effects of BTS on their fans include changing fans' racist views, enhancing certain social skills, encouraging extreme individualism, fostering a type of anarchism, embracing norm-breaking, The negative shift in supporters' views towards Iranian men, getting involved in the group's controversies, and similar issues, which will be briefly mentioned below.

Razieh, 15-year-old, reports in her interview that being a BTS user has led her to the conclusion that all humans should be viewed equally and that one must seriously avoid adopting "racist" views:

- "You mentioned that BTS has changed your perspective; can you elaborate on this?

Of course! You've seen how all Afghans are viewed negatively, especially among Arabs. They say, 'If they see a girl without a hijab, they'll kidnap her and do terrible things to her.' I was so scared to get close to an Afghan girl, let alone be friends with one. But after I became a BTS fan, I became friends with an Afghan girl, and I asked her why there's so much negativity about them. She said that most people see us as weak, and that's how they tarnish our reputation. She said, 'We came here to have a peaceful life, but with the things people say about us, we're afraid to say we're from Afghanistan.' I realized how misguided I was to think badly of them and to believe what others around me said."

"Increasing social skills" is another topic that some interviewed fans have mentioned. For example, Elnaz, 13-year-old, feels compelled to use BTS-branded items to demonstrate the depth of her fandom, and despite her young age, she has even dared to order merchandise from abroad:

- "Have you ever ordered something from Korea because of them?

Yes, I have. I found a backpack on an Iranian Instagram page that I liked, and they said they would bring it directly from Korea. They sent it to Iran by air or sea, and I ordered it, paying for the shipping and customs fees."

"Encouraging extreme individualism" is another prominent theme observed in many of BTS's songs. Teenagers and young adults, who often face criticism, denial, and sometimes hostility from their parents due to a lack of understanding of their biological – brain-, emotional, cognitive, and social transformations, are called to rebel against the adult society by BTS. They are encouraged to break away from their parents and pursue pleasure in whatever form they desire. Reihaneh, 15-year-old, reports in her interview that by freeing herself from the

commands and prohibitions of her parents and surrendering to her desires, she feels better than before:

- "Reihaneh, what do you think are the positive and negative aspects that BTS has had for you?

Well, as I said, BTS has taught me not to care about others' opinions and to make my own decisions. From the day I started doing this, I feel much better and more satisfied. When I'm sad, I watch their clips or listen to their songs, I dance, and I feel better."

"Fostering a type of anarchism" arises from encouraging fans to rebel against their parents and directing young people to rely on themselves. Golnoosh, 14-year-old, states in her interview that according to BTS's guidance, she seeks to live freely by rebelling against parents, which means nothing more than greater anarchism.

- "What song do you really like?

I really like the song 'So What'?

- Can you tell me what it's about?

At the beginning, it says: 'One says I'm a right person, and another says I'm wrong; I don't care, so what? We are young, rebellious, and free. So what? Our worries remain unanswered in the end. So what?' It mostly wants to say to be free and not care about anyone's words because it's pointless if you don't enjoy life and youth.

- So you believe that you shouldn't care about anyone's words?

Yes. I believe in everything it say. I believe in every single word of their song. Because it's all true.

- So you really don't care about anyone's words or worry about anything?

No, really. I mean it. I'm never worried, nor do I care about anyone's words. Why would I lie? That's really how I feel.

- Even regarding to your parents' words?

When I feel something isn't right or I don't want something, even their words, I don't have to listen to them. Everyone knows what's best for them, and they are responsible for their actions. Everyone is free to do what they want and enjoy it; otherwise, life becomes meaningless.

- Do you mean that the meaning of life is summarized in freedom and enjoying life?

Yes, when you don't enjoy life and don't achieve any of your dreams, what meaning can life have for you? The purpose of life is to do what you can and what you love and not miss out on anything. You shouldn't lose at life. I think listening to them has even made us reject many of the ridiculous things in our society and become different.

- Is this just your opinion, or do all ARMY members think this way?

Yes, when you don't enjoy life and don't achieve any of your dreams, what meaning can life have for you? When BTS's belief is this, ARMY members should share the same belief, but someone might think differently. The ARMY members who are my friends all agree with me; when you interview me, it's like you're interviewing them too."

With the necessity of breaking away from the adult generation and embracing new conditions where individuals focus solely on themselves without regard for their social relationships, the "embrace of norm-breaking," frequently mentioned by the BTS boys, appears essential.

The BTS members, through the norm-breaking behaviors they display, effectively teach their fans the necessity of breaking norms.

"I had seen in Hollywood and among Western singers that sometimes boys wear a bit of makeup or nail polish. At that time, when I was a fan of Persian rap, imagine I was listening to a song by some bearded guys (laughs), and I thought it was a ridiculous thing. I would ask myself why a boy should wear nail polish, or I always saw Harry Styles breaking taboos by taking photos in skirts and dresses, but it always seemed strange to me. Not that I disliked it or hated it; I just thought, 'So what?' But after I got to know BTS, I saw that they wore makeup, and I really connected with that. It's not that they have soft and beautiful faces; that's why makeup suited them so well. When I saw their photoshoots and pictures, I didn't think, 'Agh! What are they doing?' I liked it. I noticed their hair; it was very interesting to me that most of them dyed their hair and used beautiful colors that enhanced their attractiveness a hundredfold. These things were very interesting and beautiful to me, and aside from all this, their group dances were very new to me." (Poonh, 18-years-old).

- "Have they ever worn a skirt or princess dress?

One of the members wore a skirt in the music video for 'Butter' or 'Dynamite'; I'm not sure which song, but I am sure about that princess dress (laughs)." (Elnaz, 12-years-old).

With the new standards that fans have found in light of BTS's direct and indirect implications, the report of "The negative shift in supporters' views towards Iranian men" is another expected issue among BTS fans:

"Negin: Saeedeh, besides this, we were comparing something else too, remember?! That there aren't any decent boys among us!

Saeedeh: Exactly.

- Don't you think this is because your standards have changed? Maybe our boys are decent, but they don't match your criteria?

Negin: Yes, my standards have really changed, and I'm very happy about it. If I were to marry someone based on my previous standards, I have no idea what my life would be like. I've become very open-minded about this. Because their boys are very family-oriented; they love their partners wholeheartedly. It's not like that in Iran. Infidelity has become very common. There's a lot of duplicity, so it's hard to know and understand if an Iranian truly loves you or if they have several others besides you. There's a specific sense of hopelessness. I don't like Iranians.

Negin: And it's not just that. Iranians don't care about women at all and use every opportunity to belittle them. Whereas Koreans are not like that. They truly respect women and care about them. They respect women in every way, especially emotionally. In contrast, Iranian boys are only looking to fulfill their needs in a relationship and to sort out their own affairs.

- Guys, I wanted to ask your opinion about boyfriends, but what I've gathered so far is that your opinion about Iranian boyfriends is at least negative, right?

Negin: It's really negative. I'm disgusted by Iranian boyfriends. They are completely untrustworthy. I'm so distrustful of them that if one of them messages me, I feel like he is talking to ten other girls at the same time. To be honest, my brother, even though he has a girlfriend, is talking to ten other girls at the same time. I'm not saying Koreans are not like that. But I'm saying their actions are much clearer. Look, I know I shouldn't speak so confidently since I haven't lived there, but what I've seen and heard proves this to me.

Saeedeh: I once told myself not to judge. I hadn't personally experienced anything. So I said I'd go try it at least. But I regret it so much that I can't even describe it. There's not even a one percent chance I would do it again. And I really oppose it. (laughs and says) Either Korean or no one." (Negin, 19-years-old, and Saeedeh, 20-years-old).

Finally, "getting involved in the group's controversies" is another important issue that diverts the time and energy of many fans towards very trivial and sometimes absurd matters:

- "Are their fans emotionally dependent on them?

Yes, oh, in what way (laughs). It's a situation. It's enough for one of them to sneeze, and all their fans worry about them. I've even seen them unable to sleep at night and crying for them! They imagine themselves with the member, feeling like that person is their husband and belongs only to them, and now they have to take care of him and follow him around (laughs). I remember once they posted a ridiculous news story to attract attention, saying one of them was getting married! Then that member's fans started hating on him and crying as if there had been a public mourning. They were so upset that they fell behind in their studies and didn't go to school; they were so emotionally disturbed, and this controversy ended up benefiting them, bringing in a lot of followers (laughs)"

4- Cultural Effects

Support for the BTS group has various effects, including psychological, social, cultural, ethical-belief, educational, economic-political, aesthetic, artistic, health and hygiene, and familial impacts. In this section, the cultural effects of supporting the BTS group will be examined and discussed. The topics that will be addressed regarding the cultural effects of supporting BTS are as follows:

- The growth of K-pop groups in the initial cultural foundation of Korea (such as K-dramas).
- The promotion of K-pop music to an entertainment industry.
- Providing content and entertainment that appeals to teenagers and young adults by BTS.
- Encouraging fans to read and watch various books and films.
- Interest in becoming familiar with Korean culture.
- The spread of the Korean language among fans.
- The reception of Korean food.
- Acceptance of content produced by fans.
- Other cultural aspects (cultural initiatives to support charities, cultural transformation, acceptance of fan-generated content, and the group's efforts to redefine masculinity).

The following sections will delve into the aforementioned topics.

4-1- The Growth of K-pop Groups in the Initial Cultural Foundation of Korea

In today's world, power is not solely tied to economic strength; one must also consider cultural superiority alongside the concept of power. In other words, if a third world war were to occur on our planet, it would be more of a cultural war than a military or economic one. Therefore, for nearly three decades, the Korean government has sought to create a suitable initial foundation for cultural growth alongside the economic development of Korean society, relying on both economic and cultural power to advance its strategic goals.

According to Wikipedia, the Korean Wave or Hallyu, which emerged in South Korea after the 1990s, is described as follows: "The Korean Wave or Hallyu is a neologism that refers to the global spread of South Korean culture since the 1990s. In its early stages, this wave expanded with the spread of Korean dramas and pop music in East, South, and Southeast Asia, and later, with the growth of the internet and social media, especially the presence of Korean pop music

videos on YouTube, it became a global phenomenon. The term Hallyu was first used in 1999 by the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism. At that time, the ministry produced a music CD in Chinese titled 'Hallyu: A Song from Korea,' which Chinese media used to describe the success of Korean pop culture in China.

With the dawn of the 21st century, South Korea emerged as one of the largest exporters of pop culture and tourist attractions. These factors have been among the most significant aspects of the country's growing economy. The increasing popularity of Korean pop culture among many nations led the South Korean government to subsidize and finance startups in the entertainment sector to expand its soft power. The government's goal was to compete with the pop cultures of Japan and Britain, an area that has been dominated by Americans for about half a century. Meanwhile, the Western world gradually recognized South Korean society as a developed society.

Much of the success of the Korean Wave is attributed to advancements in social media services and online video platforms. Korean pop culture was transmitted to audiences that were very distant through these tools. The use of these tools to facilitate the advertising, distribution, and consumption of various Korean entertainment products (especially K-pop) has made the culture of this country recognized globally since the mid-2000s.

The expansion of the Korean Wave from the early 21st century has significantly impacted contemporary culture, the music industry, film, television, and the behavioral aspects of various people around the world."

Many respondents in their interviews have acknowledged that their first acquaintance with Korea and subsequently with BTS was through the Iranian state television's introduction to the Korean film and drama industry or K-dramas, and they were drawn from K-dramas to K-pop, especially since some K-pop singers have also acted in K-dramas.

Reihaneh, 21-year-old, mentions in her interview about the history of K-pop, the simultaneous presence of K-pop and K-dramas:

- "What do you know about the history of K-pop before we get to BTS?

Look, K-pop is not a new phenomenon in Iranian society. K-pop was introduced to Iranian teenagers and young adults more than two decades ago with groups like Super Junior, Double S 501, and SNSD, along with K-dramas and series like 'Boys Over Flowers,' 'Dream High,' and 'You're Beautiful.'"

Shabnam, a 25-year-old, in an interview, mentions that she has watched the Korean series "Samson" more than 100 times, indirectly highlighting the depth and greatness of the South Korean film and television industry:

"There was a Korean series called 'Samson' that was shown on Farsi 1. It was the start of my interest in Korea. It all began with that film."

- Can you please tell me more about your interest and fantasies regarding that Korean actor?

I followed him a lot on Instagram. Although he's not very active and has only acted in two series, I really like him from those two series.

- At what age did this interest begin?

When this film was being aired on Farsi 1, I was in middle school, and I always wished to see this series. But my mom wouldn't let me and said, 'Go to sleep; this isn't suitable for your age.' This stuck in my mind and made me more curious about what it was that my mom wouldn't let me watch. Later, when I got older, I bought the series, and I've probably watched it over a hundred times. My sister would get annoyed and say, 'How can you still watch this!?"

Negin, 19-years-old, and Saideh, 20-years-old, in a joint interview, echoed Shabnam's sentiments about watching the series "Boys Over Flowers" multiple times, noting the diversity and richness of Korean dramas. They emphasized that by watching films and series from the K-drama industry, they have set aside Iranian films and have not watched Iranian series for years:

- "So, Negin, can you tell me how it happened that you got acquainted with the K-drama and K-pop industry and then introduced BTS to Saideh?"

Negin: Well, I unknowingly got familiar with this industry through the series that were broadcast on television. When I was in seventh grade, I saw a group of my classmates talking excitedly about Korean films and songs. This group had a really cool and strange vibe. One time, I sat next to them and heard them talking about Lee Min-ho. They were so excited that I remember when I got home, I brought my laptop to the dining table and while eating lunch, I searched for his name and thought, 'Wow, oh my God, this guy is amazing.' I downloaded and watched every film that Lee Min-ho acted in. Then, every time I watched a series and liked one of the actors, I would download their films and watch them, and that's how I ended up watching a ton of Korean series.

- What was it about Lee Min-ho that attracted you?

Negin: Well, first of all, definitely his looks. But after watching his films, his acting drew me in. He acted so well that my jaw would drop. It was so natural. I had never seen an actor perform so naturally. Really, when Lee Min-ho or other good actors were in a film, I would get so absorbed in the series that I wouldn't know if I was in real life or in the film.

Saideh: His appearance really has an impact. I was initially attracted by his good acting, and then gradually I realized that his look is stunning.

Negin: I should also mention that their series are very diverse. You don't find repetitive content in their series.

- What do you mean by saying their themes are diverse?

Saideh: Look, Iranian series are very repetitive. They're all about suffering, hardship and misery. They're a bomb of despair. But Korean series, while they do have suffering and poverty, they give so much hope. I mean, whenever I have a problem, I sit down and watch a Korean series. It really takes me away from everything and just immerses me in the series fantasy realm. I come to realize that I'm sitting there watching a series and smiling, feeling excited. It's very rare for me to sit down and cry, and even those emotional scenes are appealing to me. The whole series cultures hope in you. For example, there was a series that I feel had a significant impact on all K-drama fans, including me and Negin. It was called 'Boys Over Flowers.' You've probably heard of it! Lee Min-ho acted in it. It had a school theme. The story was about a girl who accidentally gets accepted into an elite school. In that school, Lee Min-ho and his friends are considered the troublemakers. Then, Lee Min-ho and his friends bully the girl, but during this time, Lee Min-ho falls in love with her, and the story continues. I became so enamored with this series that if I say I've watched it over 12 times, I'm not lying. It had such a good feeling

In Korean dramas, the concerns of wealthy individuals have also been depicted. They even show the worries of elderly people. This series made me think that one day I will grow old too, or that I might change my behavior towards them. Because of this positive impact, which is absent in Iranian series, I haven't watched any Iranian series for about 5-6 years.

- Can you talk about the series you mentioned that was made about elderly people?

Saideh: One of them was 'Shining Eyes,' and another was 'Youthful Days.' The main concept of these series was that everyone grows old, and we must respect the elderly and understand that they have the right to live too. They

depicted all the problems faced by elderly people: forgetfulness, losing their abilities, and many other things. After watching these two series, I really transformed and began to respect elderly people much more. For example, in 'Shining Eyes,' the story shows an old woman who had a very romantic life with her husband in her youth, but her husband passes away after their child is born. The story is based on her recounting her memories of her youth. It shows that they also had happy and romantic times and were like us, but as they age, people disrespect them and many other things. The series wasn't primarily a romance; the romantic part was just that woman's youth. But it was really a good series. It was a bit conceptual and hard to understand, but it was educational."

Negin: They show many concerns. For example, if an elderly person wants to go fishing, fall in love, or go to the park, they depict all of that. If someone falls in love in their old age, they show that this love is beautiful. It's really nice that they portray this issue so openly. This way, people can understand them very well. Sometimes when I watch Iranian series, they depict elderly people as if they have no feelings. They show that even the worst people have feelings."

Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned the presence of some idols in the K-drama industry, noting that this subtle strategy has led them to immediately transition from K-drama to K-pop and become fans of groups like BTS:

"I used to watch a lot of Korean films and series, and I started a drama called 'Hwarang,' which is called 'Beautiful Knights' in Persian. Back then, I was looking for dubbed versions, so I would watch them on Filimo. What a good kid I was!

At that time, I would also read the comments that people left, and sometimes I would leave comments myself. In the meantime, I kept seeing a phrase that said, 'I only watch this series because of Taehyung.' So, I searched to see who Taehyung was, and through that, I found out he was a member of BTS. Of course, since he wasn't the main character in this series, he didn't catch my attention much at first, but as the story progressed, I got to know him more. He was being cute, and most of the moments that came out from this series were related to Taehyung. Before all this, I had heard of BTS and knew to some extent that they were a Korean boy band...

I even knew that their fans are called ARMY, and at one point, I didn't like ARMYs and never thought I would become one myself. Anyway, this series

made me pay attention to them, and gradually I became attracted to them. I remember that clearly, but I don't remember how I got to know all seven of them (laughs)."

- "What made you get acquainted with K-pop?"

Almost (pauses), the first time I watched a Korean series. Most people my age who are K-pop fans got acquainted with K-pop through this series because there was a K-pop group in it that also acted.

- Oh... well, what series was it?

Boys Over Flowers.

- Boys Over Flowers?

Yeah. It's a very romantic, what do they call it, typical series. It's about a very rich boy falling in love with a girl who is very... you know. It was very popular. For that year, the story was very attractive."

- A poor girl, a rich boy?

Yeah. Like a prince and... you know. The story is about a boy who is the boss, no what it called, he was heir to a very big company in Korea, and the girl accidentally gets a scholarship to the school that belongs to this boy's father. Then a series of events happen, and there's a romantic story. In this series, there was a Korean group, and the male second lead was a member of that group. They even sang the songs for that series. Because I liked that actor, I found out he was a singer. Then I listened to their songs and realized they were K-pop. That's how I got acquainted with K-pop in general. But now, I think most people who become K-pop fans get to know BTS first. I mean, our generation is like the old generation

- So they directly go after the music...

Yeah.

- Not that they first go for the series...

Yeah. And often, they go from K-pop to K-drama or the South Korean film and television industry.

For us, it was the opposite. But for most of them, they first get to know K-pop and BTS, then they find out they like Koreans, and then they start watching series. Most of the cases I've seen have been like this. Of course, this has been my personal experience; it may not represent the whole picture."

Sayeh, 21-years-old, in her interview states that because she has been a consumer of K-drama products, she has become somewhat familiar with the Korean language, which has made her feel less alienated when encountering K-pop, allowing her to more easily embrace BTS as a foreign music group:

- "So, Sayeh, since when have you been a fan of K-pop?

Look, I was a fan of just BTS for a long time, I think about three years, and now for a year, I've become more familiar with K-pop.

- So you went directly for BTS and not in a way that you first got interested in K-pop and then focused on BTS?

Yeah, exactly. I became an ARMY in 2018, you could say officially. But before that, I had been listening to their songs and watching their music videos for about six months, but I can't say I got to know them all of a sudden because I had been watching K-dramas for about 4 or 5 years before that."

- So from what age?

About from elementary school. I had been watching them since then, and my ear had gotten used to their language, so when I encountered their songs, it wasn't something new that I couldn't listen to or that would bother me. Because, after all, when someone encounters a new language, their ear isn't used to it at first. Anyway, yeah, it was in 2018 that I realized, 'Oh, I'm a fan,' because I suddenly got very involved."

4-2- The Promotion of K-pop Music to an Entertainment Industry

One of the notable and important innovations of Big Hit Entertainment is the promotion of K-pop music to the entertainment industry. This means that, unlike Hollywood, where a singer may fade into obscurity after performing a song until the release of another song, which could take months, Big Hit has made a significant effort to keep BTS constantly in the spotlight. After their song performances, they have introduced various entertainment programs featuring the stars, keeping them alive in the minds of fans. The provision of entertainment, comedy, and competition programs under titles like "Run BTS," "BTS In The Soop," "Bon Voyage," and "BTS Island," along with individual and group live streams, fan meetings, fan signs, and the production of a plethora of BTS-branded merchandise, has elevated K-pop music to the entertainment industry. As a result, BTS stars remain present and influential in the minds of their fans.

Furthermore, the need for laughter, joy, and vitality among teenagers and young adults drives them to welcome comedic programs, and the provision of comedic programs by idols can potentially attract teenagers and young adults to BTS. The statements of Sarina, 13-years-old, and Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, provide evidence of this:

- "In that one or two months you mentioned it took for you to become interested in BTS, what caught your attention about them?

Well, I mostly watched their comedy films, and then I went to watch 'Run BTS.' I was more into their comedic phases than their songs and music videos, and I was attracted to them more because of their humor... I laugh at their work. They do a lot of funny and amusing things. The clips they make of themselves, one of their activities, I think there have been nearly a hundred, close to two hundred episodes where they do specific activities together in each episode. They do funny things that make ARMYs laugh."

Reihaneh, 17, in her interview about the history of the "Run BTS" program says:

- "Can you explain the 'Run BTS' program to me?

The 'Run' program is episodic and has been around for a long time; I think it started back in 2014 or 2015. In this program, they play various games, and each episode has its own specific theme, like cooking, pottery, flower arrangement, camping for a few days, and so on. It has an entertainment format and is generally very fun. Initially, the episodes were about 15 to 20 minutes long, but over time they increased to about 40 minutes. At first, it aired every Tuesday, but it would stop in between due to their work, for example, during concert breaks and heavy workloads. However, after the LA concerts and around late 2020-2021, they released a few episodes and then said it would stop until around September, and they aired special episodes where they had a mind-reading competition among the members, and one of them that aired last week was Yoga 'Flying' each having two parts of 30 or 40 minutes. Now it's unclear when a preview will air again to say, 'Get ready for Run on Tuesday,' and the airing has become a bit chaotic."

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, and Gelareh, 14, in their interviews describe the content of the "Run BTS" programs as follows:

"... Watching reality shows¹, concerts, and various programs that are comedic, educational, or even friendly is a much better option compared to other entertainments that might be somewhat unhealthy or, in other words, even have negative influences and exacerbate feelings of depression and lethargy.

- Can you give an example of these programs and what kind of content they usually have?

For instance, the reality show Run BTS.

In that show, there are a series of friendly competitions among the members of the group. These include cooking contests, brain games, sports, and things like that, which, in addition to being exciting and lively, showcase humor, laughter, and a kind of real comedy among the members. Programs like this are very useful for spending time and gaining energy in a healthy and appropriate way.

"... For example, there was a part where they were in a place similar to a pool and were playing together. There was also a jacuzzi and sauna there, and the members would go into the sauna room, where the temperature was very high, and they would play games. Anyone who gave a wrong answer had to stay there longer. Overall, it has more of a humorous and fun aspect."

Gelareh, a 14-year-old, states in an interview about the program "BTS In The Soop":

"There are many other programs, for example, 'BTS In The Soop'² was one of them that showed a few days of BTS's trip to an island or a forested area with beautiful houses, exhibiting their life together.

Alongside featuring these experiences, they would take each member individually and ask them how that part was and what they did, and the members would share their experiences. In different segments, they cook, play games, like guessing a song based on its rhythm.

¹ Reality television programs, or more commonly known in Iran as competition-documentaries or reality shows, are a genre of television programming that gained attention from producers in the late 20th century and early 21st century. A reality show presents the everyday lives of people in various situations such as competitions, discussion-based issues, documentary-style content, and entertaining segments that narrate a few hours of individuals' lives. The goal is to showcase everyday life on television. These programs, which are not scripted, not only follow specific and entertaining events for the audience but also provide valuable and useful information to viewers

² BTS In the Soop" is a program created by Big Hit Entertainment and Big Hit Three Sixty featuring the members of the group BTS. The show has two seasons, with the first season airing in 2020 on JTBC and the online platform Weverse

The program BTS Bon Voyage presents a more advanced level of the BTS In The Sloop program. This means that while in BTS In The Sloop, the group members go on a short trip to a forest or an island and showcase their experiences there, in BTS Bon Voyage, the members share their experiences from international trips, especially since the recent experiences add to the excitement due to the members facing unexpected travel issues.

The first season of BTS Bon Voyage aired in 2015, and the last season was for 2019. The first season shows the members' trip to Northern Europe, which contains new moments, memories, and experiences for the group members."

Zahra, 24-year-old, mentions the BTS Island page, which features cartoon content centered on the members of BTS, providing entertainment for fans:

- "You mentioned there is a page that you are very interested in.

BTS Island.

- Yes, what kind of page is BTS Island and what content does it share?

BTS Island is also one of the main pages of the group, and there isn't much difference in their content, but there is a story about it. These seven members live in a space that is completely peaceful and serene. The posts shared are all cartoonish. It is more for entertainment and is a bit different from the other group pages. Because it is cartoonish, it is happier and funnier.

- What activities do the photos on this page show them doing?

They do many things, most of which are considered daily, for example, they go to nature for fun. They go for a picnic (laughs). But recently, they posted a few times that they went to a play space for fun (laughs). Since it is cartoonish, they also include some unrealistic things. But the main goal is to entertain the followers.

- Considering that you said they live in a world full of peace and serenity, it has a bit of idealism as well.

That's right; they even wrote in the bio of the page that it is an island full of peace and serenity created by BTS for the fans, and then they said come and take a look at the posts for a little relaxation."

Individual and group live streams of BTS members are another form of entertainment that fans can enjoy. The design and presentation of cartoon symbols of the idols, created by themselves, and the creation of animal symbols of them are other forms of entertainment that fans benefit from:

- "My dear, what did you mean by "Tata Mike"¹?

Each of the boys has a puppet character that Tata created for them, based on their own personalities, and the boys designed it themselves.

- Do you know why exactly these characters were created?

As far as I understand, the boys designed these characters so that people could get to know them much better through these characters. (Reihaneh, 17-years-old).

"... Each member of BTS also has an animal symbol that ARMYs have assigned to them. Jin's animal symbol is, um, something like a sheep that has a cute appearance?

- Koala?

Not a koala... wait a minute, I can't remember right now.

- Uh-huh.

And Suga's symbol, his real name is Min Yoongi, and he is the one whose shoulder got really injured, to the point that he couldn't participate in any activities for a while. His animal symbol is a cat, and J-Hope, whose real name is Jung Hoseok, has a squirrel as his animal symbol, and they call him Sunshine. This is his nickname. Sunshine means the sun because he brings a lot of hope to ARMYs. RM, whose real name is Kim Namjoon, was called Rap Monster, and his animal symbol is a koala. Jimin, whose name is Park Jimin, is called Chick and has the smallest physique among the members. The seventh member, whose real name is Kim Taehyung, has a tiger as his animal symbol, and Jungkook, whose name is Jeon Jungkook, has a rabbit as his animal symbol.

- So, how do they feel when they hear these animal names?

They actually do these things themselves to seem like them. Jungkook really acts very funny. According to their behaviors, ARMYs assigned these names

¹ The BT21 characters were designed in late September 2017, and the name is a combination of the name of the group BTS and the 21st century. When the group BTS joined the Line Friends messaging app, a project was initiated to design characters and create new products related to the boys. The project includes 8 characters created by the members of BTS: Koya (Namjoon), RJ (Jin), Shooky (Suga), Mang (J-Hope), Chimmy (Jimin), Tata (a character who sometimes smiles; he is a curious, shape-shifting alien prince from planet BT with a heart-shaped head and a blue body with yellow spots, created by Taehyung), Cooky (Jungkook), and Van (Tata's space robot, created by RM (Namjoon), who is the protector of BTS). Each of these characters guides the audience in some way into the world of BTS.

to them, and they agreed that they resemble them, and Alcapone is Jin's animal name."

The description of fan meetings and fan signs of the BTS boys has also been mentioned before.

Holding grand and global birthday celebrations for idols and events like Festa (the anniversary celebration of the formation of BTS) are other aspects that can be noted in the mutual relationships between BTS and their fans.

Kowsar, 25-years-old, in an interview, points out that there are no similar video programs to BTS in Hollywood, and this indicates K-pop's advancement over Hollywood:

"... Another attraction... they create a series of programs... the experience I had while being a fan of BTS... it was like a series that I was living.

- Uh-huh.

For example... it wasn't just music. They released songs, every once in a while they would release an album. The albums had several music videos. Then they would release the music video and have performances. They would go to several shows to perform the songs and dance. Then they would have a program that lasted about two hours from the start. In the middle, they would talk, tell jokes, interview each other, talk about themselves, and others, and then perform songs in between. They called it a comeback show. Then... for a while, they would have a break, and during that time, they would air some programs that they had recorded earlier. Programs where they would sit and play games together. For example, they would play that game together or play Mafia or go to a haunted house to film.

- Uh-huh... like a vlog?

Yeah, yeah. Vlogs like that but more fun, with more professional filmmakers, and they share their interactions with fans a lot. And this is another feature of K-pop, where the friendship between group members is very evident to fans, which I haven't seen in Hollywood."

By examining the statements of the interviewed fans, it becomes clear that the company's efforts to promote BTS's music to the entertainment industry have been quite successful, and programs like Run BTS, BTS In The Soop, Bon Voyage, member and group lives, and similar ones have been well received by many fans and are utilized by them.

4-3- Providing content and entertainment that appeals to teenagers and young adults

Big Hit Entertainment, in an effort to attract more and more audiences, has worked to address the issues of teenagers and young adults while also creating a space for their entertainment and fun to achieve its goals. Therefore, alongside efforts to enlighten teenagers and young adults, it strives to elevate K-pop to the entertainment industry to fulfill its desires. Diba, 15-years-old, in an interview, talks about the company's success in creating some enlightenment for teenagers and young adults:

- "Besides the concepts of self-love and going with the flow of life, does BTS refer to other topics in their songs or not?

Usually, RM sings about these kinds of issues, like who am I, which is something that most teenagers or even young adults struggle with, like what is my purpose now, what role do I have in society, how am I perceived personally, how accepted am I in society, and what do people think about me, and such things. RM himself has said that he has struggled with such topics, which is why he sings more about this subject. For example, in the song 'Persona,' he says, 'Who am I? The question I had my whole life¹.'

- "Apart from the relative impact that BTS has had on your self-love, have there been any other effects from BTS on you

I used to criticize myself a lot and constantly told myself why I was like this or that I should get my nose done, but now I'm not like that anymore, and the intensity of those feelings has decreased significantly. When I compare myself to other kids and my peers at school, I feel like I take life much easier and see more positive things about myself and life compared to others."

Big Hit Entertainment, alongside its efforts to enlighten the issues facing teenagers and young adults, has provided a plethora of entertainment programs such as Run BTS, BTS In The Soop, Bon Voyage, majestic birthday celebrations, Festa, individual and group live streams, fan meetings, fan signs, BTS Island, BT21, and similar events, aiming to satisfy the entertainment and leisure needs of teenagers and young adults.

An examination of the statements from the interviewed fans indicates that Big Hit has successfully drawn the attention of more teenagers and young adults towards BTS through these entertainment programs.

¹ Who am I? The question I had my whole life; The question which I probably won't find an answer to my whole life

Narges, 21-years-old, mentioned the organization of BTS-themed parties and celebrations among fans, while Shabnam, 25-years-old, talked about how she and her friends imitate BTS's dances:

- "So can you now explain about that meeting?

Umm, the meeting was such that a group of ARMYs who were friends came up with a plan to gather every once in a while with their friends to have a kind of party. But it was only for ARMYs.

This is what one of my friends who was friends with them told me. At first, there were few people, but over time, the number increased. Those who organize the meetings are financially well-off. Their fathers are wealthy in Tehran. That's why they spend a lot of money. Umm, after a while, the number kept increasing. They gather for various occasions, like when BTS releases an album or wins awards in shows. Each time has a special theme, and they dress according to that theme. During the members' birthdays, they gather and celebrate. Dancers go to dance, and if someone knows how to play an instrument, they bring it and play it, but just BTS songs. If someone can sing, they sing. They generally gather and have fun. I've been twice because my friend invited me. They don't just let anyone in; you have to be friends with someone who can take you there, and that's how I managed to go because I had a connection. Oh, and at their events and meetings, there are always BTS-themed cakes and cookies. They hold competitions there, and sometimes at the end, they give you a gift to take home as a souvenir. Umm, also, the themes they choose are usually based on one of the boys' outfits. For example, if it's Taehyung's birthday, they say to choose one of Taehyung's outfits and come dressed like that. They have a group that organizes the program and location. Usually, it's at one of the villas of those wealthy people in Niavaran. I remember going there once or twice, but that was a few years ago. I don't know if it's still happening now.

I remember one of the fans saying, 'We are so unfortunate in Iran that we can't go to concerts or have the boys come to our country, so we gather with the kids like this to ease the sadness of not having BTS.' This is the only thing we can do with other ARMYs to have fun."

- "What common characteristics do you see among all these fans?

Now, most teenagers, both Iranian and foreign, want to enter the industry at a young age and be able to dance or sing well. Personally, I've seen people who are interested in these groups and mostly imitate their style, hair color, or dances. When I asked my trainees about their interest in groups like EXO,

Junior, or BTS, I got similar answers. For example, one of the kids said they are very down-to-earth, dance beautifully, and are coordinated. My friends and I gather in groups of five, buy similar outfits, and every week we imitate their dances. Many of them wanted to enter the music world, but only a few were persistent, and it's very hard. One or two got accepted. Many fans are also influenced by their emotional singing, beautiful and soft voices, and the meanings of the songs and music videos, which have a lot of variety."

Reihaneh, 15-years-old, and Sonia, 17-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned doing BTS's suggested challenges at school or making BTS dubbing videos with their friends:

- "Where do you download BTS's Runs?

Mostly, my friends and I send them to each other to watch. Sometimes we perform their challenges at school.

- So your friends also follow the Runs.

Yeah, most of them watch their videos and share them with each other. For example, one downloads it and sends it to the others, or we take turns downloading and sending them."

"... I only talk to ARMYs, like my friends who are fans.

- Can you explain a bit more about what you talk about? Of course, if you want to answer.

Come on, I'll answer (laughs). For example, if they post something new, we talk about that, whether it's a post from the group or any of the boys. If it's a photo of themselves, we discuss their outfits, hairstyles, and makeup. If it's a song or music video, we listen to it together. For example, we listened to 'Butter' so much that we memorized it, and then one of the kids said, 'Let's make a dabsmash video with it,' and we did that, and it turned out well, actually. We mostly talk about these things."

Negin, 13-years-old, mentioned in an interview that she has started finding, buying and selling paintings of the animal symbols of idols. Reihaneh, 15-years-old, also talks about mimicking BTS members with her brother at home:

"...I drew some paintings myself.

- What kind of paintings?

For example, we compare the members to animals or know their favorite fruits. For instance, I drew the animals of two members. Jungkook's animal is a rabbit, and Namjoon's animal is a koala.

- Do you share your paintings with each other?

Not like that, I show them to my friends, but mostly I do it for myself. I miss them, so I draw these and look at them, and it eases my longing.

- Are they considered fan art?

No, fan art is when you post it on social media. I don't do that; I might gift these.

- What about your friends?

No, my friends aren't really into social media, so they also draw some things, but we don't post or show them to anyone. But we exchange these as gifts, and honestly, we've started trading and selling with each other. I do this, for example, I bought a drawing of Taehyung from one of my friends; she draws beautifully. Another thing I do is draw BTS symbols and sold them cheaply because I'm not really focused on the money.

- What symbols of BTS do you draw?

Koala, rabbit, tiger."

- "Can you tell me what makes them attractive to you?

To be honest, I like their silly antics and behaviors more than the game itself. They are very cute and funny; I like that they are humorous, or for example, seeing their true selves in the runs and how they interact with their friends is interesting, it feels like I'm closer to them. I also like their accents when they talk to each other; their tone is fun. Sometimes I walk around the house and mimic them and talk like them. I say a bunch of silly things quickly, but in their tone, for example, I stretch the words and like that, and my brother laughs at me, then he mimics them too (laughs).

- Do your friends like the Runs for the same reasons?

Yeah, I think most of them watch because of these things; otherwise, they can do their competitions. The important part is the off stage moments of their games and the other things they do alongside. For example, when we watch a Run, Dorsa comes and says, 'Did you see what Namjoon did? How cool was that? Oh, I could die for him!' or something about Jimin or any of them.

- So, it's more about the members of the group that attract you than the game itself.

Uh-huh, they are so crush-worthy!"

Masoud, 20-years-old, in his statements, talked about his family gatherings, emphasizing that he and his siblings used to sing along to BTS songs:

- "What impact did Korean songs have on you?

The first impact was that it brought my five siblings and me closer together. Before getting to know BTS, none of us interacted much, and we were often in conflict. After discovering the group, the good vibes we felt after listening to the songs were indescribable, and when we sang along after repeating the songs a few times, it became our most enjoyable pastime.

- Did you also watch Korean movies?

As much as you want, we watched Korean movies together every night, especially in the summer when school was out; we stayed up until midnight watching Korean films. We all loved Korean movies as a family, and the next day, we would spend hours discussing the excitement of the films and interpreting them.

- Did Korean movies have an impact on you?

They had a huge impact. The efforts I saw in the movies to overcome difficulties were very effective in my personal life and taught me the spirit of resilience against hardships."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, in her interview, mentioned her use of BTS-themed items and accessories:

- "Do you have any BTS items?

Yeah. For example, a BTS bag, a lot of BTS photos and photocards, a BTS notebook, a bag, a pencil case, and a BTS bracelet.

- Are all these easily available in the shops in your city?

It depends on the shop; the shop I get them from sells accessories and jewelry, but now, if you go into any shop, most of them have at least one BTS item with a BTS design.

- Uh-huh. So if someone enters your room, what BTS items can they see?

I've stuck BTS photos on my wall. I've hung up my BTS bag. My pencil case is in my BTS bag, and my BTS cup is in the kitchen, and I've put my

bracelet and other things on my shelf; most of the photos I've stuck on the wall are visible.

- Do you use a lot of different BTS items?

Yeah."

Considering examples and instances like those briefly mentioned, it can be concluded that BTS has effectively contributed to the advancement of their K-pop group into a successful entertainment industry. Their creative and suggested entertainment has been well received by fans, and thus, unlike Hollywood singers who are often forgotten after releasing their songs until the next one, BTS and its members remain consistently in the spotlight of their fans.

4-4- Encouraging fans to read various books and watch movies

By examining the information provided in the interviews with BTS fans, it can be concluded that BTS has increased the reading habits of their fans in several ways.

Since BTS's songs sometimes have philosophical or psychological themes, listeners of their recent songs are encouraged to explore philosophical, psychological, or historical works that inspired BTS's songs, as traces of these works are reflected in the group's music.

In addition to this, the widespread creation of one-shots and fan fiction among BTS fans leads them to read stories centered around the idols or idols with the book's author. It is worth noting that most one-shots and fan fictions created by teenage and young fans who have just reached biological maturity focus on romantic and sexual themes, which can be considered a form of dark literature. Instead of being enlightening and uplifting, such studies may lead to a decline in their intellectual and cultural development.

Another type of reading among BTS fans is the study of books that have been written about the lives of the group members

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, noted in an interview that the codes presented in BTS's songs have encouraged her to study ancient Greek history and books with philosophical and psychological themes:

- "You mentioned that some of this is for entertainment and attracting an audience. I wanted to know, does it teaches you anything? For example, what topics are discussed in BTS's theories?"

Yes, it definitely has educational aspects. For me personally, I'll give an example: the music video for 'Blood, Sweat & Tears' made me curious to enhance my general knowledge about goddesses and Greek myths to understand what concept and moral lesson BTS was trying to convey by referencing topics like the wings of Icarus.

Or it was because I wanted to better understand the teasers for the Wings album that I became eager to read some philosophical books like *Demian*¹, *Those Who Walk Away from Omelas*², *The Map of the Soul*³, *The Almond*⁴, and *The Magic Shop*⁵. These are examples of books I became interested in reading because of these analyses and the introductions by BTS members, and of course, studying always has positive feedback and useful learning...

In the music video for *Spring Day*⁶, by including the name Omelas in a part of the set design, it made a reference to the story *Those Who Walk Away from Omelas*, which piqued the audience's curiosity about the story and its meaning. This story also has a specific philosophical and educational theme, or for example, in the teasers for the 'Wings' album, a part of the text from the *Demian* story was written in the teasers, referencing this philosophical book. The part that discusses the inner and intellectual rebirth and compares it to a chick hatching from an egg."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, Sheida, 20-years-old, and Mahtab, 18-years-old, also mentioned in their separate interviews that they are fans of reading one-shots and storytelling centered around the members of BTS, and they follow these works on Wattpad and some Telegram channels and Instagram pages:

¹ Is the name of a literary book written by Hermann Hesse, a German author. This book is one of the famous literary works of the world.

² *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* is a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin that was first published in 1973. It is a philosophical tale composed of a very simple plot and abstract descriptions of the characters; the narrator emphasizes a utopia called Omelas and its citizens. This story was nominated for the Locus Award in 1974 and won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story of the Year

³ *Map of the Soul* is a book by the famous philosopher Carl Jung. The group BTS produced their music album titled *Map of the Soul: Persona* based on this book

⁴ *Almond* is a novel written by Son Won-pyung. The story is about a teenage boy who suffers from alexithymia

⁵ *In to the Magic Shop* is a book written by Dr. James R. Doty. In the book, we follow his journey from childhood and his introduction to the magic shop to becoming a renowned neurosurgeon. The group BTS drew inspiration from this book for one of their tracks titled *Magic Shop* and the lyrics are very close to the text of the book. After the release of this song, the group suggested that their fans read the magic shop book, leading to a significant increase in its sales. This is why the book is also known as the *Magic Shop BTS* book.

⁶ *Spring Day* is a song by the group BTS that was released in 2017 on the album *You Never Walk Alone*. This music video is inspired by the philosophical short story *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* by Ursula K. Le Guin as well as the film *Snowpiercer* 2013 by Bong Joon-ho. This five-minute music video contains extensive symbolism and addresses the concepts of death, life after death, and closure. Many fans and media outlets have linked this music video to the Sewol ferry disaster which occurred on April 16, 2014, resulting in the disappearance and death of over 300 students. RM, the leader of BTS, stated that the video focuses on visually representing the lyrics of the song and that it can be interpreted in various ways.

- "What is fan fiction?"

It's an app. called Wattpad that has been around for many years. This application is for writing and reading. Some people come and write whatever they want in it, and it's not necessarily about the ships of music groups. But a large part of Wattpad is dedicated to these fan writings. Fans write stories about their favorite ships or even about their favorite artists. Many people read them, comment, and vote or like them. It's not just Iranians; there are many foreign writers who come and write on Wattpad.



Aside from Wattpad, many people also write their stories on Telegram or Instagram and share them with readers. And these stories have a huge audience; I myself have read about 300 books on Wattpad, mostly about Kookmin and other ships. They are very interesting.

- What style and genre do you like, and how much time do you spend reading these?

I go on Wattpad almost every day to read fan fiction. Of course, now, because of the internet and everything, I can't go on as much, and my time has decreased. There were times when I would finish two fics in a day. I can say I've become addicted to Wattpad (laughs), and the topic doesn't really matter to me. If I like a writer's style, I read it. It doesn't matter what the topic or genre is. If it's beautiful, I read it. But I should also say that if the writing is beautiful but the topic is offensive or very bad, I won't read it. Because many people have beautiful writing, but the content of their stories is really terrible."

- "Have you been in BTS fan pages and fandoms?"

Not in that way. I was in some Telegram groups for fans. For example, I remember reading stories that fans wrote about BTS, and I found them

interesting. Then I would critique them, pointing out where they had flaws and such.

- Can you explain more?

It was such that, for example, they would write a story and name the main character after one of the BTS members. Then I would read it and change the parts of the story I didn't like in my mind and take it in a different direction."

- "Where do you read other people's fanfics?

There's a site called AO3¹, but there are also Telegram channels and an app called Wattpad. At one time, they used to post them on Instagram, and there were blogs too. But I mostly follow AO3 myself."

Raziyeh, 15-year-old, also mention in her interview that she don't follow a specific theme in her readings; and read everything from romantic to crime content, as long as the writer has a beautiful writing style:

- "Do you personally like fanfiction or do you write it?

Sometimes I read it, but I don't write myself.

- I've seen that fanfictions are categorized into several types; can you tell me which type you like?

It depends on the writer. If I see that their writing is beautiful and they use good words and it's worth reading, I read it.

- So you don't follow a specific style overall?

Yeah.

- So it doesn't matter if the style is crime or romance?

That's right."

As previously mentioned, in many cases, the one-shot stories and narratives are focused on sexual issues, discussing sexual relationships between genders and, in some cases, unconventional sexual relationships, such as sexual slavery, which are referred to under the title of moral works related to the BTS group.

Finally, some fans have noted that after getting to know the BTS group, they became interested in learning about the ups and downs of the members' lives and were encouraged to read books that provide biographies of the idols.

¹ Archive of Our Own



4-5- Interest in becoming familiar with Korean culture

Psychological studies indicate that a neutral phenomenon, alongside a positive phenomenon, takes on its own value and possesses positive characteristics. For example, providing health services by an anonymous group, due to the positive evaluation of health services by the general public, leads observers to also evaluate the health service provider positively.

Therefore, based on the classical conditioning model mentioned, it can be expected that BTS fans, due to the attraction they find in the group, will also look positively at the country, culture, and people of Korea, thus becoming interested in Korea and its people and culture.

Some interviewed individuals noted that before getting to know the BTS group, they generally had a negative view of Korea and its people, referring to them as yellow-skinned, almond-eyed, and possibly backward. However, after getting to know the BTS group and developing an interest in them, they speak positively about the people and culture of Korea.

Sana, 16-year-old, has noted in her interview that her interest in the BTS boys has led her to become interested in Korean culture as well. By using available virtual tours about Korea, she has become familiar with the country and its culture:

- "Do you have any new information about South Korea that you didn't know before getting to know BTS?

Almost everything I know about Korea, I learned after getting to know BTS.

- So you searched on the internet?

Yes, I even used virtual tours to see some of the tourist spots."



habnam, 25-years-old, and Erfan, 21-years-old, in separate interviews, mentioned their admiration for the respect that people in Korea show towards one another, especially towards older individuals, as well as the dining etiquette and the foods commonly consumed by the people of Korea, among other things:

"... One of the places I really want to see is Namsan Tower, which is a tourist spot where couples go and hang locks as a symbol of their love. Even my professor, who wanted to go to Korea, I gave him 300.000 tomans to buy a lock and hang it there and bring me the key. I have so many dreams and love for this tower, and I want to see it.

Another thing I really like is the respect people have for each other. For example, in learning the Korean language, one of the hardest things was that they have specific language rules for speaking with each person based on age, gender, and status, and I really appreciate the respect that exists among them. Even in terms of eating habits, they are not at all like the Chinese, who eat strange foods. I am so interested in their way of eating that I have even prepared their dishes and the chopsticks they use to eat, and I have learned how to use them, which is quite difficult. My family has also supported me a lot in this journey, giving me energy and telling me not to care about what others say and to follow my interests."

- "Erfan, you've seen and heard so many Korean songs and movies; has it had any cultural impact on you?"

Yes, I've come to like Korean culture to some extent.

- Can you give an example?

For instance, their eating culture. They eat a bowl of vegetable soup and get full quickly. They don't overeat like Iranians, who have several types of food and rice. That's why they all have slim or average body types. I also like their culture of showing respect, and I always thank and appreciate my guests in that way at the end of my work."

4-6- Promotion of the Korean Language among Fans

Fans interested in BTS gradually become familiar with some Korean words and the Korean language through their engagement with the group's songs and entertainment programs (such as Run BTS, BTS In The Soop, Bon Voyage, etc.), especially if they are also K-drama viewers. This learning process occurs more quickly for those who are already engaged with Korean dramas and the film industry.

On the other hand, the appeal of BTS has led some fans to consider continuing their education in Korea or even migrating there, prompting them to take the necessity of learning the Korean language more seriously. They enroll in Korean language classes to gain a more precise understanding of the language and its writing.

Hadis, 14-years-old, Saba, 16-years-old, Maryam, 18-years-old, and Masoud, 20-years-old, mentioned in their separate interviews their auditory learning of the Korean language through their engagement with K-pop and sometimes K-dramas:

- "Well, we were talking about the language. You said you tried to learn through the series. How much impact did it have, and to what extent did you learn?

I learned enough for casual conversation, but I also started learning the alphabet a bit, although I wasn't very successful because it was hard. I should mention that I didn't pursue it very seriously. Some people go to classes for it or watch dramas 24/7 to learn Korean. Many of them become proficient after a while and even hold classes for others."

- " So do you have a fan page for them?

I don't have one myself, but I follow most of their fans. They have channels on Instagram and YouTube where they constantly post their clips. I've watched so much and memorized their songs that I know their language quite well, maybe even better than Persian (laughs). In many places, I speak Persian and suddenly switch to a Korean word."

- "Have you ever taken steps to learn Korean?"

Not officially, but I've learned many of their words and sentences informally.

- How did you learn?

I watch a lot of Korean dramas because I like the romantic genre, and Korea has really great dramas in this area. I've watched so many dramas that I've learned a few things."

- "After watching all these Korean movies and songs, have you learned the Korean language?"

Korean movies helped me understand the meanings of more words, but I can't speak. I can only mimic them, but my sisters have become so good at Korean that they can translate."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Erfan, 21-years-old, mentioned their academic learning of the Korean language as follows:

- "Do you like the Korean language and culture?"

Yes, very much. I've been going to Korean language classes for a year now. I also really love their food. It's my dream to visit Korea once."

- "Did the interest that K-drama or K-pop sparked in you lead you to learn Korean?"

Yes. I had been watching Korean movies and dramas for several years without pursuing the language because I relied on translations and subtitles. But when I got to know K-pop, I noticed that sometimes the translations of the videos were delayed or might not be available at all, as fans have to do this work, and it can be hard to find. That's why I wanted to learn so I could understand what they were saying. There were also some things that I initially misunderstood, and later I realized that what the person said was not what the subtitle indicated, which was misleading, it was fake in lie.. This made me want to understand for myself, and I went to learn. Also, seeing that my K-poper friends knew several languages encouraged me to learn Korean, especially since before that, I kept telling myself, 'So what if I learn Korean? How will it help me?'

- So one of the reasons you wanted to learn Korean was to avoid using fake resources in this area and to understand the difference between fake and real, right?

Yes, that's right."

"... Sometimes, my friends and I read the songs in Korean together and have a great time.

- Why do you read in Korean?

Reading in Korean gives us a much nicer feeling. Since we sing Korean songs together so much, it feels like we were born in Korea and have no accent."

4-7- Reception of Korean Foods

- "Are there any students among your pupils who feel embarrassed or ashamed about their bodies due to these standards?

There are students in my class who are overweight, but so far, none of them have told me that they are upset about it or trying to lose weight. In fact, I see a lot of fans who are always eating. Korean food and their way of eating are very appealing, and it creates a craving in people." (Sheida, 20-years-old).

South Korea is a historical country, and in today's world, it is notable not only for its technological advancements but also for its traditional and diverse foods. It is worth mentioning that Korean citizens use different foods for various seasons; for example, in spring, they use more seasonal vegetables in their dishes, in summer, they consume cold and refreshing foods, and in winter, they eat fermented foods.

Diba, 15-years-old, Maryam, and Taranom, both 18-years-old, in their separate interviews, stated that their interest in the BTS boys has extended to an interest in the culture of Korea. While they adore the BTS group, they have also become familiar with aspects such as history, culture, and Korean foods, and they have become fans of the foods they encountered while engaging with Korean culture:

- "What's your reason for wanting to travel to Korea?

The first thing that comes to my mind in response to this question is that if BTS has a concert, I would love to go there because I think it would be a shame to go to Korea and not attend a concert. Even if BTS doesn't have a concert, I would like to attend concerts of other K-pop groups.

Another reason is that I want to visit Korea as a tourist, and Korea has a very high level of technology. For example, they have stores that sell many cute and cool things, or I want to see stores related to idol merchandise, or even

BTS has a museum there. I want to eat their food and see their old neighborhoods. Overall, I think they have many interesting and cool places."

- "So K-pop hasn't made you interested in Korean culture?

Korean culture isn't particularly interesting, but I do like some Korean foods."

- Can you give an example of a Korean dish you like?

Noodles. I eat noodles for dinner almost every night. I even bought chopsticks¹ to eat with them; it really gives me the feeling of being in a Korean drama."

- "Would you like to travel to or migrate to Korea?

I just want to take a trip where I can go to a BTS concert and see the places I've seen on my phone, and then return to my homeland. For example, I really want to go to Jeju Island and shout like Jimin: 'If you don't want to dance with my instrument, I'll make you do it!' And in the end, I love myself because no one else can be me. I'm going there for those two words (laughs). I saw this in one of the Run BTS episodes from 2017, and since then, I've been interested in Jeju Island. I want to go to Jimin's dad's café, take a picture with Bang PD² and his girlfriend, wear their traditional clothes, go to Seoul to eat mochi at a restaurant near Namjoon's house, go to Busan, and eat kimchi and jajangmyeon. It seems like I'm going more for the food (laughs), but seriously, their food is really delicious. I have ordered them several times from K-pop online shops."

4-8- Other Cultural Aspects

In discussing cultural effects, topics such as the growth of K-pop groups in the cultural foundations of Korea (like K-dramas), the elevation of K-pop music to an entertainment industry, providing content and entertainment that appeals to teenagers and young adults through the BTS group, encouraging fans to read and watch various books and films, interest in learning about Korean culture, the promotion of the Korean language among fans, the reception of Korean foods, and the acceptance of content created by fans have been mentioned. However, these recent points do not cover all the cultural impacts of engaging with the BTS group. There are other cultural effects, including cultural initiatives to support charitable organizations, cultural transformation,

¹ Chopsticks used for eating in East Asian countries

² CEO of HYBE (formerly Big Hit Entertainment)

acceptance of fan-generated content, and the group's efforts to redefine masculinity.

"Cultural initiatives to support charitable organizations" is a very appropriate action that some members of the BTS group have taken, helping charitable, health, and medical centers, among others. Additionally, they have invited their fans to engage in similar actions. Shirin, 22-years-old, mentions in her interview:

- "Shirin, what do you know about idol birthday celebrations?"

The birthday celebrations of idols are held in a very dreamy and fairy-tale manner; even princes wouldn't dream of their celebrations. These celebrations are not only held in Korea but also in most countries around the world. Each idol's birthday is celebrated with a specific color; for example, for Taehyung's birthday, the whole world turned purple, and for Jin's birthday, it turned pink. To make the birthday celebrations luxurious and grand, the company spends billions, and for each idol's birthday, the company allocates a portion of its revenue to charitable works

- What impact do these birthday celebrations have on the fans?

Fans, following the company, become filled with excitement and energy, counting down the moments to hold these celebrations no matter where they are in the world. They actively follow every moment of these celebrations globally in the virtual world and media, and they take the initiative in charitable works and helping cancer patients, imitating their idols and the BTS group, inviting other fans to participate in challenges on their fan pages.

- What do they ask of fans in these challenges?

For example, they say, let's make this birthday celebration different from previous ones. In addition to our spiritual support for our idol, let's be ambassadors of goodwill and health by providing financial support and helping those in need. For instance, this time, let's help the Autism Support Association," and in this way, fans also deliver their financial contributions to those in need with the help of fan page managers.

- What cultural impact do these celebrations have on fans?

They promote the beautiful culture of helping those in need and special patients. Fans enjoy the celebrations and also engage in a humanitarian and philanthropic act."

"Cultural transformations" is another concept in which BTS members have played a role, striving to change some of Korea's cultural taboos¹. Reihaneh, a 21-year-old, stated in an interview on this subject:

- "What are the taboos you are talking about? Can you explain them?"

There are various taboos in Korea. For example, not attending university, dropping out, simple things like tattoos and smoking or using simple drugs... or even having large and unconventional pets or behaving disrespectfully towards older individuals and academic or professional seniors.

- Do you know an idol who has done things considered wrong by Korean society? What happened to them?

For instance, Jungkook from BTS got a tattoo, which is a taboo in Korean society, and given the significant impact of BTS, this act received a lot of attention from fans and even ordinary people. Most fans were happy that Jungkook freely pursued what he wanted and expressed hope for the removal of these unnecessary taboos. So, most fans were satisfied with this positive step. However, a group of people in South Korea started gathering signatures to prevent Jungkook from getting more tattoos, but their efforts were ignored, and Jungkook continued to do what he loved freely, showing that these sensitivities are all unnecessary and that this matter does not warrant interference from others. This act was welcomed rather than criticized."

"The acceptance of fan content production" refers to the openness of cultural productions by fans in relation to BTS. These productions start from editing images and photos, leading to editing BTS clips or creating clips about the group. In addition to producing images and clips, creating fan sites or pages and establishing fan channels are other actions taken by fans to disseminate the thoughts and opinions of BTS. However, it seems that the production of oneshots and stories centered around the group members, which are uploaded to the virtual space, constitutes the largest volume of cultural productions by BTS fans. As previously mentioned, in most cases, the content of these oneshots and stories is inappropriate. Ghazal, a 16-year-old, says in an interview regarding this:

¹ In relation to the change of some cultural taboos, it should be noted that the norm-breaking actions of the BTS group are not necessarily positive; they can also be evaluated negatively. This is because the secular environment of the company and the BTS group means that this group does not have a structured value system like religious or non-secular systems. Therefore, the idols' actions in an environment that lacks fixed and structured values, where they attempt to present new behavioral models to adolescents and young people by breaking norms, may not necessarily be seen as positive actions (such as drug use, keeping pets and large animals at home, or behaving disrespectfully towards the older generation)

- "Ghazal do you read fan fiction?"

Yes, I do.

- What kind of fan fiction?

I read romance. The kind that talks about everything else. About life. They talk about their lives. Yes, I read those.

- Do you write as well?

Yes, I do.

- Can you summarize one of your fictions for me?

One that I really like is about... it wasn't very fictional. I mean, it was (not) all fictional. It was about a girl who goes to a company as an intern... the company where Suga is. Then she get introduced with Suga. They practice together. They work together. The girl debuts. Then they fall in love (laughs), and that's the story of their acquaintance, their journey to each other, and the things that happen between them.

- Do you put yourself in the place of that girl, or do you just write a story about two people?

Sometimes yes... I imagine myself in that space at first, and then I write the story."

"The redefinition of masculinity" refers to the transformation that BTS has brought to masculine identity. Following Big Hit Entertainment's directives, BTS has presented desexualization of makeup, clothing, and expressions of love, and through their actions, they have encouraged men to adopt feminine clothing and makeup, thereby altering a masculine identity that has remained untouched for centuries. Additionally, by declaring love without regard to gender, they have blurred the existing boundaries between the two genders

It seems that with the changes BTS has made and continues to make in masculine identity, the outcome at the fan level is nothing but the formation of a androgynous sexual identity. Sana, a 16-year-old, Razieh, a 15-year-old, and Mohsen, a 22-year-old, expressed in their interviews regarding the gender-neutrality of clothing, makeup, and love:

- "Has BTS influenced how you dress or do your makeup in any way?"

Not for makeup, but about BTS's clothes I should say they are very attractive and cute. I became interested in suits. I know if I say it, my mom will get

upset, so I prefer not to say. Oh, not even mom; but also if my aunt finds out, it will be embarrassing, and the whole family and the country will find out."

- "Regarding BTS's makeup, I heard that many people insult them because of their makeup.

Wearing makeup among men in Korea is completely normal and not strange for them, but there are still some who say makeup is only for women, not men, and that idols shouldn't wear makeup. As far as I've heard, it's part of the company's rules. Iranian celebrities also wear makeup, and some people just say things because they don't like BTS, without doing any research. According to the logic of haters, if BTS dyes their hair or wears makeup, it means they are feminine, but if our own celebrities wear makeup and dye their hair, it's not a problem. I've heard that they say makeup and hair dyeing are a standard for South Korea; I have no information about its reality. There's really no reason to hate."

- "So, is it normal for you for boys to wear makeup?

Yes, it really doesn't matter to me, and it's up to them."

"I'm not gay, but sometimes when I see their photos, I get aroused. I mean, they wear so much makeup and look so attractive that I get stimulated.

- So, do you mean they wear heavy makeup?

Not heavy; I think their makeup artist is doing their makeup literally to attract boys. They do their makeup in a way that looks beautiful and attractive to me.

- Is this a weakness for them?

They are imposing homosexuality on me as a fan...

- How do you realize they have sexual appeal for boys?

I talked to my friends, and they also say they are good-looking."

5- Educational Effects

Support for the BTS group has various effects, including psychological, social, cultural, ethical-belief, educational, economic-political, aesthetic, artistic, health, and familial impacts. In this section, the educational effects of supporting BTS will be examined and discussed. The topics that will be explored regarding the cultural effects of supporting BTS include: active learning, enhancement of fans' technical skills, lack of attention to studies and academic decline, and various awareness raising aspects. The following will delve into the aforementioned topics.

5-1- Active Learning

Jean Piaget, the famous Swiss psychologist known for his contributions to cognitive psychology, introduced the concept of "active learning" as a summary of the practical results derived from his cognitive theory. From Piaget's perspective, conventional school education does not provide real learning for students. He even emphasizes that if a teacher, instead of lecturing, combines acid and base in front of students, the results of this teaching would still not be very beneficial. For deep learning, it is essential for children to be free in a practical environment, to engage in various experiences, and through the trial and error process in that environment, to achieve and internalize real learning.

The findings from interviews with BTS fans indicate that some of the subjects discussed at the BTS group level actively encourage fans' learning and motivate them towards achieving certain active learning outcomes. Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Sayeh, 21-years-old, mentioned in their separate interviews the conditions that stimulate their active learning as follows:

- "You said following the boys' activities in music and their videos increases your creativity?"

Yes, a lot.

- How so?

Because they are full of creativity themselves, Jungkook suddenly and spontaneously starts splashing paint on the canvas during 'In The Soop,' beautifully capturing the very scenery in front of him. Or when the members are together, in an afternoon that I can feel its atmosphere very well, they start to improvise and sing, and Yoongi, out of excitement, decides to record this moment so it can be a keepsake, thinking it's really cool, and begins to create that improvised song, thus creating the theme song for 'In The Soop.'

A song that is full of emotion, entirely their own, with their signature on it. Taehyung, even though his painting style might differ from Jungkook's, starts painting in a style he likes, simple, minimal, and cute, which makes it artistic. Namjoon is the same way, and Taehyung generally does a lot of things not according to the usual rules, but turns them around in his own way. For example, there was a game that had a specific way of being played; everyone started playing according to that method until it got to Taehyung, who completely changed everything and played it in a new way. This taught me that you shouldn't always go by what is established; don't be afraid to go against the current and act in your own way."

- "What's good about fic?

The good thing about fics [fan fiction] is that you already know the characters beforehand. When you read a book, you have to read the first 70 pages to see if you like that character or not. Then you understand the story and how the writing is, but fan fiction isn't like that. You already know the character and are somewhat familiar with the story's foundation. Even if it's very strange and unfamiliar, explaining it takes at most 5 pages. And then when you read the first paragraph, you can tell if this author's writing is useful for you or not.

- So, in fact, you want to say that fan-fic is much broader than just BTS and K-pop.

Yes, it's much broader. For example, in Harry Potter, there was a character with white hair who looked odd among them, right? I really like him, and I've read so many fan fictions about him that there's nothing left I haven't read. Because there isn't a book about him, and another point is that many times, attraction to the author happens through these fan fictions. For instance, many authors have emerged from Wattpad. Those who initially wrote fan fiction, but their work was good and they rose up. Many times, publishers find authors from here, and sometimes a story has a lot of potential and goes to an editor, gets edited, and is published as a separate story. Because when something's fan fiction is read, it means that thing has an audience, and they buy the copyright for that character or completely change it and publish it.

- Have you ever written fan fiction yourself?

Not me. I wanted to write one, but I haven't had the time yet. Besides, another good thing about fan fiction is that you can practice. When you want to start writing, you can't just submit your first writings directly to a

publisher. You can work in the fan fiction space with pre-established characters that you are familiar with or comfortable with, and this takes the burden of character development off your shoulders, allowing you to create only the special things you want for them. That's why it's much easier for you to write. That's why it's great for practice."

It is also worth mentioning that the new generation, in their engagement and exploration of the virtual space that offers a plethora of informational resources, has come to the conclusion that they can find answers to all their legitimate and illegitimate questions by searching online (which teenagers and young adults refer to as "Googling"). Therefore, the stimulation from BTS members, combined with the new Googling feature observed in the new generation, has created a suitable environment for teenagers and young adults to engage in active learning based on the information obtained and through trial and error, effectively realizing the ideal of active learning that a great theorist like Piaget envisioned.

Reflecting on the interview with 12-year-old Elena further highlights the vast scope and value of active learning or education. Elena stated in part of her interview that in encountering BTS, she became a fan by "Googling" to learn about the members of the group. She also noted that she searched online to understand the meanings of BTS's songs and obtained the meanings of the songs through this method

Elena, in another part of her interview, mentioned that since she is a fan of the BTS boys, she created a fan page that has 150 followers. To engage her followers, she has sought to learn photo and video editing, in which she has also succeeded. Furthermore, to support them even more, while managing her fan page, she has familiarized herself with various music-related programs and, by learning how to stream, she strives to increase the number of listens for BTS songs, so that their songs rank higher on global sites like Spotify and YouTube.

Streaming to register votes for various music festivals is another aspect of 12-year-old Elena's activities:

- "As far as I understand, you are mostly a fan of BTS. Can you tell me how you became interested in them?"

Well, it started when I saw a music video of theirs on TV, and at that time, I didn't know them at all. I had only seen a few Korean movies and wasn't familiar with their songs, which made me search for information about them. First, I learned the names of the members, who are seven: Taehyung, Namjoon, Jungkook, J-Hope, Jin, Jimin, and Suga. Then, gradually, I started

listening to their songs, got attracted to them, and eventually became an ARMY.

- How did you listen to their songs?

Through YouTube, Spotify, satellite channels, and Instagram.

- What attracts you most in their music: the singer's voice, the meaning of the lyrics, or the composition?

Um, the lyrics are important, but for us international ARMYs, since we don't know their language, the composition and rhythm are more important to us, and then we look up the meaning of the lyrics to understand what they are saying...

- You mentioned you have a fan page. How many followers do you have?

I have 150 followers.

- How many hours do you spend on this fan page daily?

I don't know, I think about 5 hours or more a day.

- What activities do you do on your fan page to support them?

I edit their photos, create video clips, or post news about BTS, like the latest news that they are going to the military and so on.

- How did you learn to edit and create video clips?

I downloaded some editing and video-making programs, and then I played around with them until I learned.

- Did you get help from anyone?

Sometimes I get help from my older sister.

- When did you start your fan page?

I have been an ARMY for 2 years. A year ago, when I was about to reach my one-year mark as an ARMY, I decided to create this page. I told myself, "Elena, you can't do much for them, at least create a fan page to show some support," and now it's been a year since I've had this fan page.

- So if you want to support their album, you do it through the streaming you mentioned?

Yes, exactly.

- Which apps do you use for streaming¹?

On Spotify and YouTube."

The topic of Googling reveals a significant transformation in the new generation, providing them with extensive functionalities.

Sarina, 13-years-old, in her interview, stated that like Elena, she translates BTS songs using Google Translate and understands them. Narges, 21-years-old, also mentioned in her interview about her actions when she was 12-year-old stating that she translated BTS songs using Google Translate

- "Have you ever felt obligated to stream BTS songs that you don't particularly like as much as the others?

Yes, I support all of them, but I listen to them less and they aren't my first choice. However, it's not like I completely ignore them. I stream and give

¹ Streaming is a complex and difficult task. 21-year-old Saye, in an interview, mentions this issue: You have to be careful not to be detected as a bot, because YouTube automatically filters you. Because it's like, what do you mean you haven't slept in 24 hours and you're getting views like this? I don't consider you a real person.

- How many minutes should there be in between? I mean, would you watch and then take a break, and then watch again?

No, we didn't take breaks; we would go watch other videos.

- So that their views would go up too?

Yeah, we would just browse YouTube and watch other videos. Normally, it doesn't pay attention to these things, but when something really spikes in traffic and suddenly trends, it becomes more sensitive to it. This is also the case for Spotify. Normally, you can just put a song on loop and listen to it like that and do a lot of these things, but Spotify is such that I can't accept that a song that is trending everywhere in the world is progressing naturally on this algorithm. That's why we always use playlists or playlists that are arranged according to certain rules. For example, we don't put the first song, the one we want to trend, right at the beginning; we create some distance between the songs.

- What's the reason for creating playlists?

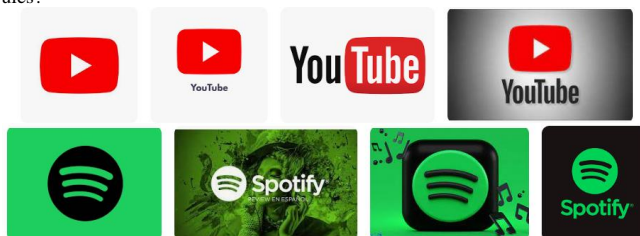
So that we aren't detected as bots.

- Then you said you realized a certain comeback had happened. What did you do next?

I hadn't slept for 24 hours; I was boosting YouTube views.

- So you were watching a video over and over to increase its views?

Not over and over, but yes. Oh, by the way, one of the points you realize when you enter the BTS fandom is that you learn a lot about how YouTube or Spotify and similar platforms work. You learn many rules about things that might never come in handy for you. For example, we learned very well how to boost views, how many times, and with what intervals to watch to increase the view count. Sometimes when I watch a reaction video, for example, if the person is a singer, they don't know the rules we have, and they might say, How interesting! Are there such rules?



them views just like the others, but I don't listen to them as much as the others.

- How do you understand the meaning and concept behind BTS's songs?

I don't know much Korean, and I mostly understand the English parts of their songs. I don't understand the Korean lyrics very well, but I get the gist of what they are saying. I usually check Google Translate."

- "My dear Narges, can you first tell me since what year you have been a fan of BTS and what made you turn to them?

Well, I became a fan in 2013. Before that, I watched a lot of Korean movies and series with my mom. At that time, I wasn't really a fan of K-pop; I mostly watched their movies and series. Then in 2013, BTS had just debuted. I was reading some news about a K-drama actor on Google when I suddenly came across a news article about BTS. Right below that news about the K-drama was a photo of BTS, and I saw their picture. I clicked on the photo and opened it. Then I saw a few really attractive boys. At that time, the members' outfits and style were not like they are now. They had dark and teenage styles, which I really liked. I was dressing similarly at that time, wearing baggy clothes and all black. That's why they caught my attention. I clicked on the news and read that the boy band Bangtan Boys had released an album, and of course, it was a Korean site that I always visited, but I translated it into English using Google.

Umm, After reading the news, I searched for BTS and read their biography, and I liked them.

- How old were you when you became a fan of BTS?

In 2013, I was turning 12, I think. I was in the first year of middle school at that time."

Negin, 13-years-old, reports in her interview that she obtains the information she needs through Googling. Golnoosh, 14-years-old, also mentioned in her interview that since she doesn't pay attention to the teacher in school, she reads the necessary topics for her studies through Googling and understands them. Diba, 15-years-old, stated in her interview that she obtains her general knowledge (such as the inherent sexual orientation of humans) through Googling:

- "What role does the company play in this?

They bring in advertisements for them. For example, BTS has done an advertisement for Samsung, and there was a rumor that BTS was going to disband, and Samsung's stock dropped significantly in a second, resulting in a huge loss.

- Where do you get this information?

From Google."

- "Doesn't bringing your phone to class make it hard to understand the lesson?

What's there to understand? Our lessons don't require understanding at all; the teacher comes in, sits down, and talks, and people get sleepy. If I don't have my phone, I get bored in class and during breaks, especially the last period, which is very dull. The pressure in Iranian schools is so high that I think this is necessary.

- When you haven't listened to the lesson beforehand, don't you struggle during exams?

No, I said my personality type is such that I'm smart. I study before the exam, and wherever I don't know something, I search on Google and learn what I need to know. My grades aren't bad. But if my grades drop a bit, it's better than feeling bad.

- Can you calculate how much of the time you spend in class you listen to BTS?

It depends on whether the teacher is paying attention or not; if they're not paying attention and I feel relaxed, I have my earbuds in the whole class. I run the wire under my dress, and since my ears are under my wimple, I also rest my head on the desk, and nothing is visible. Once, the teacher asked me a question, and I just turned down the music and answered normally. It feels really nice to listen to music in class."

- "Darling, according to what you said, you got to know BTS through seeing their pictures, and you could have seen pictures of other groups instead. Did you ever find yourself wanting to get to learn about a group other than BTS?

You know, at that time, the wave of K-pop and K-drama was just starting to take shape in Iran, and we can almost say that everyone was somehow following these topics. Now that I think about it, when I was researching and reading about BTS, it seemed like I wanted to have complete and

comprehensive information about them, but at the same time, I would also search about others, like who this group or singer is, what their songs are like, when they came out, and such information.

Of course, this might have been because I didn't want to fall behind the other kids who were talking and wanted to have something to say, but overall, it seemed like I was trying to focus more on BTS...

- In the whole K-pop scene, not just BTS, it's very common to ship two people together. For example, whenever two people do something together, people say, "Wow, these two are together and have a relationship." For BTS, the ship Taekook is very popular, and generally, everyone ships them together.

Yes, well, I was seeing these things and I had questions about what they mean, so I went to study more about it to understand what it is, or as someone who doesn't have much information, to see how it is in our religion and other religions, because you really can't ignore religion as beliefs you grew up with since childhood. Maybe at some point, you act against your religion, but you definitely have to examine new topics within your religion as well. So when I went and read, I understood and accepted that a person's inclination is a God-given thing and exists in everyone from the moment of birth, and they can't do anything about it; it's not something that suddenly appears at a certain age. Generally, these things that might seem strange also exist in animals, for example, snails are hermaphrodites."

The feature of Googling, along with the excessive interests of many fans of the BTS group, actually causes fans to support their favorite group by creating fan pages and fan groups. This means that these fans, to produce content for their fan page or fan group, turn to learning various photo, video, or audio editing programs, or spontaneously engage in learning the Korean language and similar things so that in the future they can easily use the original texts of the BTS group.

- "Sahar, have you ever taken any steps to audition, like going to a dance class or working on your voice?"

I haven't gone to classes because I couldn't find anything useful. Dance classes in Iran aren't helpful, and most singing classes focus on traditional music, which doesn't relate to what I do. So I practiced by myself, and now I know a lot of K-pop dances. Even the other day at the gym where I go for bodybuilding, there was talk about me becoming a K-pop dance instructor and holding a class for them there. I also cover songs myself and I'm a cover

artist. Once, I sent one of my songs to JYP, but I deleted it later because I felt embarrassed and my voice wasn't ready enough yet. There are some virtual companies that have no relation to these big and famous companies; for example, a 16-year-old girl creates a page and says, "You all come and send me your covers and audition." Then, once you become an idol of my company, I create several pages and put your voice on all those pages, and this way, I make you famous, but they don't pay for this. At first, I was very eager to join these kinds of companies, but after a while, I felt that I couldn't work for them, and I couldn't stand that a company that isn't even a real company and is so small and disorganized would tell me what to sing, what not to sing, what to do, and what not to do. So I decided to be an independent cover artist, and at first, I didn't think it would go well, but then I saw a lot of support, so I thought maybe I don't need to audition to become an idol; maybe I can continue my independent coverist journey and eventually create and release my own song like Madgal. Madgal isn't in a company; she creates her songs independently and releases them.

- Dear Sahar, considering that you are 15-years-old, how did they offer you a job in a dance class?

I've been going to dance classes for about 5 years, and everyone there knows me. My instructor has seen several times that I'm completely skilled in K-pop dances, so she said she would talk to the management about holding a K-pop dance class for me to work with the kids because recently many K-pop fans are looking for such a class, and I'm sure it will be welcomed.

- Does the fact that you don't have a formal certificate in dance create a barrier?

K-pop dance classes are still very few and popular in Iran. When I have the complete skill, what does it matter whether I have a certificate or not? Moreover, there's no certificate for K-pop dances in Iran; all the clubs eventually go for those who have learned by themselves.

- Earlier, you said you do covers; can you explain what you mean by covers?

A cover is when you choose a song, practice it, and then sing it over its instrumental version and record your voice.

- Where do you publish your covers that receive attention?

Now I'm an admin of a page on Instagram for the group Blackpink, which has a lot of followers. I talked to the main admin, and they agreed to let me

post my covers there, and now I've gained a lot of fans for my work. When I'm busy and don't post anything for a few weeks, they ask about my covers. Additionally, my friends are also very interested in my songs and they like them. The situation has become so good that if you Google "Minhee coverist" (Minhee is the name she chose for herself), it brings me up and my songs are there

- Can you explain more about what you do for covering songs and how much time you spend on this topic?

I really struggled because I'm just an ordinary girl; I don't have a studio or any facilities, and I do everything with my phone. It took a lot of time for me to learn how to use music editing software and to improve my singing style since I haven't taken singing classes. I consider my work serious, and I see being a cover artist as a kind of job for myself, not just for fun and entertainment. I've practiced a lot and worked hard for it.

- Have you ever made any income from covering songs?

Not yet, but I'm sure that one day I will progress enough to earn money from it.

- Now, considering that you want to audition, would you like to immigrate to Korea?

Yes, definitely. I used to want to go to Japan as well, but I couldn't learn Japanese well at all, so I decided to go to Korea.

- From what age were you interested in learning Japanese? Did you take classes or try to learn it on your own?

About two years ago, I really liked Japanese anime and watched a lot of them, and I was picking up some of their words naturally. Gradually, I became interested in it; I even got a book for learning Japanese, but honestly, it was very hard, and I didn't understand it at all.

- Have you learned Korean?

You could say I know it.

- How did you learn?

Through Korean dramas, Korean educational programs, and Korean cartoons. For example, I'm currently watching My Little Pony dubbed in Korean with Persian subtitles. I can say I learned Korean by myself" (Sahar, 15-years-old).

- "How much time do you spend on virtual activities in support of BTS?"

It varies from period to period; it really differs a lot.

- How was it?

How was it... well, I can say I learned 90% of my skills from these activities. In fact, I learned because of them.

- Skills, like what?

Yes, skills, for example, I learned all my work with video and audio editing software because their programs are in Korean, and they kindly provide English subtitles. Then you want to present this to the Persian media. Because we have a channel, and there's a translation group there, and I'm one of the translators, I learned how to subtitle or time it" (Sayeh, 21-years-old).



Marzieh, 19-years-old, states in her interview that not only has she personally learned editing in the virtual space, but she and her friends also teach editing to new members of their fan group:

- "Do you have skills in editing?"

Yes.

- Did you take any classes?

No, it was self-taught.

- Did you learn while producing content for your channel?

Yes, of course, when we want to take a new editor who is interested in collaborating but has almost no previous experience, we teach them."

Sayeh, 21-years-old, portrays the pinnacle of active learning and teaching in her interview. She states that she and her friends, who are members of a BTS fan group, first learned editing through self-directed and active learning. Secondly,

to support the group more seriously, by publishing videos of BTS members' entertainment programs (like Bon Voyage), she and her friends created a large organization where 30 people were actively involved in the translation group. After translating an 8-7 hour Bon Voyage video, the translation would be handed over to the editing and proofreading group for final corrections before being uploaded for fan use in the virtual space:

- "Do you know Korean?

No. I translated from English. We were in a group, and everyone translated, and gradually we had to learn. We had to learn video editing to be able to fix certain things. I learned a lot of these things, and I learned them all out of interest because it was something I wanted to do, and I unconsciously got into it. That's why at the age of 18 and 19, there were times when I would work on this for 4 or 5 hours a night because they have a program called Bon Voyage that suddenly gets released. For example, suddenly an 8-hour video comes out, and it's not usually available for free. It's usually purchased, but since we are Iranians and don't have money, we use files that kind fans provide us. Anyway, when these videos came out, we would sit down to translate them, and there were times when I would sleep 3 or 4 hours at night to keep up with this and complete the translation.

- What is this program?

It's like the Run BTS program, but it's a bit different, and the format is such that they would send them on a trip once a year to have a week for themselves

- Did they film them afterward?

Yes! They sent them with the team! But it's really necessary overall because when you think about it, you've worked for a year or two straight, and even your Thursdays and Fridays aren't free, it's really tough to be sent away for at least a week without working. Of course, they are addicted to work. I mean, when you see them, you'll notice that one of them is sitting in their break time writing something for themselves, and another one is sitting in a corner creating a melody. There's a kind of work addiction like this in Korea.

In short, when they went on trips and such videos came out, we would sit down to translate, and there isn't just one translation team; there are several, and to keep up with the others, we would translate quickly so that we could pass our shift to another group for editing, and another one for proofreading, and so on until the video was finally ready to go on the channel.

- Did you have shifts?

Yes, you could say that. It was like this: the translation team would finish by a certain hour, the editing team would complete it by another hour, and we would have to deliver the video by a certain day. After we delivered the work, our job was done. We would go to sleep, but the editing team's work had just begun.

- And your work could last from night until morning?

Yes. Night until morning. Even though there were 30 people in the translation group I was in.

- Was this your peak time for supporting?

No, this isn't the peak. The peak is during comebacks (new releases).

- How was it then? Did you stay awake for 24 hours?

Yes, it happened. The first time I stayed awake for 24 hours for a comeback, I was really surprised because sleep is very important to me, and it wasn't like it was an obligation or a duty. Rather, you feel like you are part of a community, and I hadn't felt that identity before. They give you an identity. You feel like you are part of a community."

The experiences of some BTS fans in active learning that they have gone through are valuable, and if educators understand this and apply it to the educational system, they can create a significant transformation in their educational system.

5-2- Enhancing Technical Skills

In the previous section, active learning was mentioned, and it was noted that during active learning, the learner, based on trial and error, achieves valuable experiential outcomes, and since these outcomes are the result of the individual's own intellectual and practical efforts, they are retained in the learner's mind in the best possible way.

One of the side results of active learning mentioned is the development of a technical spirit¹ among fans, meaning that fans feel compelled to not only familiarize themselves with various programs but also, alongside learning

¹ The importance of this issue becomes more apparent when we consider that, according to the research literature in psychology, males, due to their relatively different brain structure, have a greater awareness and understanding of technical issues than females. The group BTS, whose majority of fans are female, is actively taking significant steps to address their weaknesses in this area as they engage in active and technical learning

different types of visual, video, and audio editing, strive to present the results of their efforts in the virtual space as well as possible and resort to various promotions (with real and fake pages, getting green ticks, etc.) to increase the views of their work. Naturally, these recent technical issues can be generalized to other aspects of the fans' lives, and they can use the recent virtual space more effectively by learning the ups and downs of the technical aspects.

Ehsan, 17-years-old, notes in his interview that he has friends who, due to their fandom of BTS, have sought to create a fan page, which naturally requires initial knowledge of the virtual space, understanding social networks, and other technical details that admins need to be aware of and familiar with:

- "Do your friends also support BTS?

Some of them are hardcore fans of BTS, while others are against BTS.

- How do your friends show their support?

They always imitate the idols' styles and looks, and they have BTS songs on their phones, and they always practice reading in Korean and have fan pages on Instagram to promote BTS more."

Sarina, 13-years-old, in an interview, mentions that in the fan page she created for her favorite group, she sought to promote her page by resorting to people with fake pages to support her fan page so that with an increase in followers, her page would be taken more seriously by others:

- "Sarina, how do you show your support for BTS?

I used to have a fan page, but it got filtered, and I didn't continue anymore.

- What did you post on that fan page that got filtered?

I posted edited music videos or sometimes posted about Blackpink too, but it got filtered for no specific reason because of Rubika.

- Did you create those edits yourself?

Yes.

- Did you ever find out why your page got filtered?

No, I never found out because my page didn't have any bad content, but I think the person who reported me didn't like BTS

- When your page was active, did you make any money from it?

No. Well, I had a page on Rubika, not Instagram, and back then they didn't pay for ads on Rubika. Maybe sometimes they would give some back, but not money. As for a page that makes money, no, because Rubika doesn't pay its users, and you have to be a seller to earn money.

- What do you mean by giving back?

For example, they say, "Promote my page, and in return, I will follow you with, let's say, 7 fake pages."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, mentioned in an interview that she uses a green tick (meaning the validity of the previously announced news on her fan page) to make her fan page look more credible:

- "You said you have a Telegram channel too?

Yes, I have a Telegram channel where I post information that these sasaengs leak, I have about one and a half thousand members.

- What kind of information do you post?

For example, a certain artist is going to release a song. Someone is going to collaborate with someone else. This artist is dating that boy or girl. I mention concert dates, performances, and song releases, and I talk about the artists' controversies. After I post these, if they turn out to be correct, I put a green tick to show that yes, the news was predicted correctly."

Sana, 16-years-old, also noted in her interview that after learning to edit images, she learned advanced levels and now places her images next to her favorite idol:

- "Do you agree with beautifying idols' faces with Photoshop?

They are beautiful; there's no need for that, but I edit my own photos a lot.

- Why?

Because I know many people became fans of Jimin because of his looks. So we conclude that looks are very important. To make myself look attractive, I use photo editing apps to appear more appealing. The problem is that a person only looks good in the virtual space. But in reality, it's not like that. I really wish my real face looked like those edits, but it doesn't; what can be done?

- Has BTS influenced your interest in photo editing?

The influence was that I first came across a video on YouTube that showed how to use a photo editing app to place myself next to Jimin. One of my

friends also helped a lot, and I liked many of my photos. Since then, I edit a lot.

- So the video was about how to place your photo exactly next to Jimin's photo?

No, next to the BTS members. There are many of these kinds of YouTube videos."

5-3- Lack of attention to studies and academic decline

Field studies conducted among the research population indicate that fandom of the BTS group often coincides with a lack of attention from fans (especially extreme fans) to their studies and their academic decline.

However, some interviewees have noted that BTS has motivated fans and provided opportunities for some fans to progress academically. But field observations suggest that BTS fans, more than making academic progress in their fandom, experience regression and academic decline.

The mentioned academic decline sometimes results from the environment created in the educational setting, where fans spend most of their free time discussing or listening to BTS songs or performing their dances, which naturally reduces students' focus on their studies and diverts their attention to non-academic and emotional issues.

In other cases, fans experience a lack of time due to spending too much time managing fan pages or creating content, leading to academic decline.

In some instances, excessive and unregulated consumption of BTS's emotional content causes fans' minds to become tired, reducing their concentration and memory for effectively absorbing academic topics.

Sheida, 20-years-old, notes in her interview that a few BTS fans experience academic progress motivated by the idols:

- "Do you see BTS's influence as positive?

No. It depends, in my opinion. If they want to proceed rationally, it can be positive. For example, if they focus on their progress and success. But on the other hand, some only pay attention to appearances and controversies and as a result, it has a significant effect on their academic decline."

Shadi, 15-years-old, mentioned in her interview that in their school, the discussion about BTS is so hot that even fan students take the opportunity

before the teacher arrives in class to showcase their skills in performing BTS dances to their classmates.

- "Honey, how did you get to know this group?

Well, I listened to Korean singers for about a year or two before, and I was generally familiar with them, but I've known BTS for a year and a half, and it happened that the kids at school encouraged me more. My school is private, but many of the kids are fans of this group, and they would play their songs at school and sit together in class to listen or dance before the teacher came to class, then they would talk about which one is attractive and which one is better, and they even fought over them. I gradually got attracted to them without even realizing it, but I don't remember a specific event that made me attracted; I just gradually started watching their clips and liked them, and I loved their cute faces, and I kept looking at them at home and even gradually learned their songs and dances

- What do you like most about them?

Um, at first glance, their looks are obviously noticeable, and then their songs."

Samaneh, 17-years-old, and Nikoo, 15-years-old, in their separate interviews mentioned spending a lot of time managing their fan page and creating content, which naturally leads to academic decline due to spending 11-12 hours a day on the BTS group:

- "Have you ever sent gifts to the boys?

On their birthdays, we send something small, like a watch or an accessory.

- Approximately how much time do you spend on your page daily?

Managing a page is hard overall. I mean, you have to spend two-thirds of your time on it, especially if you have a lot of followers; that's why some hire admins, but I do it myself.

I spend about 11 or 12 hours or sometimes more a day because I have a lot of followers, and I have to keep posting, I have to constantly look for news about them. Overall, you have to give up on studying to spend all your time on the page; if someone is focused on their studies, it becomes a barrier, and you can't keep up with your lessons. Right now, my studies are heavy; I'm in a lot of experimental classes, which makes it even worse, and I'm really overwhelmed; I can't handle both."

- "How much time do you spend writing or reading these fan fictions?

These days, I don't write fan fiction as much as before because my time has filled up due to school and the classes I'm attending. I also changed my school this year, so my friendship with my ARMY friends has faded a bit, but during the time when our friendship was stronger, I spent more time on it. For example, in online classes, I would spend my time writing these, but it was getting bad because I missed a couple of classes even though I was there; I just wasn't paying attention, so I put it aside a bit."

Sana, 16-years-old, noted in her statements that her excessive use of BTS videos at night has led to her insomnia, which in turn has resulted in decreased concentration and memory weakness:

- "How much time do you dedicate to BTS daily?

About 4 to 5 hours at night.

- From what time to what time?

From around 10 PM to 3 AM.

- When you wake up in the morning, are you not sleepy?

Yes, I feel sleepy, but I'm used to it because I've been awake at these hours for a long time.

- Are you awake just because of BTS?

I watch Jimin's videos for one or two hours, read a bit of a novel, and spend the rest of the time chatting in one or two of the Iranian BTS ARMY groups.

- Has this insomnia affected your academic performance?

Yes, I feel a lot of pressure in classes; I went to the doctor, and they said it could be due to this insomnia. I feel weak and dizzy, and I find it very hard to learn my lessons. My memory has weakened a bit, and I can't concentrate."

Given the mentioned evidence, it seems that fandom of the BTS group is more associated with academic regression among students.

5-4- BTS Awareness Campaign

The BTS group, like other music groups, conveys some of its intended concepts to its audience through its songs. However, the BTS boys, due to deepening their relationship with their fans (by producing programs like Run BTS, BTS In The Soop, Bon Voyage, or holding events like fan meetings and fan signs or

celebrating events like idol birthday parties and Festa), have a greater impact. Alongside the messages they convey through their music, they can also provide additional messages to their audience, which they benefit from to further increase the fans' inclination and affection for the group.

Based on BTS's songs, it is clear that many of their songs aim to convey a specific message to their audience. For example, the song "Fake Love" talks about loves that are not real and only carry the name of love. Because in true love, despite the unity of the lover and the beloved, both individuals maintain their independence while being united, but in fake love, one of the two sides must dissolve into the other. Therefore, the song "Fake Love"¹ effectively explains the differences between true love and false love, warning those who are caught in an illusion and perceive their false love as true love not to fall victim to their delusions

The song "Spring Day"² also recalls the bitter memory of the drowning of a ship carrying students, while depicting the painful fragilities that occur in people's daily lives, it also illustrates hopeful and joyful opportunities that exist alongside failures. Similarly, the song "Zero"³ portrays the sorrow stemming

¹ I could pretend for you,
Like I'm happy when I'm sad,
For you, I'm willing to act,
Like I'm strong, when I was hurt,
I wish love was as perfect as it is,
I wish all my weaknesses were hidden,
I grew a flower that can't be bloomed
In a dream that can't come true
I'm sick of this fake love,
I'm sorry, but this is a fake love,
I wanna be a good man just for you,
I laid the world at your feet,
I changed everything just for you,
Now I don't recognize myself, who am I?

² A part of the original lyrics of the song 'Spring Day' by BTS is as follows:

I miss you,
How much longer do I have to wait for you,
How many more nights do I have to spend without closing my eyes,
Until I finally see you,
Until I finally reach you,
You know all my quirks,
You are my best friend,
The sun will rise again,
None of the seasons or any of the dark nights,
Last forever

³ A part of the original lyrics of the song 'Zero' by BTS is as follows:

There are days,
Days when you feel sad for no reason,
A heavy body,
A day when everyone except me,
Is busy and greedy,
My steps don't fall,

from failure that may affect and hurt people, while addressing hopeful opportunities within the essence of failure, disappointment, and despair.

However, as mentioned, alongside the direct and indirect messages present in BTS's songs, the group members, due to deepening their relationship with their fans, practically have the opportunity for broader social interactions with their fans, an opportunity that is not available or is very limited for other music groups.

Nastaran, 19-years-old, noted in her interview that the same-sex behaviors of some BTS members during performances, waving the LGBTQ flag while performing, and the group's efforts to desexualizing love (and makeup and clothing) have led her to change her previously opposing stance on LGBTQ to a supportive one:

- "Before the K-pop issue, what was your view on queer¹ people? Did you have any information in this regard?

Yes... Look, I have an older sister, and my personality has been shaped by her. That's why she introduced me to these things more, and I don't know

I think I'm already late, can you see?
The whole world is disgusting,
Everywhere is a speed trap,
My heart is shattered and words fade away,
Why was I running so hard?
Oh, why me?
I go back home,
I lie on my bed,
I think,
Was it my fault?
The night is confusing,
Suddenly I look at the clock,
It's almost twelve,
Does anything change?
Surely, nothing like this is going to happen,
But this day,
Is over,
When the second hand,
Aligns with the minute hand,
The world holds its breath for a brief moment,
It's twelve-thirty at night,
And you're going to be happy,
And you're going to be happy,
Like the snow that just landed on the ground,
Let's breathe like it's the first time,
And you're going to be happy,
And you're going to be happy,
Turn all of this around,
Everything is new

¹ Queer" is a term used for sexual minorities that embraces same-sex and non-heterosexual relationships

why (laughs), but I've always had an okay view. I'm still (laughs) okay and positive. I have no problem.

- Was there anyone among your friends who had no knowledge or very little knowledge or a negative view of the queer community or K-pop?

No, their view of the queer community, but had they become familiar with K-pop and normalized it through K-pop?

Recently, my cousin, who is younger and has just become a fan of these groups, she didn't know anything about it before. If she had any familiarity, it was from the family saying... Oh, sorry for using this term... it's disgusting or that it's bad, and oh, these people are not good. But since she became a fan of BTS or other groups, she has developed a very good perspective, and she is like that saying it is none of my business, it doesn't concern me; it's others' lives, and they like to have a life like that. I think it has a very positive impact, especially for us living in Iran, where we don't have such a perspective in society; it's great to be influenced."

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, also stated in her interview that during her fandom of BTS, she has distanced herself from her previous biased views:

- "What was your previous view of East Asia?

My previous view of East Asia was largely influenced by the opinions of those around me and society. Even though I tried to judge impartially and without bias and have my own personal opinions, it was impossible for the surrounding atmosphere not to affect me.

For example, most of my acquaintances, without having any information about Korean films and music, would fanatically avoid them and mock anyone interested in this content. Simply because perhaps the faces and appearances of East Asian people seemed special and maybe unusual to them. Especially mocking the faces and acting styles, dancing, or the clothing of artists and people in Korea, which I never had such an opinion about and I opposed these racist views. Because these opinions do not stem from reason and logic, knowledge, and an open perspective. I have always tried to stay away from bias, especially bias regarding race and certain appearance and gender stereotypes."

Sofia, 18-years-old, also mentioned in her interview the cultural groundwork laid by idols regarding the necessity of paying attention to one's mental health issues and the decision to address and reduce recent problems:

- "So, have the bad feelings you experienced due to obsession and depression faded or changed alongside K-pop?"

K-pop (pauses). Yes. In some ways. Well, since I started stanning Stray Kids, there were some things, one of their members had very severe anxiety. Ji Sung. He was about my age back then and had very severe anxiety. Then I was also struggling a lot with anxiety. For example, when I saw that an idol, someone who is so accepted in the world, has these issues too. He has these problems. Well, it made it much easier for me to cope with these things. Or for example, Jungkook from BTS has a lot of toxic perfectionism (laughs). Of course, he always says that. Well, I've had a lot of that in my life. I've always felt like I'm alone. But I see that even such people, no matter how big and famous they are, still struggle with such problems. It makes me feel much better. I think that's the point. It has helped me in this way.

- Since companies try to control idols' behavior a lot, haven't they tried to cover up their illnesses?

Yes. A lot. But it happens, you know. It slips out, and there's nothing they can do about it. For example, Ji Sung felt unwell during a fan meeting. They couldn't say anything else. Or for example, Jungkook is obvious everywhere. Whatever he does, his idealism and perfectionism are evident. They can't say that it's not like that. Because these are part of the person. I think covering it up is hard. But generally, companies do this. Then there are still people who come out and speak and don't pay attention to what the company says, but their numbers are few. Like JB from GOT7. He had severe depression for a while. Then it seems he was under treatment. He was taking medication. Then he came live and explained. He said, for example, I have depression. I take pills. This is a problem like many other problems that can be treated. Don't be ashamed of it. Definitely start your treatment. Take care of your mental health and things like that. He got a very good reaction from others."

An important point to note regarding BTS's information dissemination is the issue of the instilling of group's values during their communications. This means that people cannot live their lives detached from values, and in the vast majority of cases, human behavior is based on a solid value system.

For example, in the song "Fire,"¹ BTS depicts the exhaustion of young people from the judgments and injustices imposed on them by the older generation

¹ A part of the original lyrics of the song 'Fire' by BTS is as follows:
Everything is burning everywhere,

(which is not always the case). Instead of suggesting ways to deepen intergenerational dialogue and resolve existing ambiguities in interactions between the younger and older generations, they prescribe a chaotic approach, encouraging the youth to rebel against their older generation, which is not a correct and constructive approach, just as avoiding bias is not always right; some biases (like having pride in one's country) are also considered appropriate.

Fire fire fire fire
When I wake up in my room
I have nothing
After the sun sets, I sway as I walk
I was completely drunk
Swearing on the streets,
I've lost my life, I'm like a madman,
Everything is messed up, my lifestyle is chaotic and unbroadcastable,
Live however you want, anyway, it's your life,
[Don't] try too hard, it's okay to be a loser,
Everyone say la la la la la...
Say la la la la...
Raise your hands, shout, set it on fire,
Everything is burning everywhere,
Set everything on fire, boooooooooo,
Set everything on fire, boooooooooo,
Hey, set it on fire,
As if you want to burn everything,
Hey, keep going,
Until morning comes,
Just stay alive because we are still young

6- Moral and Ideological Effects

Fandom of the BTS group has various effects, including psychological, social, cultural, moral-ideological, educational, economic, political, aesthetic, artistic, health, and familial effects. In this section, the social effects of fandom for the BTS group will be examined and discussed. The topics that will be reviewed regarding the moral effects of fandom for the BTS boys in this section include: fostering moral tolerance, moral-ideological influences, diminishing ideological aspects, guiding fans toward joining the sexual revolution, accepting relativistic ethics, moral transformation in the family environment, and moral transformation in individual, social, and environmental ethics for some fans.

The following will address the aforementioned topics.

6-1- Fostering Moral Tolerance

Tolerance conveys relatively different meanings in various social spheres, meaning that while in the political realm, political tolerance signifies endurance from a position of weakness, in the realm of ethics and moral discussions, tolerance means engaging with different opinions presented by others based on patience and authority.

If we pay attention to the theories developed regarding "identity," Marcia refers to achieved identities, moratorium identities, and Brzezinski mentions informational identities (equivalent to achieved and moratorium identities in Marcia's theory), normative identities (equivalent to the closed identity), and confused identities (equivalent to Marcia's confused identity). Moral tolerance belongs to the higher forms of identity in the theories presented regarding identity, where the owners are willing to engage in dialogue with others, whereas closed identities are not willing to engage in dialogue with opposing individuals at all and immediately label the other side in the face of emerging problems, seeking to resolve the problem or problems that have arisen.

The BTS boy band has shown moral tolerance by accepting others' opinions and not denying or rejecting opposing views. They invite their fans to adopt moral tolerance and accept different opinions from others, and if necessary, to engage in dialogue with them.

Some of the interviewed individuals mentioned BTS's moral tolerance, noting that they respect all groups, including children, adults, and the elderly. Although they are often not religious, they respect followers of different religions. When interacting with Muslims, they not only congratulate them on the arrival of

Ramadan but also pause their concerts during the call to prayer and refrain from touching veiled Muslim women out of respect.

- "Can you give a more specific example of how much importance they give to ARMYs?

For example, when Taehyung told ARMYs that when they ask for your husband's name or fiancé's name, don't say mine, and never consider me as your husband, because you will definitely find someone better than me, and he should promise me to take care of you, they say things like that.

- So when you hear these statements, what messages do you take from them?

We know that we are very important to them. Sometimes during fan signs, they shake hands with ARMYs, play with them, and hug them. They are not racist at all; they respect all races, including those who wear hijabs and are Christians. They show complete respect to them. Overall, they respect the elderly and children, regardless of age." (Rokhsareh, 16-years-old).

- "What is their belief regarding religion?

Well, they don't insult any religion, and I haven't seen them disrespect Muslim fans at all, but they don't necessarily accept it either. However, to avoid losing fans, they don't talk about these things at all.

I said that their beliefs are different; I mean, not all of them are really fans of the West and capitalism, but on the surface, they have to appear differently. For example, one of them believes in God a lot, one believes a little, or one just likes to dress a certain way, and one doesn't. I won't mention their names, but that's how they are.

- Do they generally respect their fans?

Yes, a lot, because that's what they are after. If there were no fans, how would they hold concerts, how would they make money, and how would they go to the Burj Khalifa?" (Saba, 16-years-old).

"...One interview I remember well is when BTS members were asked about their Muslim fans, and they said that they have a lot of respect for them. They were asked about their views on hijab, and one of them said, I think it makes them feel more comfortable, and it seems like they value themselves this way. Overall, they are good with their Muslim fans. They have always shown this, both in fan meetings and concerts. For example, at the time of the call to prayer in a country with many Muslims, they paused their concert.

Well, they themselves are not Muslims. But to show this respect, they did that." (Raha, 18-years-old).

Generally, singer and actor groups send Ramadan messages and congratulate Muslims on this month, wishing them health. Because Korea has some cultural ties with Indonesia and is familiar with some things that Muslims have, one of which is Ramadan, BTS has sent Ramadan messages several times.

Regarding hijab, I want to say that in one of their programs, they were asked about their Muslim fans at concerts and events, what their opinion is about them. Then Namjoon said that our Muslim fans are not few, and it's very pleasing that we have Muslim fans, and I see them at concerts and events. Then Yoongi said that in my opinion, Korean girls are beautiful, but Muslim fans are even more beautiful because they have to cover their beauty, so their beauty is somewhat diminished. He argued that they are so beautiful that they have to wear a headscarf and must wear covered clothes.

They have a very good view of their Muslim fans and are very okay with it, and they know they shouldn't touch, shouldn't hug, for example, at a concert, they said they would take pictures with 5 persons ... 5 of our fans... Then when the fan they were supposed to take a picture with was Muslim, J-Hope quickly told everyone to be careful, don't hug, don't shake hands, don't get too close, don't touch, and after observing all these points, they took pictures and talked with her, so they know some things." (Mahshid, 21-years-old).

Some interviewed fans stated that they have set aside some of their narrow-mindedness under the influence of BTS's moral tolerance and have interacted with communities they previously viewed negatively with moral tolerance. Razieh, 15-years-old, expressed in this regard:

"... You know, Iranian songs are like this: one cuts his vein, one kills himself because his love left him, and one consumes cigarettes and alcohol, but BTS's songs are not like that and make you understand that life, as hard as it is, also has joys, and if we fail in a matter, it doesn't mean that life is over and we have to die, no. They have saved the lives of thousands with their songs. They made me see life more positively and strive for what I want. I remember my surroundings used to say that those who are black are dirty and disgusting and said a lot of ugly things, but when I got to know BTS, I saw that changed, and I realized how beautiful a black person is, to the point

that in the summer, I saw a black person up close who had come from America, and he was very kind and respectful and very, very beautiful."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, in her interview, acknowledging that the members of BTS do not have a religion, similarly mentions her and her friends' distancing from religion:

- "Do you know how BTS thinks about religious issues?

Koreans don't have a religion, but they respect all religions...

- What is your and your friends' relationship with religion like?

Almost all my friends and I are like that, and we don't care about religion"

Pooneh, 18-years-old, despite criticizing Jungkook's presence at the opening of the World Cup in Qatar, approached the question of idol's criminal behaviors with great gentleness, noting that to make the right decision, one must be in the same position and circumstances as that individual to see whether they should condemn them or not:

"Regarding the World Cup issue that took place in Qatar, many Hollywood artists who were invited to perform for the World Cup preliminaries did not go. Why? Because Qatar has strict laws for LGBTQ individuals, and these artists did not go because they wanted to show their opposition. But Jungkook went, and I was very seriously upset about that. I think he could have not gone. However, the only thing that made me not set Jungkook aside was that I thought he might have been forced to go, because you know that artists in K-pop and even in Hollywood and America are often forced to do many things. Then, considering this issue, I was able to come to terms with what Jungkook did; after all, not everything is the artist's choice, and companies are also involved. Moreover, Jungkook and BTS have a history of supporting the LGBTQ community. So yes, that's why I tried to rationally deal with this issue and not react emotionally. Although Jungkook still received a lot of hate over this matter.

- In your opinion, shouldn't he have gone?

Look, there's no should or shouldn't. Ethically, it would have been respectful not to go for all the fans who are part of the LGBTQ community and not to perform in a country that imprisons homosexuals or does not grant them freedom, but he went. Many people didn't see this as a problem, meaning they don't have concerns. I mean the fans. But for me, it's important that my idol doesn't show his support just by taking a picture with the LGBTQ flag. He should support in such a situation and not go. But now

that he has gone, I might criticize him, but I'm not behind the scenes, and I don't know what really happened. Was it really his decision, or was he forced?

- If he were to say something against LGBTQ individuals, would you set him aside?

I would definitely be upset, but I still don't know if I would say I would completely set him aside or not. Maybe I wouldn't be able to see him the same way as before. I would have to see what happens.

- I think your statements have some contradictions. You said if, for example, he commits murder, you wouldn't set him aside, but if you see him violating ethics, you wouldn't be his fan anymore. Now you're saying maybe?

Look, I said that giving hate for something they do that we think is wrong is a mistake. I also told you that if I see him doing even the worst thing, I would never give him hate because they are human too, and we have no right to insult them. But I said if they set ethics aside, I probably wouldn't like them anymore. But again, I have to be in that situation, you know, it might not be that easy for me to set them aside. Because they are very important to me, but my whole point was that we shouldn't make decisions about idols so easily."

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, also noted in her interview that under the influence of BTS's moral tolerance, she has not only set aside her prejudiced views about East Asian people but has also become interested in a variety of other arts:

"...Well, the first impact BTS had on me was that it somewhat changed my prejudiced and perhaps thoughtless view of East Asia, especially South Korea. To be honest, the general view of Iranian society towards East Asia is largely racist, and their faces, content, and culture are even ridiculed and mocked by our people. But when I found myself in their environment, I saw that there are even things to be interested in, and it's not at all as I thought. In a way, K-pop and BTS have been a medium for me to gain more information about different cultures and distance my views from that closed-mindedness and prejudice. I got to know different cultures and could get along with various tastes, experience new things, and perhaps even develop a greater interest in other arts like music, dance, painting, writing, or even learning a new language."

6-2- Moral-Idiological Influences

- "Why do you think clothes and makeup don't have a gender? After all, some might not accept that a boy wears makeup or dresses in feminine clothes?"

This words are like saying a girl isn't pretty at all if she cuts her hair short or that a girl should only wear pink because pink is a girl's color. Well, maybe a boy want to wear pink or become a cool makeup artist. Why shouldn't what he wants happen? Why should he be ridiculed and insulted just because he's a boy and didn't choose his gender? Everyone has their own interests; it can't be that a girl is only one way, and a boy is only one way. This way, the world becomes monotonous

- Did you have these thoughts before getting to know BTS, or did getting to know them lead you to this way of thinking?

Well, I was a kid before, and I didn't think much about these things, but after getting to know K-pop and BTS, I realized that nothing has a gender" (Hadis, 14-years-old).

People need a moral and value system in their daily lives to organize their interpersonal and social relationships based on the musts and must-nots of that moral and value system.

A person's moral and value system, like lighthouses guiding ships, directs individuals in their actions, and adopting different values by different individuals can sometimes put them at odds with each other (like someone who accepts a moral and value system based on social Darwinism and an individual who rejects the values derived from social Darwinism and considers it a betrayal of human ideals).

Therefore, adopting a moral and value system that guides and directs individuals in their personal and social lives is a crucial and vital issue for humans and can bring them closer to happiness or misery.

Considering the previous discussions in the book, role models play a significant role in providing moral and value guidance to children, adolescents, youth, and other social groups, and they have an impact in this regard.

Field studies on the moral and value influences of BTS on their fans show that, apart from fans who view Big Hit Entertainment with skepticism and consider it a part of the idols' behavior, attributing the idols' actions to the company's initiatives, other fans who do not critically view the company and the members

of BTS are significantly influenced by the values conveyed by their favorite role models.

In this section, to complete the discussion, the subject of desexualizing of makeup, clothing, and love, which is strongly emphasized by BTS, will be examined regarding the group's influence on their fans.

As mentioned in the introduction, idols can be divided into two categories based on whether their behavior is genuinely their own or if their actions are influenced by the requests of the company and similar factors.

Those who do not consider the idols' behavior as inherently theirs and see it as stemming from others' directives are expected to be less influenced by behaviors they perceive more artificial than those who consider the behavior of BTS members as inherently theirs and do not see them as "slaves" to the company.

Shadi, 15-years-old, in her interview, notes that from her perspective, idols are like slaves of the company, executing the orders and prohibitions of the company (and therefore one should not be influenced by their artificial behaviors). Marzieh, 19-years-old, also believes that the spread of inappropriate and vulgar storytelling is a desire of the company itself (to attract more audiences):

- "Are the boys supporters of homosexuality too?"

Yes, well, just like in the West, they are here too, and they respect it. And I can say that they themselves display its behaviors. I even remember one of their members wore a dress in the colors of the LGBTQ flag and said he wore it out of his love and support for them.

In a way, it's a form of slavery, but they are chic and stylish slaves (laughs), otherwise, it doesn't matter; they do and say and wear whatever the company tells them."

- "Do you think some fanfictions, like smut fictions, invade the idols' privacy?"

Yes, unfortunately, and this is an invasion of privacy and even the character of a person.

- Why do you say character?

Imagine someone who is a noble and kind-hearted person in real life, but in a fanfiction, they are portrayed as a sadistic killer.

- Does the company not sue the producers and writers of these contents for violating the artists' rights?

Yes, HYBE has repeatedly warned about sexual edits. In this regard, many reports have been made to the company to take action against these individuals, and every time HYBE issued a statement that they would take action and file complaints, but nothing happened, and those statements remained just statements, and the company never acted on them, which alone shows that the company is very indifferent towards its idols."

Critical individuals like Shadi and Marzieh, who believe that the idols' behaviors are influenced by the company's directives or the atmosphere created by some extreme fans, do not receive serious influence from the idols because they see their behavior as different from what appears on the surface.

Zahra, 24-years-old, and Sana, 16-years-old, in their interviews, have shown the slight influence of these individuals from the idols:

- "Has hearing these positive meanings had an impact on you and those around you?

(After a slight pause) If I want to talk about myself, I would say yes, it has had some impact, but not to the extent that I would say it has completely changed my behavior and ethics; it hasn't really been like that, but it has caused some minor changes, yes. If I want to talk about other people, it depends more on their personality; there are those who are more easily and quickly influenced and probably receive more influence, but there are also individuals who are less susceptible and may not even receive any influence from these meanings.

- Can you give an example of those influences, even if they are minor and small?

In the case I just mentioned, the idea that you should not only focus on the goal but also enjoy the journey, I can say I was influenced by that. I used to act completely the opposite; for example, if I wanted to travel by my own choice, I would definitely choose to leave at night because I don't like the journey and only the destination mattered to me. But now I have somewhat changed in reaching my goals and desires; I also consider the journey, and this has affected my ethics as well. Of course, I still say it has been somewhat influential, and I'm not at a point where I would say I love going through hardships to reach my goal (laughs)."

- "Before getting to know Jimin, did you not want to help your classmates?

I was a bit jealous, like my mom; my dad is also jealous, but not as much as my mom. I was raised to be jealous, to be jealous of everyone, and I think the reason for my jealousy is that I underestimate myself, or rather, I used to. After getting to know BTS and Jimin, I saw that someone at the peak of success can be very generous and strive for the success of others as well. Now I don't feel jealous like before, and I've improved. It's not very important for me to be outstanding or the best; I want everyone to be great together. My self-confidence has also improved a little because I'm helping, and I feel like I'm doing something. I'm very similar to Jimin."

Among fans who do not have a critical view of the company and do not see the idols' behaviors as artificial, it is expected that their value influence from the idols will be significantly greater than that of the first group. If we focus on the area of influence of BTS solely in terms of their key slogan regarding gender-neutrality in makeup, clothing, and love, we can more accurately observe the fans' influence from the idols in this regard.

Elnaz, 12-years-old, and Gelareh, 14-years-old, have mentioned their influence from the makeup of BTS idols in their interviews:

- "Well, regarding their hairstyles, we haven't seen a boy in Iran dye his hair yellow or pink; what do you think about this?

Well, in my opinion, these things don't have a gender, and both girls and boys can dye their hair, and I don't see a problem with it.

- So you think this is something everyone can do, right?

Yes.

- So, in this way, there's no longer a difference in appearance between boys and girls, is this ok?

Well, we also want there to be no difference.

- And do you think because they say it's okay and both girls and boys do it, this is ethical and desirable?

Yes.

- Before they said such things, did you think this way?

Yes, I thought this way before I got to know them; now it has increased.

- So in Korea, both boys and girls wear makeup?

Uh-huh.

- What about jewelry and accessories?

Well, in Korea, in K-dramas and such, we see that both boys wear earrings and girls, and this also has no gender.

- So if you were a boy or had a brother, would you accept such things and approve of this?

Yes, why not."

- "What's your personal opinion about BTS wearing makeup since they are boys?

As far as I've seen, they have very simple makeup, just a bit of lip gloss, which is for a nice lip appearance, not to look like girls. Even Iranian people wear foundation and such in programs. They wear eyeshadow too, but the eyeshadow we've seen is not like that; of course, it's none of our business; they can do whatever they want. My personal opinion is that I have no problem with it at all, and to be very personal, I don't like a boy to wear too much makeup, but to the extent that they can have this freedom, I like it, and even I think there's no problem with nail polish, like J-Hope who wears nail polish. Overall, I personally have no problem with this, although I would love for them to always be with their normal (ordinary) appearance, but since they need to look more beautiful, they have to wear makeup.

- Did you have such a perspective on men's makeup before getting to know BTS?

No, I was backward and didn't even know boys could do such things, and if I had known, I would have said, 'Ugh, ugh.'

Erfan, 21-years-old, in his interview, describes the intensity of his influence from the BTS boys, noting that his influence from the group is so deep that he is even willing to stand against his family and leave home to defend it:

- "What do your parents think about BTS?

My mom has no opinion and is very happy with the changes in me and my sister, but my dad is against it and thinks these changes make me look superficial and silly, and he tells me to stop doing these things.

- What changes in you does your dad consider superficial and silly?

For example, my makeup, plucking my eyebrows, wearing light lipstick and soft blush, or he is against me dyeing my hair.

- Why don't you listen to your dad's opinions?

My dad is from the 70s, and I'm from the 2000s; we have about thirty years of cultural difference. I think makeup is not just for girls. Boys can also feel better with makeup.

- What do you say in response to your dad's opposition?

I say I've found my own way, and with these changes, I feel good, and my income has increased, and if you oppose too much, I'll go live independently, and then my dad will be silent and won't say anything."

Ghazal, 16-years-old, Maryam, 18-years-old, Marzieh, 19-years-old, and Mahshid, 21-years-old, in their interviews, have mentioned their influence from BTS's gender-neutrality in clothing as follows:

- "K-pop tries to show that clothes have no gender. Do you think this way too?

Yes, now everyone thinks this way. I think it's not just in K-pop; they are trying to do this everywhere. Why should there be a rule in the era we are living in that tells me, because I'm a girl, I have to dress this way?"

"... What's wrong with boys wearing makeup or clothes that don't have feminine or masculine labels entering the market? The choice of what to wear or whether to put on makeup as a human being, what impact does it have on society that it needs to decide on personal matters? Imagine one day you go out and a boy walks by you in what's called girl's clothes, so what happened? Did you get hurt? Did your mental order get disrupted? Did your life get interrupted? That person's personal choice has no impact on your life and is fundamentally none of your business, but I don't understand why these issues are still not accepted in Asian countries and the older generation still doesn't accept this will and freedom, which are human rights, and fights against it, making the lives of many young people poisoned. They couldn't live the way they want and deserve because their parents, with their wrong way of thinking, blocked their path, and now they want to impose their youthful frustrations on their children".

- "Do you really think clothes have gender or not?

No, clothes really don't have gender, and it's us who label them this way in different times and places. For example, if you look at the history of high-heeled shoes, they originally belonged to men, and later, with the slogan that there's no difference between men and women, women started wearing men's high-heeled shoes, and that's how they gradually became recognized as women's shoes. Or even long hair, which we see throughout history that

men in the past also had long hair, but now men are mostly recognized by their short hair, and even skirts were for men in the past to fight more easily, and nail polish was for men to scare off enemies, if I'm not mistaken.

- Well, has BTS done anything in this regard?

I think yes, BTS has always tried to set aside these gender boundaries, but still, BTS's activities have a framework and are not very norm-breaking compared to Western celebrities, and Iranian boys feel ashamed to wear pink. In Korea, many men, actors, and singers wear it, and I think BTS's style with skirts is still very chic and masculine, and as Bangtan says, fashion never has a gender; it's trendy at any time.

- How successful have BTS members been in showing that clothes don't have gender?

I really don't know, but I don't think they've been more successful than the influence of Western celebrities in this regard.

- Fox News reported that Chinese officials are worried that the artistic and famous stars of their country, influenced by the attractive and feminine appearances of some South Korean and Japanese singers and actors, might encourage young men in their country to distance themselves from masculine traits. What do you think about this? Do you think K-pop, by promoting this style of makeup and fashion for idols, will lead to a decrease in masculine traits?

I mean, these ridiculous gender labels and making everything girly or boyish make it so that if someone uses something girly, they become a girl, and if they use something boyish, they become a boy? What nonsense is that? Do I need to say that being a man or a woman relates to something else? So, genetics, physiology, and anatomy of men and all that are irrelevant?"

- "What do you think about the idea that they work on that clothes don't have gender?

Yes, BTS and K-pop groups, whether they are girl or boy groups, believe that clothes don't have gender, and if you like a style, you can wear it, meaning simply don't limit yourself to gender. For example, if you're a girl and you like to wear a tie or a suit, go for it."

Sarina, 13-years-old, Mahtab, 18-years-old, Tina, 19-years-old, and Shabnam, 25-years-old, in separate interviews, emphasized the influence of gender-neutral thinking on makeup and clothing:

- "Has the time you spent following BTS affected your beliefs?

It hasn't affected my religious beliefs, but it has affected my beliefs about gender stereotypes.

- Can you explain about these beliefs regarding gender stereotypes that BTS has influenced?

For example, I used to think that clothes or colors have gender, but K-pop made me realize that these things don't have gender. For instance, I thought makeup was only for women, suits were only for men, or pink was a girl's color, but now I think there's nothing wrong with boys wearing skirts or makeup or girls having short hair and a boyish style."

- "What do you think about boys wearing makeup? Do you think this taboo in Iranian culture has faded because of BTS?

Well, in Korea, if you know, it's very normal and okay for boys to wear makeup. Before I got to know BTS, because of the religious family I grew up in, I didn't have a very positive view on this issue, but now when I look at it, I see what's wrong if a boy wears makeup? Nothing. These gender boundaries that have been defined for us are not good. A person should be able to express themselves freely, and if a boy wants to wear makeup or nail polish, he shouldn't be stopped, just as if a girl wants to wear a man's shirt or a formal man's suit, we shouldn't say no, don't do that, because it's ugly or silly. I think these boundaries we set are more harmful than useful, and BTS is supposed to help with this so that both boys and girls can express themselves more easily and be comfortable with themselves, because one of their slogans and a concept they refer to in many of their songs is the concept of love yourself. Of course, besides this, the support BTS has given to minorities and the emphasis on having a positive view of oneself and self-acceptance is something that fewer groups have. In this regard, BTS is very strong."

"...For example, I listen to Harry Styles too. Overall, both BTS and Harry Styles or Sam Smith, they all wear makeup and flashy clothes now, and even wear clothes that you would buy in women's stores, and they present this very okay. For instance, Taehyung wore a shirt that you would think is a men's shirt, but it was actually from a women's collection of a brand. Or I know Harry Styles wore a skirt for a Vogue magazine shoot, and then someone came and said, "Show your masculinity," and Harry mocked it with a silly post. I mean, BTS and, for example, Sam Smith are very okay with

promoting this idea, but since I'm not in a relationship with anyone, I don't know how much impact it has had.

- So do you think they have been able to influence the normalization of makeup for boys and change perspectives on boys' makeup or gender-neutral clothing?

Yes, they have been influential because I myself am now much more okay with these things than before. Before, I might have even felt a bit disgusted, like, "Oh... for example, this..." before BTS, of course, but now I feel like, "Okay, this is very normal and all.

For example, you said your way of thinking has become a bit more positive regarding the idea that clothes don't have gender or boys wearing makeup.

You know, I'm saying they are expressing themselves, and it's not intentional because not all of them do this. For example, I say his shirt was from a women's collection, like Taehyung's. While in that performance, the others were wearing men's collection clothes and stuff like that, or there's one member who wears nail polish now, but the other members don't do it. Since not everyone does it, it exactly goes back to my previous statement that everyone has their own different style... That's why I feel it's more about expressing themselves than trying to do it intentionally. But of course, this expression is naturally very influential. I used to have a problem with boys wearing nail polish, but for example, when Harry Styles first did it and then one of the BTS members did it, I was changed so that now I am okay, it's just nail polish."

- "What about clothing? Have BTS and Korean artists influenced you?

Well, I've always been interested in makeup, even though my mom used to say not to wear too much makeup. Then when I saw that makeup and beauty are a form of art, I became more interested and liked it. When I saw boys wearing makeup, at first it was very strange for me! I felt that men shouldn't wear makeup. But BTS doesn't even consider clothing to be gendered. I was influenced by them, and my surprise and guard about it decreased a bit. I might have even been more inclined to look for colors and designs of girls' clothes before. But now I choose whatever I like. For example, I don't say this is for boys or anything."

Raha, 18-years-old, Mahlaqa and Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, and Narges, 21-years-old, in their interviews, have shown their influence from the desexualization of love of BTS boys:

- "Well, this issue of intimacy between boys or gay relationships is still considered a taboo in the place where we live. While it's often seen in K-pop. Do you think being in K-pop has played a role in normalizing these relationships and issues for you?

Yes, it has had an impact; I think it has had a lot of influence.

- Have you seen people who had a negative view on these issues before getting to know K-pop, but then gradually changed their minds?

Personally, before I read fan fiction and saw such things, I had no idea about this topic, and of course, my parents weren't going to talk to me about these things, and I don't think if I hadn't gotten to know these things, I could have understood and accepted that such a thing exists so easily.

- So do you really think you understand them?

Look, maybe I don't know how they feel, but when I see a gay couple, not necessarily in K-pop, it started there. But now, whenever I see them anywhere else, in a movie or photo, or see them up close, I like how much they love each other. I really feel how much they love each other, and it's a beautiful feeling for me. It's not like most of our people who say, "Ew, that's disgusting." Maybe I don't understand their feelings. But it's like a love that exists between a girl and a boy; we see it, and it's beautiful to me.

- Do you think K-pop has played a role in normalizing and establishing other things for you? Especially in things that haven't been accepted in Iran or are still considered taboos.

In Iran, many things are taboo and incomprehensible to them. However, I think coloring hair; that boys dye their hair or wear makeup and such things has become a bit more normal. But for us, not for our parents and the whole society."

- "After that, was there anyone among your friends who had no knowledge or very little knowledge or a negative view of the queer community and became familiar or normalized through K-pop?

A close friend of mine from that time, who was a fan before me and then I became a fan through him, was homophobic. It took years for him to change, and I think K-pop helped, even though he always had a guard against these issues. But over time, with the help of K-pop and high school and the progress of the world, he tried to update himself.

- What behaviors did they have that you find attractive?

Look, generally, because of their actions and the way they talk, like their voices being a bit high-pitched and many of them having had plastic surgery, they were cute, and they were very close to each other. Sometimes it makes you think they might be gay to that extent. For example, they are all boys, but they kiss each other on the lips, which, of course, is now common among friends in America, but this kind of behavior wasn't very common a few years ago. Now, since I'm not a big fan of them anymore, I'm saying this a bit critically; otherwise, their current fans wouldn't say such things in front of them."

"... Back in 2013, many of my peers didn't even know what homosexuality was. It was only after the fandom outside started addressing these topics and shipping that Iranians began to ship the members. Many had homophobia before and even disliked same-sex couples. But after the shipping issue, their perspective changed. However, I wasn't like that; I was already familiar with homosexuality before that. When I realized the story of this shipping and love, I didn't get too involved. I say I loved Suga so much that the others didn't matter."

6-3- Diminishing ideological Aspects

From one perspective, anthropological views can be divided into two categories: those that see humans as duty-bound and those that take a non-duty-bound stance.

Religious and spiritual views often see humans as duty-bound, meaning that they expect a religious person to strive for religious and spiritual goals that elevate themselves, their family, the community they live in, and even the global community, while also not neglecting respect for and preservation of their surrounding environment and even the global environment.

However, non-religious views, by setting aside the duty-bound perspective, see humans as free, and this has led individuals to consider their goal as the elevation of their own pleasures. This is considered as a non-duty-bound perspective.

Some interviewed individuals, emphasizing Illuminati¹ and Satanism² ideas that have increasingly focused on celebrities, including singers, have considered the views of many famous singers to be inspired by recent trends, thus placing singers associated with Illuminati and Satanism in contrast and conflict with religious ideas. Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, expressed in her interview regarding this:

- "So, are BTS members not theists?"

It's not unlikely that they aren't. I mean, unfortunately, most of the famous singers and actors in the world are Satanists, and there are few who worship God among them. In fact, I've seen that they often wear a triangle symbol around their necks or on their rings or earrings or have triangular necklaces, meaning you see that it's a symbol of Satan, and since they never talk about God among them, you can't say they worship God or anything. In fact, anyone who is famous has to be on the side of the capitalists and become a Satanist. Even once, one of the famous singers in the world openly said he was a Satanist at his concert. They are actually serving a group that doesn't accept God themselves and are like slaves."

Of course, Big Hit Entertainment has prohibited BTS members from taking a stance on important issues such as their religious beliefs, sexual orientation, political views, and so on, so they are not allowed to comment on these recent matters. Therefore, the direct promotion of issues like Illuminati and Satanism by them is moderated (although some fans have emphasized BTS members' support for Illuminati ideas). However, the fact that BTS members do not speak

¹ In its new meaning, the Illuminati refers to various organizations that have claimed or have been claimed to be connected to the original Bavarian Illuminati or similar secret societies, although these connections have been unfounded. These organizations are often accused of conspiring to control world affairs through planning and directing events and infiltrating governments and corporations in order to gain power and influence and establish a new world order. A key element of some conspiracy theories is that the Illuminati is depicted as operating in the shadows, controlling the narratives in novels, films, television shows, comics, video games, and music videos like a puppet master

² Satanism is a group of ideological or philosophical beliefs in which its followers perceive Satan as a primordial archetype and a being that predates the universe. They view Satan as a living entity with several aspects shared with human nature. Satanism is classified within the "left-hand path," opposing the "right-hand path." Left-hand practitioners believe in enriching themselves internally through their actions and hold that ultimately they must answer only to themselves, while right-hand practitioners achieve their internal enrichment through devotion and submission to a greater power, believing they must be accountable to that greater power.

Satanism generally focuses on physical advancement through the use of natural patterns and laws, rather than obedience to divine laws or those sent by a higher authority. For this reason, many contemporary Satanists avoid the beliefs and tendencies of past religions and tend to have more self-centered inclinations, seeing themselves at the center of existence and natural laws, resembling schools of thought such as materialism, egocentrism, and magical thinking. Nevertheless, some Satanists voluntarily choose to adopt certain moral codes.

The practices of Satanists sometimes resemble a form of inversion, where certain common ethical codes in society are deliberately altered. They refer to this method as "cultural shock" and interpret this behavior based on "moral relativism"

about religion itself plays a significant role in normalizing atheism, which can have a decisive impact on the moral and social lives of individuals. Tina, 19-years-old, expressed in this regard:

- "Has BTS talked about their religion? Because the discussions I've heard about this have been somewhat contradictory; some believe their religion is Christianity, while others say they are atheists.

I remember that just a while ago, I read on Twitter that BTS has never officially stated what their religion is. For example, I saw a video on YouTube where they guessed based on the fact that one of them had a cross on his necklace, so that person might be Christian. For example, they said that the other two have never mentioned anything, so maybe they have no beliefs. But as far as I know, Koreans are either Christians or those who have no beliefs at all. They really can't say such things, and I know they haven't said anything like that. Maybe someone has read it; I haven't read it yet. For example, I now confidently don't dismiss everything. It's possible that someone is irreligious because many Koreans are among them who have no religion, maybe even more than half."

Raha, 18-years-old, discusses the beliefs of some idols, which are a mix of divine religions and man-made religions, addressing the dilution of the concept of religion and religiosity in a different way:

- "Don't the idols say what their religion is?

Some do. But some don't. After all, it's personal.

- What is their religion mostly?

They have Christians. They have Buddhists. I've seen these a lot. There are also laic and atheists among them.

Some fans interviewed about BTS sometimes approach the concept of religion with indifference and sometimes consider religion an outdated concept that needs to be updated, and sometimes they mention moderating their religiosity while supporting BTS."

Glenoosh, 14-years-old, Shabnam, 25-years-old, and Diba, 15-years-old, in their separate interviews about changing their religious views while supporting BTS, have expressed the following:

- "Is there anything specific you've learned from BTS that you'd like to share?

I learned from BTS that I should value myself more than anything else. We humans are what matter, and we've been given the opportunity to live. We should value ourselves and not sacrifice ourselves for others. It doesn't concern us what others do. We shouldn't limit ourselves and should live fully, meaning we should always be happy.

- So, the individual is more important than everything?

Yes, humans are the most important and intelligent beings and have free will and talent.

- So, does BTS believe that humans are more important than God and existence?

Yes. If there were no humans, why would God create the world? Everything has been shaped for humans; even God is something that humans only think about. If we are not here, it's as if nothing exists."

- "But you also said you are interested in religious beliefs. However, homosexuality is not accepted in different religions.

Look, I'm interested in Christianity, but that doesn't mean I have to adhere to everything that was said two thousand years ago.

- So, do you think morality is a relative thing? I mean, what you're saying is that there are no fixed moral laws, and depending on changing circumstances, moral rules can also change.

Well, not in all circumstances. But some things are like that. It depends on the situation.

- Like what?

For example, in the past, homosexuality was considered immoral, but now it isn't... I think we shouldn't let old and outdated frameworks dictate how we should behave and think.

- But it seems that BTS, alongside the Western cultural industry, is doing the same thing. I mean, imposing their own approved frameworks of thought and behavior on the whole world. Don't you think this is a way of erasing diverse cultures and homogenizing all people?

I don't know. But BTS, unlike the government, for example, in our country, doesn't force anyone to do anything. They give us the right to choose, and I can choose whether to do this or not."

- "My dear, Diba, considering that you said you got to know K-pop 4 or 5 years ago, has BTS or K-pop influenced your beliefs?

Yes, it has definitely had an impact, but I can't say that everything I am now is because of BTS or K-pop, because at that time I also got familiar with the virtual space and went to other places. For example, if I want to give an example, I now approach religious issues much more moderately."

Some other BTS fans have been so influenced by the boys of the group that they prefer them over religion and religiosity, considering the group as a priority compared to religious beliefs, and in situations where they need guidance on how to behave, they choose a policy for themselves based on the influences of BTS. Fariba, 46-years-old, and Glenoosh, 14-years-old, expressed the following in their interviews regarding this:

"...My husband doesn't even let me take off my veil. I want to dance at family gatherings; what's wrong with that, like everyone else?

- Do you mean dancing in front of women or in mixed gatherings?

In a mixed gathering, what's the problem? My husband says it should only be in family gatherings with women or at weddings in front of male relatives, I mean the one who are Mahram¹.

- Has BTS influenced your views on dancing?

For example, what kind of influence do you mean?

- For instance, has your belief about dancing changed after getting to know BTS?

Maybe it has influenced me to think that learning to dance is good.

It's true that BTS dances, but isn't dancing in front of non-relative (non-mahrams) individuals is against your cultural norms and religious directives? Which would you choose between religious directives and modeling after BTS?

¹ Mahram comes from the word "Haram", and it means something which is sacred or prohibited. In Islamic law, Mahram means a person who you are not allowed to marry, and it is permissible to see them without a headscarf and shake their hands and hug them if you like. These individuals include close family members such as parents, siblings, children, and some other relatives. For example, a husband and wife are also considered mahram to each other

Therefore, non-mahram means it is not Haram to marry, with a few exceptions. It also means you have to observe the hijab in front of a non-mahram. This includes people who are not closely related to the individual and may include friends, colleagues, and strangers.

Religious directives are important, but when I see that BTS has completely moved against our religious directives and is successful and popular, which model do you think I should follow? Religion or BTS? I choose BTS.

- Aren't there role models who have followed religious teachings and achieved success and popularity?

Nowadays, no one talks about religion as a model for success in the world.

- Do we have role models?

No, we really don't have role models who have achieved success by following religion.

- So all the scientists that Iran has had and has, are they all non-believers?

Being a scientist isn't the same as being successful. I think fame and wealth are the criteria for success in today's world.

- And how much has BTS influenced your thinking about success?

A lot. They have both fame and wealth, so they are successful and popular. I want my children to have fame, wealth, and popularity together."

- "Do you think dancing conflicts with your religious beliefs?

What do I care about religion? A religion that opposes dancing is of no use to me.

- Religion doesn't oppose dancing; it just says you shouldn't dance in front of non-mahrams.

Well, that's exactly where the problem lies. If you can't dance in front of everyone, then what's the point of dancing? How will you become famous? It can't be that only women see your dance; when the video is broadcast, everyone sees it, whether they are men or women, mahram or non-mahram. I don't believe in any of that. Some members of BTS, like V, are very religious, but their religion doesn't say they shouldn't sing or dance in front of non-mahrams. What difference is there between us and them? Even women can't sing in Iran, so what expectations are left for dancing and its culture?

- You said you seek guidance from BTS when necessary; how do you seek guidance from them?

Whenever I have a problem, I listen to my favorite songs, and it feels like I get inspired about what to do, or sometimes it reminds me of certain things, so I don't stress myself out as much.

- For example, what do you remember when you listen to the songs?

For example, that song "So What" always reminds me of the things I told you... or many songs remind me that the world isn't worth worrying about and to enjoy my life.

- If one day you conclude that BTS has made a mistake or that you have taken the wrong path, wouldn't you regret it?

First of all, BTS never makes mistakes. Secondly, I've learned a mindset that I should never regret what I've done."

In conclusion, the interviews with BTS fans reveal a significant shift in their perspectives on religion and personal values, often influenced by the group's messages. Many fans express a preference for individualism and self-worth over traditional religious beliefs, viewing BTS as a source of inspiration and guidance. They tend to prioritize the group's ideals, such as the acceptance of the value authority of humanism (as opposed to theism) and the freedom of expression, over religious directives. This shift leads to a diminishing adherence to their previous faith.

6-4- Guiding fans towards joining the sexual revolution

- "Do you think what is said about BTS having signs of homosexuality is true or not?

Look, they have supported homosexuality; for example, Jimin said he is bisexual, but the other members haven't said anything, or Jungkook has sung a song." (Golara, 14 years old).

The Wikipedia encyclopedia describes the sexual revolution as follows:

The sexual revolution or sexual liberation was a social movement that challenged traditional sexual behaviors and interpersonal relationships in the West from the 1960s to the 1980s. Many changes in sexual norms during this period have become the dominant trend today.

Sexual liberation included the increasing acceptance of sex outside heterosexual relationships and outside of monogamous arrangements (mainly marriage), along with other issues such as contraception and birth control pills, public nudity and in the presence of others, the normalization of homosexuality and

other forms of sexual desire, and the legalization of abortion, all of which were raised during this revolution.

Theoretically, the term "sexual revolution" or "sex revolution" was coined by a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Reich. Wilhelm Reich was an Austrian scientist who wrote a famous book in 1936 titled "Sexuality in the Cultural Struggle."

According to Reich, sexual instincts are an important part of human physical and psychological mechanisms. Therefore, dual morality and the repression of these instincts lead to behavioral and personality disorders, which usually result in despair and depression or aggressive behaviors, or manifest as a desire for authority, hidden violence, and the establishment of hierarchies.

The famous slogan of the hippies, "Make love, not war," in the 1960s and 70s is not unrelated to Reich's teachings. Reich, who considered himself a communist, further stated that repressed sexual desire and instincts hinder the flourishing of human capacities and creativity and prevent confrontation and conflict with the repressions caused by the capitalist system.

In addition to Reich's ideas and opinions, the theories and field research of Alfred Kinsey, an American researcher, also played a major role in the emergence of the sexual revolution.

In fact, it was through Kinsey's research and books that issues such as female orgasm, masturbation, homosexuality, and similar topics came out of the realm of prohibitions and taboos and became subjects of public discussion and debate.

Alongside the theoretical domain, the introduction of birth control pills to the market was also a major factor in the emergence of the sexual revolution.

Although condoms and some other contraceptive methods had limited popularity until 1960, the birth control pill initiated a significant transformation in human sexual relations

The establishment and expansion of the sexual revolution are less conceivable without the 1968 movement and the activities before and after it. Activists and supporters of these movements rose up against the rigid social and cultural values of their parents, as they believed that the emergence of violence and war was a result of these structures. On the other hand, they were influenced by the ideas of Reich and Marcuse, believing that 'without removing the constraints in sexual relations, a free society cannot be formed.'

However, the profit-seeking motives of yellow journalism and certain economic circles fueled an extreme wave of pornography and economic exploitation of

the newly formed relationships, which overshadowed the enthusiasm and ideals in sexual relations that Reich and Marcuse advocated for a considerable time.

In the 1980s, with the spread of AIDS, the debate arose about how much free sexual relationships contributed to the spread of this disease and whether communication methods should be made healthier or whether a regression in sexual relations should be initiated. In particular, traditional forces and their religious institutions found a platform to counter sexual autonomy with 'medical arguments' and once again introduced only formal sexual relationships within the family as healthy. However, the sexual revolution has largely passed this stage as well, and with the care and education aimed at having healthy sexual relationships, it continues on a path less tainted by excesses and extremes. The further liberalization of sexual rights and the recognition of the sexual orientations of minorities that were previously suppressed and rejected are manifestations of this trend¹.

Although the members of BTS have not explicitly referred to the concept of sexual revolution, their behavior supports the sexual revolution, as their role model effect directs their fans towards the sexual revolution in practice.

The clear support for the LGBTQ community is one of the most significant aspects of BTS's (and actually Big Hit's) support for the sexual revolution.

Alongside BTS's support for sexual minorities or LGBTQ, some of the traditions formed and existing within the company, the group, and BTS fans strongly direct individuals towards the goals of the sexual revolution. Instances such as creating one-shots and pornographic fanfictions (storytelling), shipping individuals often in a sexual context, creating fan art (artworks made by fans), the K-role tradition (role taking under the characters of interest), and most importantly, the silence of BTS members regarding their sexual orientations and Jimin's announcement about his attraction to both genders, are among the main cases that have been raised in support of the sexual revolution by Big Hit, BTS, and their fans, and it can be confirmed as a result that the company and the group are aligned in supporting and joining the sexual revolution. Examining the opinions of interviewed fans in this regard is very enlightening.

Diba, a 15-year-old, notes in an interview that her first acquaintance with LGBTQ was through reading fanfiction by BTS fans in this regard:

¹ Vahidi, F. (2013, December 13). The sexual revolution: An event with far-reaching consequences. DW. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/4t2wjdnm>.

- Diba, do you read fanfiction or not?

Yes, I do because I generally like novels, especially romantic ones. There was a time when I read a lot, but their stories were well-written, not just nonsense, but now I sometimes go to Wattpad, which is full of stories and novels, and I read.

- Besides the romantic genre, what other genres of fanfiction do you read?

Well, as I said, the first one is romance, and after that, I like fantasy and vampire genres, and I also enjoy reading drama and sad stories (laughs). I mostly read boy-girl stories, but I might have read one or two couple stories. I have thought a lot about the LGBTQ topic and researched it; I have come to terms with it. You know, because in our culture, these things are not very normal, and generally, no one talks about them from childhood to make it a bit normal for a person. That's why it took me a long time to come to terms with it.

- Did you have any knowledge about LGBTQ before getting to know BTS, or did you become familiar with this topic through them?

Um, well, my first acquaintance with LGBTQ was through BTS because at that time, I was not old enough to follow up and see if these issues existed or not."

Banafsha, a 20-year-old, also mentions in her interview the significant support of BTS members for sexual minorities:

- "What do you think about the fact that many say this group and K-pop promote desexualization of makeup, clothing, and love?

Honestly, I am not really into this statement because I think it has nothing to do with it, and anyone can wear or do whatever they want. I don't know, maybe because I think this way, I can't really understand this statement, but as long as no one harms me, it doesn't matter what they do.

- Does BTS support the LGBTQ community in general?

Yes, well, it often happens at concerts that they show their support for the LGBTQ community through their clothing, for example, the skirt that Suga wore in Vogue magazine or Jungkook holding the LGBTQ flag, and Namjoon wearing a skirt-like outfit.

There's also a discussion that Jimin dyed his hair this color for a music video to support the LGBTQ community, but I'm not sure, and this is just a theory that ARMYs say; otherwise, he might just like to have his hair this way."

The widespread attention to one-shots and fanfictions, in the interaction between the company and fans, further supports the sexual revolution and the acceptance of various sexual behaviors without any barriers.

Maryam, an 18-year-old, during her interview emphasizes that BTS aims to normalize homosexuality globally. Hadis, 14-year-old, also explains the differences between one-shots and fanfictions, noting that many of the 18+ (pornographic) stories are created by BTS fans under 18, and Sayeh, 21-year-old, mentions that 60% of the storytelling is about same-sex relationships:

- "Do you think BTS's support for homosexuals is aimed at normalizing this issue globally, or is it primarily for promoting and attracting an audience for themselves?

Right now, not just K-pop but people all over the world are trying to normalize this issue and create a culture that we do not have the right to insult these individuals and must accept their orientation. BTS is also trying to make the environment fairer and more humane for homosexuals because for years this segment of society has been humiliated and suppressed by people, and the new generation, with the help of the music and film industry, is gradually learning to respect this group just like everyone else, with no difference. I think it's a positive point that BTS and K-pop, considering that Korean society is an Asian society and still has its traditional and closed nature, are nonetheless striving alongside celebrities from other countries to create a culture in this regard. Of course, the world of celebrities is generally a world full of politics and underlying promotions, so it's quite possible that this action is also a form of advertising for them, but as long as this type of promotion helps the lives of a segment of society, it doesn't matter if they become more prominent through it."

- "Do fanfictions have age restrictions?

Some of them do. Those that are romantic or have explicit scenes tend to be more popular, even among those whose age is below that limit, as they find them more appealing. For example, one of the sites uploads them every week.

- How is this age restriction applied and for whom?

It's not particularly special or sensitive; they just label it, for example, +18, but many of them are written by kids under 18. They are available on all sites and channels.

- What is the difference between fanfiction and one-shots?

One-shots, as the name suggests, are short stories in the form of one or two parts, meaning they cannot have more than three or four parts. So if we have a long story, it's not called a one-shot. Fanfiction is a long and ongoing story, for example, it has twelve parts. The main difference between one-shots and fanfics is their length, and I should also mention that one-shots are mostly romantic, while fanfiction can have any genre.

- My next question is about fanfics. How much do you follow them?

Do you even know what fanfic is?

- I think they are fictional stories that fans write about the relationships of the members of their group, and sometimes they have sexual content.

Well, fanfic is not that at all.

- Really? Then what is it?

Fanfic is when you know a character from somewhere, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a real character. For example, the most famous fanfics are from Harry Potter, or Shakespeare was also a fanfic writer.

- Shakespeare?!

Yes, the play Hamlet is the most famous fanfic in the world.

- How is it considered a fanfic?

The two main characters are real, but the story is not real, and neither of those characters were asked by Shakespeare for permission to write the story. In fact, what he wrote is now considered a play, but in his time, it was a story about two real characters that existed, while the story itself was born from Shakespeare's imagination. That's why they say Hamlet is the most famous fanfic in the world.

But in reality, fanfic is like this: you see a character in a movie or something, and then you wish you could see or read more about them. For example, when you finish a good movie, you think to yourself, "I wish there was more," or "I wish I could see the continuation of this character's life." Fanfic does that, or if you are not satisfied with the ending of a movie or book, you want to read a different ending. You go read its fanfic, or if there isn't one, you write it yourself. That's what fanfic is.

- And how does this happen in K-pop?

In K-pop, it's the same situation. But first, let me emphasize that fanfic is not exclusive to K-pop fans. All artists have fanfics. If you say they don't, I can

bring you examples from any artist you name. Even Iranian artists have fanfics, and fanfic is something that fans write, and its audience is other fans. But in K-pop, the fanfic phenomenon is a bit more pronounced and prevalent. Why is that? Because, first of all, I should say that second-generation groups had a lot of this... for example, let's take Sherlock Holmes as an example. You know how they say the ship of Sherlock and John Watson?

- No, I haven't seen that.

Well, it's like this: the writer or director puts a dialogue in their film or book that serves as a hook to attract the audience. For example, Sherlock turns to Watson and asks, "Do you have a boyfriend?" and then Watson looks at him in silence for a while and finally says no. Then the story continues, but that spark is ignited in the audience's mind, and then a lot of fanfics are written where fans imagine a same-sex relationship between the two, and in the back of your mind, a story forms that can attract you more to the plot. Then each ship attracts a different group more. For example, boy ships usually attract girls more, and vice versa for girl ships attracting boys. Now imagine these are seven boys living together, or another group of ten boys living together, and in Korea, their relationships are not like ours. In Iran, for example, Islamic culture has historically mixed with our culture and made these things taboo, but often it's not like that, and in many places, their culture is different from here. For example, hugging between them is a common thing, and a fan takes this and expands on it and turns it into a fanfic.

- What is the situation of fanfic in Iran?

Fanfic has become very well-known in Iran, especially among ARMYs, because the population is large. People in Iran were not familiar with the concept of fanfic, and then suddenly they saw that ARMYs were writing fanfics, and many started using this term, so it's for them

- Is the content of these fanfics mostly about same-sex relationships?

There are all kinds. Some have no sexual content at all, or if they do, it's between two people of opposite genders, and there are those that describe sexual relationships openly and explicitly.

- But can we say, for example, that about 60% of fanfics deal with same-sex relationships?

Yes, you could say that. Most of them are like that.

- And where do they read or share these fanfics?

There are two well-known sites for this. One is Wattpad and the other is AO3. For example, I don't know if you've seen *Twilight* but that's also a fanfic that turned into a movie.

- How common is it for ARMYs to follow fanfics? Does every ARMY read or write a bit of fanfic?

No, actually. Many don't read them. For example, the ratio of fanfic readers to others is about 40 to 100."

Pooneh, 18-year-old, confirms the prevalence of pornography in one-shots and fanfics, mentioning the arousal of users of this content, who, in their arousal, seek to relieve their sexual tensions:

- "Can you explain more about the sexual nature of the stories?

Honestly, I'm shy to elaborate.

- Feel free. Please say whatever you think or know about it.

Look, the stories that are written describe the entire relationship of a ship, with any theme or couple it may be about. From acquaintance and interest to love and arguments, everything. The writer includes all of this in their story. Then, one of the events in a relationship is sex and sexual relations. I can say that ninety-nine percent of the stories on Wattpad or Instagram and Telegram contain sex and smut. Even many readers, if they know that a story doesn't have smut, won't even go near it or read it. There are even many books that are entirely about smut; they are called smut books. They only come in the form of a short story that exclusively writes about the sex of two couples, and I apologize for saying this, but many fans enjoy these sexual stories between two couples, and again, I apologize for saying this, but I know that many get aroused by these stories and have no shame about it. They somewhat enjoy reading these things, or aside from these smut books, many ordinary stories have a lot of smut in them. For example, out of every three parts of a story, one part is smut.

I've seen many fans repeatedly asking the writer to write smut for them, or on Telegram, there are many channels like this that post sexy fan art of two ships or write sexual and smut stories, or even post voice clips resembling idol voices as if they are having sex. This phenomenon seems to have increased a lot in the last couple of years. Since I became a fan, this has been the case, but when I asked older fans, they said that the fandom space wasn't like this before, and now it has increased a lot. Many have become

disillusioned with everything because of these events in the fandom and have completely left the BTS fandom.

- So they read with the awareness that they are fulfilling their sexual needs?

Yes, I know many who have said that whenever they read these smut stories, they get hormonal in a way and then engage in certain activities. They no longer care about how inappropriate it is to read excessively or relieve their needs by reading sexual stories about idols. No matter how much you tell them, they don't care. As long as they enjoy it and relieve their needs, that's enough for them."

Shipping or establishing hypothetical relationships between group members or between a group member and another individual is another aspect discussed in the general culture of the company, the group, and the fans. This means that the company and the group, through their passivity and often meaningful silence on these matters, and fans by creating texts indicating closeness (friendly or sexual) between two idols or an idol and another person, engage in shipping them.

Razieh, a 15-year-old, describes shipping and shippers in her interview:

- "Can you explain about shippers?"

Well, shipping¹ is a term that has come up in K-pop. It means that in your imagination, you envision two people being in a relationship and create an ideal couple in your mind. This couple can be a boy and a girl, a girl and a girl, or a boy and a boy. A shipper is someone who has these imaginations in their head. For example, the oldest ship in BTS is the "Taejin" ship, which combines the names Jin and Taehyung.

- Do you follow a specific ship?

I don't follow a specific ship myself. I'm interested, but not to the extent that I'm attached to one ship.

- So you don't follow a specific type as you mentioned earlier.

Not that I'm not interested, but yes, I don't follow a specific ship; otherwise, I ship all of them together.

- The members themselves?

Yes.

¹ Ship means that two people have a lot in common. Ships can take the form of: friendship (simple friendship), straight (relationship with the opposite sex), or gay ship (relationship based on homosexuality)

- But it's not like you publish them on your page.

Yes. If I do post, I try to include all of them because, for example, someone might come and say, "Why didn't you post that ship?" and now because you didn't post that ship, you're a hater of them.

- Do you have more interest in gay ships?

No, my interest in them is about the same.

- So you also ship girl-boy pairs?

Yes. I also ship girl-boy couples."

Ghazal, 16-years-old, in an interview, mentions some of the most famous ships in BTS fandom culture as follows:

"What do you know about gay ships?

(Laughs) they are Gay ships, aren't they.

- I mean, are they real or just a fandom theory?

In BTS, there are thousands of ships. Each has its own fandom. Not all ships are gay and such. They might say, for example, that their friendship is beautiful. But the most famous ones are, for example, BTS, Taekook, and V-Kook, named after Taehyung, who is also Vimin¹, Yoonmin², Sope³, Namjin⁴.

- Which one are you a fan of?

I'm a fan of Yoonmin (laughs).

- Is it just because you like them together, or is there something real?

No. Yoonmin is real. (Laughs) It's obvious.

- How is it obvious?

From the things Suga and Jimin do. The behaviors they have together.

- This Vimin you mentioned, is Jimin with V?

Yeah. Jimin and V.

¹ V and Jimin

² Yoongi and jimin

³ SUGA and j-hope

⁴ RM and Jin

- So, fans have seen something between these two that makes them think they are together?

No, look, that's just their delusion. Not even delusion. For example, they see every little movement and say they're in a relationship. While it's not like that. For instance, Taehyung behaves like that with the other members as a friend too. But they cut those scenes and say Vimin is f***ing reallll (laughs).

- What behaviors does he have with the other members too?

For example, hugging. Looking at each other.

So what distinguishes Yoonmin and Vimin in your opinion that makes you think Yoonmin is real?

Yoonmin doesn't do those things in front of cameras, as much as they are aware. For example, they wouldn't just hold hands randomly or touch each other. They are talking to someone else, but they want the other one to be next to them and connected. And it's not just me saying this. Many people who aren't even part of the fandom say it. Then they analyze body language and such, they say."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, in her interview, while discussing shipping, also addresses fan art, which often artistically processes the same previous topics at the idol level:

- "Do you know anything about the relationships and orientations of BTS members?

No, but they give some signs to fans. And overall, Korea is a homophobic country; they can't come out (announce) that easily. But they show something through words or actions.

- What signs do they give? Can you give an example?

For example, just recently, Jimin released a series of photos filled with LGBT and bisexual symbols. Fans analyzed it and found that Jimin actually came out with his photos. I read some secret news about Jimin that he apparently has a boyfriend. Of course, since I'm a Kookmin shipper, I say that Jimin and Kookie are together. But many believe he has a secret boyfriend. Many say it's Yoongi (laughs), but I really doubt it.

- On what basis do you say these two are together?

In concerts and interviews, they behave very much like a couple. Of course, many say that since Jungkook is in a relationship with Yoongi, then Kookmin isn't real. But I personally think the Taekook relationship isn't real, and since they are just shipping more, the company tells them to do something. But the Kookmin story is different. They don't give off the vibe that they are doing something out of obligation or to attract an audience. It's clear that there's a feeling between them.

- What do you mean the company tells them to do something?

If you look at K-pop fans, you'll see that they ship their members together much more than in other places. It's definitely impossible for all members of groups to be in relationships with each other. So something is off. The thing is, in K-pop, companies train the members of a band to come to concerts and interviews and do certain things together. For example, touch each other. Stare at each other or talk about each other, or if one of the other members shows affection or touches one of these so-called couples, they act as if they are jealous or don't like it. They are told all of this and justified. Then fans see this, they like it, and start creating theories and stories, making fan art, writing fiction about them, creating fan pages, and a lot of other things. Then that ship gains a lot of fans, and you know, these gay ships and couples have a huge impact on audience attraction. I have a few friends on Twitter who became ARMYs because of the Taekook ship and are now madly in love with Taekook.

In BTS, there are many ships, but the most famous ones are Taehyung and Kookie. Before Taekook, there's another ship that has even more fans, which is the Taehyung ship. That one is also very obviously fake, and it's clear that they are showing it this way to attract more audience, that Jennie and Taehyung are together. After this ship, Kook and Taehyung have the most fans. But many also ship Jimin and Kook or Jimin and Yoongi or Namjoon and Jin."

K-Role is another phenomenon in the culture of companies, groups, and fans. This term is derived from role playing. In K-Role, unlike shipping, where the relationships of two idols are hypothetically processed, individuals appear in the role of their favorite person and start to express their emotions and feelings using that person's name, and this role-playing is pursued by both sides of the relationship. Experiences conducted in this regard indicate that this type of role-playing does not go without controversy. Fereshteh, a 19-years-old, in her interview describing K-Role and some of its consequences says:

- "Why don't you connect with the Persian section of fandoms?"

Because at first, compared to international fans, Iranians are a bit more closed-minded. In the sense that they think more traditionally, their minds are more closed, and it seems like everything becomes personal among them because they are all Iranian. For example, this K-Role. I don't know how much you know about it, but it's a bottomless pit. A while ago, thanks to a lawyer who spontaneously followed up on the matter, the mess came out

- What is K-Role?

A group of kids gather together, each taking on the role of an idol, and then they start living as that idol in the virtual space. It mostly happens on Telegram. For example, they enter relationships, go to parties, go to clubs, and even engage in sex chats as that idol. I've never been involved in it myself, but I've heard a lot about it.

It's true that most of the people involved are quite young, but there are also some individuals who exploit younger kids in the K-Role scene because initially, in the role, you don't ask how old someone really is. But then suddenly, after a month of inappropriate conversations, you find out one is 14 and another is 30. This kind of thing has really happened.

Younger kids tend to be careless and trust too quickly. It starts with the role and idol persona, but gradually they begin to share their personal information. From their real names to even postal codes and home addresses for various excuses. This can be very dangerous.

This lawyer, I can't remember his name exactly, but I remember he followed up on this issue. In the end, it turned out that at the center of this issue was a very famous person among K-pop fans, actually a 30 or 40-years-old man who was exploiting the kids. This is why I say it becomes personal.

- Can you explain what you mean by sex chatting? Do they talk as if they are that idol?

I can send you an example of the content in K-Role to see.

But yes, that's exactly what it means. As they say, they couple up with someone, whether gay or straight. It's much less common for them to be straight, though.

And imagine a 13-years-old taking on the role of Jungkook, becoming a couple with someone who is playing Taehyung, and then they start saying inappropriate things and sex chatting. After a while, as they talk, they start

sharing personal information, and then they find out their partner is, for example, 20-years-older than them.

Sometimes they even get addresses from the kids under the pretext of sending gifts. Just imagine what kind of story that is."

Beyond discussing topics like supporting LGBTQ rights, creating one-shots and often explicit fan fiction, producing sometimes inappropriate fan art, and engaging in often unethical K-Role s and more explicit shipping, so far, one of the idols has indirectly indicated his bisexuality, effectively endorsing the concepts raised in the sexual revolution. This means that although the sexual revolution centered around free relationships between genders, unconventional sexual relationships were presented as marginal issues, the emphasis on content such as one-shots, storytelling, descriptions of close relationships between idols, artistic productions focused on idols, and role-playing as idols, alongside the acknowledgment of bisexuality, evokes a second sexual revolution that transcends free relationships between genders and has now reached a philosophy of enjoying sexual pleasure in any possible form.

Negin, 13-years-old, Taranom, 18-years-old, and Reihaneh, 17-years-old, in their separate interviews regarding Jimin's indirect announcement of his bisexuality, talk as follows:

- "What feelings did Jimin's announcement of his bisexuality create for you?

Honestly, it didn't matter to me. I mean, whatever, it's his life; he can do whatever he wants. Even if he wants to ruin his life, as long as he doesn't harm me, it doesn't matter at all."

"Jimin seems to have come out¹ in the photo books he recently published, showing a 50% attraction to women and 50% to men, and this hasn't been announced by him; it's just come from fan theories."

- "Sweetheart, I heard some news about Jimin's orientation; do you know anything about it?

Yeah, it's a theory from the ARMY, but Jimin has said in an interview that this is the real me, and that raises a lot of ambiguity. But my overall opinion is that it's his business and his life. Certainly, people who are bisexual or gay didn't choose this orientation and have faced many difficulties to be able to one day speak the truth. In any case, whether he is bisexual or not, I support

¹ Come out refers to the act of revealing or disclosing one's sexual orientation. In this context, it specifically means to openly express one's sexual orientation

him because it wasn't because of his orientation or looks that I became a fan. For example, unlike many who might have seen a TikTok clip or a photo because of looks, it was because of their uniqueness and talent in music and their beautiful voice."

The use of elements such as one-shots, fan fictions, the portrayal of close relationships between idols, artistic productions, and content created under the title of idol role-playing, which often focus on sexual issues, at its simplest level, normalizes unconventional relationships like homosexuality. At deeper levels, fans may praise these unconventional aspects and later refer to their own arousal, ultimately explicitly discussing the adopted positions promoted in their behavioral patterns.

Shabnam, 25-years-old, has noted the normalization of same-sex relationships in the context of BTS fandom as follows:

- "What is your opinion on homosexuality?

I remember you said before getting to know BTS, you had no familiarity with these topics, but you didn't say what you think now?

Didn't I say? (Laughs) Well, I personally have no interest in same-sex relationships. But I'm okay if my friend, for example, is gay, as long as they respect my boundaries. If they want to have romantic relationships with their same gender, that's their business, but they can still be a regular friend to me. So they're no longer a strange person to me like before. What matters is that they are a person, and their personal life is their own business."

Nikoo, 15-years-old, in her interview, praises same-sex relationships:

- "Did you get to know about homosexuality and the queer community through BTS?

No, I watch a lot of movies, so I already knew about them and liked them. Of course, I still don't know anything about my own orientation because I think it's too early for someone in their teenage years to come to a conclusion about it, and they might make a mistake.

- So BTS hasn't influenced your interest in same-sex individuals?

No, I say I became interested through the movies I watched.

- What do you think is the reason for this interest in the queer community?

I think the love between them is purer because in straight relationships, there are a lot of sexual issues involved; most boys are only focused on that. But in

queer relationships, due to the limitations they face, their love for each other has to be very strong for them to dare to confess it to each other, especially in a world where many are against homosexuality. They might even face challenges because of their relationships with their families, and of course, there are other problems too. Being homosexual is not easy at all and comes with a lot of trouble, which is why most same-sex couples fight every day for their relationship, making their love feel more real. Straight relationships have become so easy and commonplace that no one values them, and everyone thinks that if this one isn't there, there are a hundred others like it, so why should I try or love it? I think emotional and sexual exploitation happens less in the queer community, and they value love more."

Marzieh, 19-years-old, also recalls her arousal while engaging with one-shots, which may sometimes include images or video recordings:

- "What impact do you think one-shots have on the mental and physical states of those who follow them?

In my opinion, one-shots are worse than fiction. One-shots focus on your imagination and affect you along with the photo or video of that idol and suggestive writing, which really makes you feel mentally and physically affected for a short time, as if you are experiencing that scenario with the idol.

- Do they cause arousal in readers and viewers?

Exactly.

- Have you experienced that yourself?

Yes, in the past, and remembering it bothers me because I pray and fast, so I try to stay away from them altogether, as I might not be able to get out of it once I open them again. It's better if they are out of sight."

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, states in her interview that during the 3-4 years she has been a fan of BTS, she has come to realize that love is not defined by gender and has personally moved towards bisexual relationships:

- "When you think about the fact that two of them are in a relationship with each other, both being the same gender, what feelings do you have about that?

I completely respect this orientation; I'm bisexual myself. I don't care about orientation or gender at all, and I'm not one of those who say, "Oh, how

disgusting that these two girls or these two boys are together." I've been with a girl myself, so it's normal for me.

- Since when have you thought about yourself this way?

It's been less than a year.

- Do you think this issue is related to the BTS group?

I've been a fan of BTS for 3-4 years, but it was much later that I realized it had nothing to do with BTS. I met someone in a chat, we liked each other, and then we got into a relationship. In a group, I suddenly realized I really liked her.

- Where did you get your information about being bisexual?

I think it doesn't matter what people's orientations are; everyone can like anyone. A girl can like a girl, and a boy can like a boy. To me, gender doesn't matter.

- What made gender unimportant to you?

For example, I've seen a lot of clips on Pinterest about lesbians and gays, and some of my friends are like that.

- What made you curious to watch those clips?

I didn't go looking for them myself; they just appeared in my explore feed while I was browsing.

- How is this issue among your friends now?

The friends I have don't have any problem with it.

- How many of them are bisexual like you?

There are many people like me. Just yesterday, I was out and met someone, and I found out she's like that too.

- Do you think BTS talking about these issues has had an impact on this?

No, I don't think so, because when I saw the BTS ships, I didn't feel anything until I got into that group and met that girl and saw the Pinterest clips.

- Could it be that your mind was prepared for this issue?

It could be. I never thought about two girls being together before, but now I don't know if it was because I was a kid and hadn't thought about it. But in

these 3-4 years, I've grown up (that's how long I've been an ARMY) and realized that it's really okay; gender doesn't matter. I also think that gender isn't important anymore, and then when I saw that girl at the party and really liked her, I realized it's possible for someone to feel that way. She liked me a lot too. I think it's just a normal thing now."

6-5- Acceptance of Moral Relativism

Are you part of Sampo¹ or Oppo²?

I like the number six; do you want me to be part of Yukpo³ too?

The media and adults say we have no willpower,

They don't treat us properly,

Why do they kill us before we can even try?

Enemy, enemy, enemy,

Why are you hanging your head and accepting it already?

Wake up, energy, energy, energy,

Never give up, you know you're not lonely,

Our dawn is brighter than the light of day,

Inject a little hope into yourself,

Don't waste your youth, let's go (a part of the song Dope).

One of the prominent theories in the contemporary world regarding moral issues is moral relativism. Moral relativists believe that there are no fixed and unchangeable morals in the present world, and individual desires, tastes, or agreements determine moral issues. In other words, in the theory of moral relativism, there are no absolute goods or evils, right or wrong, or moral imperatives; all of these depend on the interests and preferences of individuals and the groups to which they belong.

¹Sampo refers to individuals who abandon the three principles of love, marriage, and having children

²Oppo refers to individuals who abandon the five principles of love, marriage, having children, becoming employed, and buying a house.

³Yukpo refers to individuals who abandon the six principles of love, marriage, having children, becoming employed, buying a house, and social relationships

Moral relativism is presented in three interpretations: descriptive relativism, meta-ethical relativism, and normative relativism, all of which aim to explain the absence of fixed moral foundations in the world.

Critics of moral relativism argue that the basis of good and evil is human conscience¹, and every individual feels this conscience within themselves. According to these critics, accepting moral relativism means that, firstly, no bad action should be subject to punishment. Secondly, no good action should be rewarded. Thirdly, by creating doubt about the validity of all human affairs, people fall into moral skepticism. Therefore, it seems that just as codified laws of the world do not treat criminals and reformers equally, punishing criminals and rewarding reformers, there should be acceptance regarding the goodness and badness of moral issues.

The group BTS, on one hand, due to their lack of reliance on religious views or established moral perspectives, and on the other hand, due to their efforts to appear revolutionary in the eyes and hearts of their teenage and young audience, by denying what exists and affirming a kind of individual and social chaos (as previously mentioned), have initially confused their Iranian fans, who have been raised in a culture that believes in the goodness and badness of matters and the belief in fixed moralities, with their disruptive ideas and subsequently led them towards the acceptance of moral relativism.

Gelareh, 14-years-old, in her interview, exemplifies a clear case of value confusion. Gelareh, who has grown up in a relatively religious environment and does not see ethics as variable based on religious values, considers moral relativism for others and moral stability for herself when faced with the issue of

¹ **Conscience** is a term that some philosophers and moral thinkers have utilized throughout history. This word seems to be analogous to mirror neurons, which were discovered in the last three decades, first in monkeys and then in humans. Giacomo Rizzolatti and his colleagues at the University of Parma in Italy placed electrodes on the ventral premotor cortex of macaque monkeys to study the neurons that control the movements of the monkey's hands and mouth. They recorded the response of the relevant neurons when the monkey picked up a piece of food. However, Rizzolatti and his colleagues made a serendipitous discovery: when a monkey sees a human or another monkey picking up a piece of food, the corresponding neuron in its brain also reacts and becomes active.

Although mirror neurons were initially found in monkeys, subsequent studies have shown that a similar system exists in the brains of humans (Saif, Kian-Ersi, 2011). Rizzolatti described these recently identified cells, later named mirror neurons, stating: "Mirror neurons allow us to read the minds of others not through thought and reasoning, but through feeling and direct simulation" (Wikipedia Encyclopedia).

In other words, if a person observes another human in a sad state, the mirror neurons in their brain reconstruct the emotions of the sorrowful individual, creating a sense of sadness in the mind of the first person, prompting them to automatically empathize and feel compassion for the distressed and sorrowful individual.

Walsh (2011) notes in his description of mirror neurons that it seems we are neurologically wired to understand, connect, and bond with other humans, and we cannot turn off the circuit created between ourselves and other people. This is because, by observing the behavioral cues of others, we unconsciously imitate them, such as laughing or feeling sad in response to someone else's laughter or sadness.

homosexuality. This combination of two contradictory theories is not acceptable for analyzing and resolving social issues:

"In general, I really respect people's beliefs, and this itself is a kind of so-called enlightenment that teaches us how to be good people. I think supporting BTS cannot harm our religion unless we choose our path incorrectly. For example, homosexuality is common in foreign countries or banned in some places, but it's important that we can distinguish between what is good or bad.

- So, in your opinion, is homosexuality good or bad?

For those whose religion is Shia and are Muslim, because God said it's bad. I personally don't want to get involved in these issues and I don't like it for myself, but interest can develop between any two people, so I think it's bad for me, but not for them."

Nastaran, 19-years-old, also expresses support for moral relativism in some cases and for moral stability in others:

- "If a scandal about your favorite idol comes out and it's confirmed to be true, what would your reaction be?

It depends on what the scandal is. For example, I don't know, if it's about using marijuana, that counts as a scandal. Personally, I don't care if it's something like using marijuana; it's their body, it doesn't concern me, as long as they don't promote it. But I don't know... like... maybe if it's something like assault (laughs), I would definitely kiss that person and set them aside. It depends on what the scandal is. I don't look at it and say, 'Okay, this is a scandal.' I look at whether the action they took aligns with my beliefs. When it doesn't align with my beliefs, they definitely have no place in my life anymore."

Beyond the fans who have become confused in their moral judgments when confronted with the opinions of BTS members, many fans have adopted moral relativism in their own lives due to the influence of BTS. Mahdiah, 20-years-old, states in her interview that she has learned from BTS not to judge or accuse others:

"... For example, some of my mindsets have been corrected. For instance, I don't judge others unnecessarily or undermine someone's efforts with my words, I don't accuse anyone without reason, or if someone has a problem, I help them. I've also learned that if someone needs me to listen to their words, I should definitely do that.

Oh, for example, that all races and cultures are the same. A person's skin color doesn't make them different from others. People around the world are the same. No matter where we come from, with any religion or belief we have, we can be friends, live together, communicate, study together, and that everyone can live in the way they want. We shouldn't force anyone to live differently or the way we tell them to."

Gelareh, 14-years-old, Nikoo and Diba, 15-years-old, and Tina, 19-years-old, in their interviews, explicitly state that the actions of individuals regarding issues like boys' makeup, homosexuality, alcohol consumption, or drug use are their own business and do not concern them. However, due to the social nature of human beings, harming oneself is not only considered damaging to the community's resources but, based on observational learning, engaging in unconventional behaviors can lead to teaching those behaviors to others, especially children and adolescents who have not yet reached abstract and critical thinking and are still in the stage of moral following, which can be very harmful.

- "My dear please tell me what is the general reaction of ARMYs towards BTS haters?

The first group considers them unimportant, meaning they don't care at all about what the haters say and just do their own thing. The second group consists of those who respond to the haters and prove that the members are good. The third group is the fanatics who get very worked up and just argue.

- Which group do you belong to?

The first one. The answer to fools is silence.

- Have you seen anyone around you who belongs to the second or third group?

Yes, many. I have friends who usually get into arguments and become agitated.

- For example, what kind of arguments happen between ARMYs and haters?

Haters throw insults and talk about the bad things about BTS and their nonexistent flaws, and ARMYs deny everything and support the members. For instance, in the discussion about homosexuality, ARMYs, like me, say that their orientation is their own business, and our interests are our own business."

- "Has BTS ever changed your beliefs?

Yes, this has happened and it has had a significant impact, but it hasn't been a negative impact. For example, there are people who are veiled and religious and believe that Muslim individuals must wear a hijab, or that those who don't wear a hijab are very bad. BTS has come out and said that there are many veiled individuals who are beautiful, meaning that being veiled can still be beautiful. Once, a host asked them if they prefer veiled or non-veiled people to come to fan meetings, and BTS said that it's up to individuals to be comfortable in whatever way they choose, and they always try to promote the idea that other people's religious beliefs have nothing to do with us and that it's something they must choose for themselves. They even said that if you see a veiled person somewhere, don't be the type to scoff or say, "Look at that person, she has have a hijab," and vice versa; individuals who has a hijab shouldn't bother or insult those who don't wear a hijab. This really changed my perspective. Before hearing this, I didn't have a positive view of very veiled individuals. I didn't mock them or interfere, but after BTS said these things, it impacted me, and I think people's beliefs depend on themselves and relate to themselves."

- "What is your personal opinion about BTS being boys and wearing makeup?

My opinion on this matter is that BTS's makeup is more like stage makeup, and every celebrity with a public image needs to have a reasonable and attractive appearance that others will like. I think BTS's makeup is very basic and is just a way to enhance their appearance. We see this with our own celebrities who dye their hair or apply something to their faces to look better on camera. But overall, if boys suddenly wear red lipstick or eyeliner, that's their choice, and it doesn't concern me.

- Did you have a similar view about men's makeup before you got to know BTS?

No, my perspective on this issue changed after getting to know BTS because at that time, I wasn't mentally mature enough to think about such things, and I didn't deal with these topics at all. But after getting to know BTS, I thought, "Okay, if someone wants to wear makeup, it's none of my business to comment on it," because that person doesn't interfere in my life, and they can do whatever they want without harming me, so I don't feel the need to resist. Overall, I'm not the type of person who judges others based on their appearance, so I didn't have a negative attitude about this topic."

"...A while ago, there was a photo from behind the scenes at the Grammys where Taehyung was smoking, and some ARMYs were hating on him, saying, "Oh my God, Taehyung smokes." I thought, "What do you care? It's his personal life, and what's it to you?" I feel like some people really forget that yes, he is a singer, and we listen to his songs, but he has his own life and all that.

Or if someone has an addiction to alcohol or drugs, I think, "Oh man, you're ruining your life," but again, it's none of my business; it's your life."

6-6- Moral Transformation in the Family Environment

Earlier in the discussion about adolescent confusion, it was mentioned that with the birth of a child, they effectively have two brains: the lower brain (below the bridge of the nose), which is a complete brain that regulates the vital functions of the body, and the upper brain (above the bridge of the nose), which is a developing brain that takes about 20 years to fully form. Therefore, parents should play a significant role in acting as the upper brain for their child during this time.

It was also noted that the adolescent brain undergoes severe transformations (such as cellular pruning, thinning of gray matter, reduction in the volume of the nucleus accumbens, and earlier myelination of emotional centers compared to cognitive centers), which leads to certain psychological transformations in adolescents. These transformations are often unknown to parents, causing conflicts between them and their adolescent or young adult children.

On the other hand, it was mentioned that Big Hit Entertainment, recognizing the transformations of adolescence and youth, required the BTS group to focus on not judging, providing hope, motivating adolescents and young adults, satisfying their emotional needs, and similar actions. This way, while winning the hearts of many fans around the BTS group, they also ensure the material benefits of the company and the group, effectively positioning the group as a guide and mentor for adolescents and young adults

Field studies conducted among the members of BTS indicate that the members have emotionally supportive interactions with teenagers and young adults, conveying the message that they are, in fact, considered a family with their fans. 19-years-old Marzieh expresses in her interview regarding this:

- "How did your opinion change?

Well, look, when I got into them and talked to a few of them, I saw how much good energy they have, how beautifully they speak, and how warm they are. This way you can have friends from anywhere in this geography, talk to them, express your feelings about the members, and they really understand you. Then, for example, a video of the members is released, and you get so excited; you go there and let out your excitement. It's really like if you need help in any area, they have your back, and they will do whatever they can for you. Okay, maybe from a distance, you might see us as fanatics and think we seem that way, but when you get to know us up close, you realize it's not like that. And of course, I won't deny that we have some overly fanatic fans; we all have a little bit of fanaticism, but those who are extreme in this regard, we ourselves don't feel good about them and try to distance ourselves from them. People are different; in the BTS fandom, we have everyone from teenagers to adults, with every religion, belief, and personality trait. It's not nice to generalize and say BTS fans are this way or that way. At least one thing we've learned from BTS is to respect all interests and tastes, and minorities. However, in many places, we are not understood; our interests are insulted, and we are mocked. This is a reality, but I must tell you that the goodness in the members is palpable, and that's enough for me. It's enough to give us the strength to stay strong against all of this.

- Do you feel a sense of belonging to this group now?

One hundred percent, well, not one hundred percent, but to a large extent, yes.

- How did such a feeling develop in you?

For example, we see each other as a family that supports one another and supports our boys. This family is purple; as Taehyung said, purple is the last color of the rainbow and symbolizes love and trust from the bottom of your heart to someone. From that moment on, this family took on the color purple, and I can even say that each of us ARMYs is one of Taehyung's stars in the sky."

The feeling of being a family between idols and fans leads some fans, due to the barriers that arise from their brain and psychosocial transformations, to temporarily perceive BTS as a suitable replacement for their own families. This issue is particularly evident in families that have encountered problems due to parental dysfunction (such as parental divorce, discord between parents, and the transfer of parental life stresses onto their children).

Beyond what has been mentioned, the emotional interactions of the company and the BTS group causes the fans to find themselves in an emotional space and, in competition with rival groups, and as a result perceive themselves as a family with other BTS fans.

The profound effects briefly mentioned contribute to the fact that the role of the company and the group is increasingly engraved in the minds of fans (especially younger and more troubled fans) and manifests in their lives.

The comments of 20-years-old Masoud indicate that some fans, following their beloved idols who do not prioritize marriage and family, abstain from marriage themselves, displaying the strong dependency of fans on the moral standards of the BTS group:

- "Do fans imitate the idols in this regard?

Some overly fanatic fans who love their idols and worship them imitate BTS in not getting married, believing that as long as the idols do not have the right to marry, they consider marriage forbidden for themselves and want to act like their idols.

On another level, some field evidence suggests that some fans who are married and have taken on family responsibilities, due to the limitations imposed by their spouses on their fandom, wish to escape from family life or engage in behaviors inspired by BTS (for example, dancing in front of non-mahrams¹ with a protective or zealous husband or creating romantic fan fiction with idols), which can easily lead to deep family conflicts and potentially divorce."

16-years-old Rokhsareh, in an interview, points out the aforementioned issue, noting that after a woman divorced her husband (to free herself from the constraints of marriage and see herself as a candidate for marriage with idols), the husband created a song expressing this story, complaining about Jungkook, who was the cause of his wife's divorce. However, going a step further, 16-years-old Saba reports in her interview that even some same-sex attracted individuals, considering the occasionally same-sex behaviors of BTS members, have contemplated forming a same-sex family with BTS members:

- "Can fans have emotional fantasies about idols?

Yes.

- For example, can they imagine themselves with them?

¹ Non-relatives

Yes, especially girls have a lot of emotional fantasies. I used to have them more when I was younger because, after all, I was in the peak of puberty, and hormonal changes contributed to that. I would imagine myself with one of them each time (laughs), like we were together, got married, and even had a child (laughs). As one gets older, this tends to decrease, but puberty makes it much worse. Now, many of our kids in school are like this, and they argue over the idols, saying, "So-and-so is mine and my husband" (laughs). Even those who are homosexual imagine themselves with them in a different way because, after all, they display both orientations."

What has been mentioned reflects the moral transformation brought about by BTS within families, indicating a convergence of fixed moral values (which value family) and the relativistic moral values of BTS. Through their direct and indirect messages, they have caused significant transformations in the concept of family and moral developments within the families of their fans.

6-7- Moral Transformation in Individual, Social, and Environmental Ethics of Some Fans

To examine a person morally, one can approach it from several perspectives.

- Worship Ethics: This pertains to a person's relationship with the Creator (in the case of religious individuals).
- Individual Ethics: This focuses on a person's relationship with themselves, including traits like self-confidence, patience, tolerance, selflessness, as well as issues like consumerism, impatience, pessimism, and similar themes.
- Social Ethics: This concerns the values governing human relationships with others, society, and the global community, including good companionship, social responsibility, social cooperation, charity, justice-seeking, empathy, and similar values.
- Environmental Ethics: This pertains to the value judgments governing a person's relationship with their environment (animals, plants, deserts, seas, mountains, etc.).

By examining the statements of the surveyed population, it becomes clear that, against a small group that critically engages with BTS and does not accept their presented moral standards, a significant portion of fans has shown humility towards BTS and has been influenced by them in their individual, social, and environmental ethics.

Individuals who have viewed BTS's moral messages with skepticism, either inspired by older generations, have questioned the group for their desexualizing of makeup, clothing, and love, or have labeled the group members as "sissies" for questioning traditional male identity.

The latter group, in the face of BTS's values and the certainty of their information about the group (such as Jimin's announcement of being bisexual), has either openly withdrawn their support or shifted to a more secretive form of fandom, unwilling to publicly support the idols and their group. Some other fans have continued their relative support while denying some of the values that BTS members have directly or indirectly promoted.

21-years-old Erfan mentions the negative perception of BTS among adults in society:

- "Have you ever promoted BTS in your fan page?

No, I haven't done that.

- Why haven't you done that?

My fandom for BTS is completely personal and confidential. I don't want anyone to know that I look up to BTS. That's why I don't promote BTS on my account.

- Why don't you want anyone to know you're a BTS fan?

Most people think BTS is a group of homosexuals, and anyone who supports them is looked at negatively, and I don't want anyone to know I'm a BTS fan.

- Among your close friends, is there anyone else who hides their fandom?

Yes, one of the singers in our group thinks like me and hides his fandom. He also believes that people and friends shouldn't know he's a BTS fan, and he doesn't want to damage his reputation and popularity.

- Well, even though you hide your fandom, how do you promote BTS?

(laughs) I'm one of the rare fans who, through my actions, clothing style, and makeup inspired by BTS, play a role in promoting BTS, but I don't do any public promotion on my account or among the general public."

22-years-old Mohsen reports that his friends consider male BTS fans to be "sissies":

- "If a boy is as interested in BTS as you are, what happens?

Sometimes they mock him.

- Who mocks him and why?

My friend is mocked by our mutual friends, asking, Are you a girl to be so interested in this group? I support my friend, but the other kids don't think like me. They see it as sissy behavior, meaning it's something feminine."

21-years-old Erfan mentions that he and some of his friends have withdrawn their support for BTS because the group members have increasingly put themselves in the spotlight regarding homosexuality and similar issues:

- "Erfan, how does the fact that idols don't have a clear sexual identity affect fans?

It doesn't matter if the fans are girls or boys. All fans love the BTS members, and every fan tries to imitate and model themselves after their favorite idol

- The company tries to introduce the queer community to the world through BTS; What is the reaction of the fans?

Fans are extremely emotionally and psychologically disturbed. Initially, there was an interest in the idols, but for the past two or three years, the company has been exploiting the idols to promote queerness and homosexuality. They can't believe that their idols could be queer or homosexual.

- Has this caused some fans to withdraw their support?

Yes, many of my friends no longer bring up BTS like they used to and express regret for having been their fans for a while.

- What about you, Erfan?

I have secretly continued my fandom from the beginning, but for the past year or two, I haven't cared about them as much, and I'm not ashamed of modeling myself after Jin. This imitation sparked something in my life and has positively influenced my fame and success.

- So you no longer secretly support them?

No, I don't support them like I used to, but there's still a feeling within me that compels me to keep up with their work and music."

20-years-old Masoud, in his interview, stated that some of his friends have hidden their support for BTS due to the growing rumors about the group's

desexualizing of love, but he himself would withdraw his support if he became certain of this:

- "Masoud, have you ever hidden your support for BTS?

I personally haven't done that, but some of my friends have hidden it out of fear of their parents or relatives, and I've noticed their secrecy.

- Doesn't this secretive fandom make them doubtful about their support?

I don't know; maybe all this secrecy and fear causes them to doubt BTS and eventually withdraw their support.

- What is significant behind all this fear and secrecy?

The rumor about the accusation of homosexuality is hidden behind all this secrecy. Among the general public, any boy who wears makeup and tries to look like pretty girls is considered gay, and BTS promotes male makeup and gender equality. That's why some fans prefer to keep their support a secret.

- Masoud, if it turns out that BTS members are gay, would you continue to support them?

No, not at all. I would quickly withdraw my support and erase the stain from my memory.

- Masoud, do you think about marriage?

Of course, I do, and I work day and night, saving money so that when the time comes, I won't be empty-handed, and I don't model my marriage plans after BTS."

However, as mentioned, many BTS fans, regardless of the group's norm-breaking behaviors and the rumors surrounding them, have accepted the members as their moral and ethical role models due to their deep affection for them. They strive to act according to BTS's guidance in all aspects of individual ethics, collective ethics, and environmental ethics.

Pooneh, Parinaz, and Mahtab, who are each 18 years old, acknowledged in their separate interviews that their individual ethics have been influenced by BTS's messages. They have become more enlightened, changed their lifestyles, and no longer view issues like homosexuality with disgust:

- "What made you develop such a strong feeling for the BTS boys?

You know, there are many reasons. They have given me a lot. Previously, as a rap fan, I followed it merely as a hobby. But now, it's not the same with

BTS. Since I got to know them, many good things have happened; I found a purpose, got motivated, made many good friends, created beautiful memories, and they made me love myself more, respect others, and not be racist or homophobic. I was able to change my lifestyle and mindset and have many other good feelings. After all this, I can't say they are just an ordinary singer to me."

- "What positive impacts has following BTS had on your life?

BTS has truly had a significant impact on my life; one of the biggest changes has been my transformation and my life. They motivated me to have big dreams and work for them, and that each of us can be special as long as we have a goal and fight for it, and that I shouldn't give up or back down and should be strong. I live by BTS's words; I used to blame myself for my flaws, but now I've accepted that no one is perfect, and it has changed my perspective on the people around me, like someone whose vision is blurry but can see clearly when they put on glasses. That's how it was for me. This group has made me think more clearly about my future and even my present, and in a way, become more enlightened."

- "Has BTS's support for gender minorities affected your view of them?

I grew up in a very religious family, and I was raised with the idea that these things are sins and not good, and that people would be thrown into hell for it. Because of this, I didn't have a positive view of it. But as I grew older and read more about it, I concluded that there's nothing wrong with two people of the same gender being in love or with someone being attracted to both genders, as long as both parties in a relationship are consenting and no one is forcing anyone. BTS has also provided a lot of support for sexual minority groups, which I think is the right thing to do because the taboo surrounding these types of relationships still exists in many countries. For example, in our own country, if two people are gay, they might be executed or whipped. BTS has done a lot to raise awareness in this area, but if your question is whether I defend the rights of sexual minorities because of BTS, the answer is no, but I find their actions beneficial."

Erfan, 21-years-old in his interview, states that in his work (which involves singing at wedding ceremonies), he tries to exercise strict self-control inspired by BTS members. 46-years-old Fariba also mentions in her interview that the BTS boys have given her (and her daughter) the courage to dance in mixed gatherings, contrary to the values and norms of their society:

- "Erfan, given your job, you find yourself among many girls and boys. Have you ever felt your gaze slipping into something sinful?

(laughs and pauses slightly) To be honest, it has happened to me before, but to keep my job, I quickly pulled myself together

- Can you give an example?

Last year at a wedding, the ceremony was mixed, meaning men and women were dancing together. The girls were all beautiful, without hijabs, with colorful messy hair and makeup. It felt like they were parading in front of my eyes. One of the girls was very beautiful and somewhat scantily dressed, constantly coming in front of everyone, smiling at me during the music part and giving me tips.

- How did you react?

At first, I felt really good, but from the looks and smirks of my friends, I realized I had to take it seriously and take them as my own family and relatives. I quickly changed my gaze.

- What was the reason for your reaction?

I was born into a somewhat religious family and learned about being polite and pure from my parents. I don't want to be known as a promiscuous person in society. Moreover, my job always involves such ceremonies, and to maintain my reputation and that of our band and singer, we all have to adhere to ethics.

- Has the BTS group influenced your moral adherence?

Almost yes, it hasn't been without effect. When the boys of BTS don't have the right to marry or have girlfriends and control themselves with all their charm, how can I have a deviant or inappropriate view, especially since my best role model is Jin? Although I grew up in a society where my parents are my best role models. Besides, I don't want to harm my job and social character."

- "You mentioned you like their dancing. Isn't their dance style masculine? Isn't that an issue?

No, I don't think that way. Even if it's a masculine dance, learning it doesn't hurt; it's both exercise and art. I consider dance an art of women. Since childhood, I've tried to encourage my daughter to learn it.

- What do you think about a woman dancing at a concert?

What's wrong with a woman dancing at a concert? I don't believe a woman should be restricted. It's dance after all.

- Has BTS influenced this belief of yours, or have you always thought this way?

It's not that my belief was 180 degrees different and BTS came to change everything. I liked dancing, and a woman should be free like men. Why does no one care about men dancing? In fact, I really like the group Blackpink because the women dance in it.

- So, you mean BTS hasn't had an influence?

I used to be shy about dancing in public, even in all-female gatherings. But BTS and Blackpink have influenced me in such a way that now I dance at mixed parties without feeling embarrassed. I have a habit of unconsciously imitating when I see something I like. I really admire the courage of singers and theater actors because they dare to perform in public, something I've always wanted to do one day. I also encourage my daughter to overcome her fears and shyness. My daughter is like me; when she sees something she likes, she tries to learn it. Since schools reopened, she formed a musical theater group with her friends, and she is one of the actors in the play. There was an event at a cultural center's amphitheater where my daughter played the lead role and performed very confidently. It's great that she has been able to overcome her fears, and she always says, "If Jin and his friends can do it, why can't I?" In the end, she always says, "Yes, I can." However, my husband is a big obstacle regarding the issue of dance, but my daughter hears it from one ear and lets it out from the other and does her own thing."

Negin, 13-years-old, also mentions in an interview that she has improved her performance and style by being motivated by the boys of BTS:

"... Whenever I feel like I'm not doing well, I remind myself of the promise I made to myself. Not all idols are like that; to progress, they say you made this promise to your idol to succeed, and that you made a promise to someone you admire, which definitely increases your motivation to do that.

- Is there a promise that everyone makes to their favorite idol in their mind?

Yes.

- What short-term goals have you set for yourself?

For example, to have a good report card in October.

- Did you not make this promise to yourself before?

No, I used to just study to take an exam, and two days later, I would forget everything I studied. But now, for one or two years, I don't feel ready for an exam until I understand the material, and I study in a way that I remember everything for 2-3 years later.

- Did you promise yourself to learn everything?

Yes, to learn, not just to memorize.

- What other promises have you made?

What I really like about BTS is that in all their speeches, they say to love yourself, work hard, and you will definitely reach a good place. I at least think that when someone hears something from their idol, they might think, "The other person may not know I made this promise to them," but I promise to love myself.

- Before, when you didn't love yourself, how did you view yourself, your appearance, your character, and your style?

My self-confidence has increased a lot since I started listening to K-pop, but before that, I was highly disheveled. For example, if someone saw me on the street, they would think I just woke up.

- What aspects showed your disheveled state?

Everything, clothes, appearance.

- Have you always been this way or was it a phase?

Always.

- Now, when you go out, how do you present yourself?

Now I always take care of myself, even if I'm at home and not going anywhere.

- Describe your changes in detail.

I used to wear wrinkled clothes; now I iron my clothes. I style my hair. Generally, when I wake up, I wash my hands and face so I don't look too disheveled

- Had you noticed your own turmoil before?

After I changed to a certain extent, I realized it. One of my friends told me how much my style and the way I speak have changed, and that's when I

understood it completely. Now, when I compare my current photo with one from that time, I see how much I've improved since then."

The evidence discussed indicates that sometimes the personal ethics of BTS fans are influenced by the members of the group and that they have been affected by them. The examination of statements regarding the social ethics of fans also suggests that fans are influenced by the values and messages of BTS.

15-years-old Diba and 18-years-old Parinaz stated in their interviews that the BTS boys respect various groups with different views without judgment:

- "What's your opinion about the behaviors of some fans regarding their idol's dating?

In my opinion, these types of fans do not put themselves in their idol's shoes and do not consider that the idol also has a personal life and must make decisions about that life. A bunch of fans cannot gather and decide for that person's life. I think this mindset is very childish, and if someone wants to interfere in our lives, we certainly wouldn't treat them peacefully.

- Overall, what positive and negative effects have BTS and K-pop had on you?

Some of the things I say might sound silly, but they are very valuable to me. For example, I now like myself as I am; I try not to give silly opinions about others or judge anyone because I've seen the lives of idols, and I respect every person with any opinion, shape, or inclination. The negative might be the time and internet that annoys my mom? (laughs)."

"... Let me mention one point: what attracts so many people to the ARMY is respect. They truly have a lot of respect for everyone. For example, the BTS group holds meetings with ARMYs throughout the year and talks to them during these meetings. People come from different places to see our boys. When Muslim ARMYs came to see them, they tried not to stare at the Muslim women who were wearing hijabs so that they wouldn't feel uncomfortable. Or when they wanted to do a high five, they were mindful that Muslim ARMYs are sensitive about contact with non-mahrams, so the boys were careful to avoid any actions that might make them uncomfortable. They were also cautious not to initiate any handshakes unless the girls made a move first; for example, if the girls extended their hands, then they would reciprocate. And some more like that. For instance, during concerts, when the call to prayer (azaan) was announced at one of the concerts, they paused the music out of respect for the prayer and waited for it to finish before continuing the concert, showing respect for the Muslim ARMYs. Or in

another example, each member has a special microphone that is unique to them. Jimin's microphone is gold, which is not considered appropriate for men in Saudi Arabia (!). Apparently, when they had a concert there, Jimin wrapped a cloth around his microphone to show respect for this tradition. The members also show respect for other religions; for instance, when hugging girls, they keep their hands in fists to avoid touching the girls' hands, so they don't make them uncomfortable or feel bad. This respect they have for everyone is commendable."

15-years-old Razieh and 20-years-old Masoud stated in their separate interviews that they have been influenced by the charitable actions of the BTS boys and have personally sought to engage in charitable activities:

- "Can you tell me about the motivational talks they give you?

They motivate me with their words to be more determined about my goals and to not rely on anyone to make myself happy. When I see them helping others, it encourages me to help others without hesitation.

- So, do you help others more than before you became an ARMY?

Yes.

- Do you mean financial help?

Financial help and other kinds of help.

- Can you give me examples of other kinds of help?

For example, if someone next to me has a mental health issue, I talk to them and help them find a solution to their problem."

- "Masoud, I heard that idols participate in charitable activities; is that true?

Yes, it's true. For example, a portion of their income is allocated by the company for charitable works like building schools, hospitals in underprivileged areas of South Korea, and even Japan, helping orphans and children in orphanages, and assisting cancer patients, among many other charitable efforts.

- What impact do these idols have on their fans?

It has led fans to always engage in charitable activities by modeling their behavior after the idols.

- Can you give a few examples?

For instance, fan page managers post a bank account number on their page dedicated to collecting donations from fans. Each time there's an occasion, they ask fans to send their monetary donations, for example, to help butterfly patients, or after every birthday celebration, they ask fans to deposit their monetary contributions into the page's account to help nursing homes. Since the number of fans is large, even if the individual contributions are small, they add up, and the page manager works hard to prove their goodwill by providing videos of visits to these centers, and this beautiful tradition continues."

Rakhshareh, 16-years-old, stated in her interview that, as a fan, she pays attention to the environmental behaviors of the BTS members and tries to follow their example:

- "What is BTS's relationship with the environment?

They love the environment; they make films and clips in the forest, plant trees, and water plants, help animals, and donate a lot of money to environmental causes. They have pets themselves. They recently made a beautiful video about the ocean and the actions we should take."

When discussing the influence of BTS on fans regarding personal, collective, and environmental ethics, several points should be considered.

The first point is the interpretation of some fans regarding the moral and ethical messages of BTS. For example, 22-years-old Mohsen reports that his friend, arguing that the BTS boys have gained wealth just by singing, believes he is also entitled to cheat on his university exams without putting in much effort:

- "So your friend is avoiding responsibility?

That's how he says it. I haven't seen him do his class assignments, and he always tries to get out of work.

- Has BTS influenced this issue?

He once told me that if life can be lived easily, why should we make it so hard?

- What does that mean? Could you please explain a bit more?

He mentioned a couple of these BTS members, and alongside them, he also mentioned a few of those internet celebrities, but his main point was that if it's possible to achieve success easily, why do we need to study so hard and put in so much effort?

- What does your friend mean by "easily"? Did the BTS members reach their status easily?

According to my friend, yes. He thinks singing and dancing are much easier than studying and don't require much effort, and since dancing and singing have a lot of fans, many people spend a lot of money on music and dance."

Kowsar, 25-years-old in her interview, mentioned the toxic behavior towards idols, noting that such emotional reactions tend to have more negative than positive effects:

"... That's why there's a toxic atmosphere, and everyone in K-pop agrees that K-pop companies should be thrown in the trash because they are truly useless, and K-pop fans have become toxic, creating a toxic environment."

The promotion of norm-breaking by BTS is another issue that should be addressed. This means that not every type of norm-breaking in society is viewed positively, and fans who, for example, take cues from the group to desexualization of their makeup, clothing, and love may face numerous problems when interacting with their social environment, which does not accept these recent changes.

Providing incorrect standards is another issue observable in the moral, social, and environmental values conveyed by BTS. This means that, contrary to BTS's example of caring for animals, separating an animal from its natural environment and bringing it into an apartment setting is a double injustice to the animal. Similarly, the excessive consumption by BTS members contradicts environmental goals.

Another point is that while BTS members promote certain slogans, they may sometimes behave contrary to those slogans, which creates conflict in the minds of fans. For example, 21-years-old Erfan discusses Jin's slogan about not being burdened by material concerns, while the members of the group not only display a peak of consumerism in their lives but sometimes also endorse extremely expensive brands, making it difficult for even many wealthy individuals in society to afford the shoes or clothes they promote:

- "Erfan, you previously mentioned that you imitate Jin more than the other idols. How much do you know about him?"

Before joining BTS, Jin wanted to become an actor and work in theater. He never thought he would one day become a famous singer. Currently, Jin is one of the best singers in BTS and in South Korea. He is the face of the

group in terms of beauty, and Jin's slogan is to live without worries. He says you only live once, and you should know that your life passes very quickly.

- Do you apply Jin's slogan about living without worries in your life?

I love this slogan. Life may be much shorter than we think. If a person can pass without worrying about the material concerns of this world, they will have a higher quality of life and a calmer mind."

Therefore, while acknowledging the influence of personal, collective, and environmental ethics of some fans from the BTS boys, one must also consider the confusion that the value and ethical messages of BTS create for their fans.

7- Economic-Political Effects

Fandom for various groups, including BTS, has various effects such as psychological, social, cultural, ethical-belief, educational, economic-political, aesthetic, artistic, health, and familial impacts. In this section, the economic-political effects of fandom for BTS will be examined and discussed. The topics that will be addressed regarding the economic-political effects of fandom for BTS are as follows: alignment of BTS with the capitalist system, promotion of consumerism, influence of power centers in art, political activities of BTS, seeking role models for future careers, expenses incurred for supporting BTS, and income generation for some fans through promoting BTS.

The following sections will delve into the aforementioned topics.

7-1- Alignment of BTS with the Capitalist System

Some interviewed fans have pointed out the alignment of BTS with the capitalist system, emphasizing that Big Hit Entertainment and BTS ultimately act in accordance with the interests of the capitalist system to maintain its benefits and survival.

The reasoning of these fans varies. Many interviewed fans noted that the controversies created by the company for the group members (such as rumors of homosexuality) are primarily intentional actions manifested through fan interpretations, such as shipping them. This is because more controversies are associated with attracting more fans, and attracting more fans equates to greater profits.

Other fans, emphasizing the extravagant birthday celebrations for the idols, explained that the ultimate goal of the company's spending is to gain more fame and, consequently, more profit.

Some individuals have also pointed to the promotion of extremely expensive brands by BTS, labeling the group members as promoters of the capitalist system, who, contrary to their beautiful slogans, create a sense of humiliation for many fans who cannot afford these brands.

Other fans, by emphasizing the final guidelines they have derived from their engagement with BTS (such as extreme individualism or equating aspirations with money), indirectly affirm the dominance of capitalist ideology within Big Hit Entertainment and BTS.

Thus, from the perspective of this group of fans, the dominance of profit-seeking ideology within Big Hit Entertainment and the support for the capitalist system among BTS members collectively portray the group as more of an executor of the commands and prohibitions of the capitalist system in Korea and the global capitalist system rather than a promoter of benevolent and uplifting intentions for the youth and society in Korea and the world.

Mahlagha, 19-years-old, in her interview, notes that the capitalist system is solely focused on maximizing profits and seeks to brainwash individuals to encourage them to consume the products produced by the capitalist system (therefore, the ultimate duty of groups like BTS is to brainwash their audience):

- "When you say they are very beautiful, didn't you want to undergo surgery and become like them?

No, it has never been that way because I have never liked surgery and I don't accept it, especially now more than ever because I think, why should we make ourselves playthings of the standards created by the capitalist system to benefit itself? It's not supposed to benefit us; we shouldn't make ourselves resemble their beauty standards. I've just tried to appreciate their beauty, and it has never been that way... Of course, sometimes I might feel a bit jealous, but I've never wanted to undergo surgery or do something to become like them.

- What do you think the goal of the capitalist system is?

The name says it all. It's for money and capital. They brainwash our minds and, with their specific tricks, subtly make us feel that we need the products that this system has prepared for us. It infiltrates so subtly that we don't even realize it, and we can't even imagine a world without money. It's like the homogenizing system in North Korea, which has made its people unable to imagine that life can be lived differently and have no proper definition of freedom. Capitalism wants the world to revolve around money and creates a sense of need among people, and the higher the demand, the greater the profit for this system."

Maryam, 18-years-old and Narges, 21-years-old in their separate interviews, viewed the numerous controversies regarding the same-sex relationships of the group members as a planned strategy aimed at attracting more fans and, consequently, generating greater profits:

- "Do you think the news about relationships between members and other celebrities is real or fabricated and planned for promotional purposes?

Both could be true. It's very likely that the companies' goal in spreading such news is to get those idols into the spotlight and create a lot of hashtags and controversies about them. Because relationships in the K-pop industry are not as common and normal as in Hollywood, companies in K-pop are usually very careful to prevent such things from happening and being publicized unless it benefits them and they want this controversy to happen. Therefore, it's highly likely that when a relationship story comes up in K-pop, it's fake and part of the companies' plan, but on the other hand, there may be some real relationships that have leaked outside the companies' control. I think both are possible.

- So, does promoting homosexuality benefit them?

Yes. Many people who have become fans of Korean music and K-pop have done so for this reason. Just go take a look and see how group members behave with each other in K-pop. Of course, part of it is because people in Korea are generally very comfortable with each other, so those who are fans of Koreans attribute this behavior to their closeness. But outside of Korea, members are often "shipped" much more. Because, in their view, the behaviors resemble those of same-sex couples. This behavior strongly attracts both the queer community and teenage girls. They find it cute and appealing. They see it, like it, and become fans, and then they get into shipping and reading fan fiction and such. Many ARMYs, and I'm talking about in Iran, are just fans of a ship. Most of them ship Jungkook and Taehyung and are in love with these two. Now, the fans of this ship have increased a lot. I personally don't believe in it, but the way they exploit the simplicity of these teenagers, with lots of moments, photos, and theories, makes it seem like they are really in a relationship. Overall, it's profitable. More fans mean more money, and one of the ways to attract fans is through shipping and portraying them as a couple."

Erfan, 21-years-old, in his interview, does not consider the company's billion-dollar spending on BTS members' birthdays and the celebrations held in many countries around the world as merely a simple birthday celebration. He views the goals behind events like projecting the idols' images on the Burj Khalifa in Dubai or similar towers in Japan and other countries as promotional efforts to attract more profit:

- "Does the company spend a lot on other celebrations as well?

Yes, they spend a lot on all celebrations.

- Can you give another example?

Yes, for instance, the expenses for each idol's birthday celebration are dozens of times more than for a festival. For the idols' birthdays, not only do they celebrate in Korea, but they also put up many banners and posters of the idols on the walls and famous towers around the world. They use a specific color for each birthday; for example, they used purple for Taehyung's birthday and pink for Jin's.

- Where do you think the company gets all this money for the celebrations?

If the company spends on any celebration, they promote it so powerfully and prepare songs in advance that not only do the costs get covered, but they also make several times more profit.

- How is that possible? Can you give an example?

For example, when they celebrated Taehyung's birthday, his photo and banner were displayed on the most famous towers in Dubai, Japan, Vietnam, and dozens of other countries with purple lights. They introduced Taehyung to the world so well that it would be enough for him to go to any of these countries and perform his album. Then, tickets would sell out, or they could even sell the tickets for two or three times of their actual price. As a result, whatever they spend comes back to them many times over."

Mohammadreza, 21-years-old, views the promotion of extremely expensive brands by BTS members as a duty that serves the goals of the capitalist system:

- "Have you bought albums or any items that the idols use or promote?

No, honestly, I don't have the patience for that, and the costs for buying these things are really high. But I have friends who do that.

You know, the things they promote are really beyond the purchasing power of many people. They promote items that are all branded; for example, one of their outfits might cost around 14 or 15 million tomans¹, and each of the clothes they promote is priced over two or three thousand dollars. I can clearly remember one jacket they promoted cost 23 million tomans, or there was a shoe they promoted, if I remember correctly, it was Versace or Gucci, one of those two, priced at 115 million tomans. There are many other items with such prices that very few people can afford."

¹ To make the comparison simple, it should be noted that the prices mentioned, such as 14 or 15 million tomans for an outfit, or 23 million tomans for jacket, are equivalent to the monthly income of an average person in Iran, highlighting the significant disparity between the costs of these branded items and the purchasing power of many individuals.

The statements from the surveyed population indicate that some of these fans perceive the ultimate message of BTS as extreme individualism and equating aspirations with money, which clearly reflects the promotion of capitalist goals among BTS's audience:

- "Is there something specific you learned from BTS that you would like to share?

I learned from BTS that I should value myself more than anything else. We, as human beings, are what matter, and we have been given the opportunity to live. We should value ourselves and not sacrifice ourselves for others. It doesn't matter what others do. We shouldn't limit ourselves and should live fully, meaning we should always be happy.

- So, the individual is more important than everything else?

Yes." (Golnoosh, 14-years-old).

- "Has the amount of money they make influenced you?

It depends on how you look at it. I see it this way: if someone works really hard and makes a lot of money, I think, well, I should also work hard to make money.

- If you become something, can you make that much money?

According to the latest research, if I can become a surgeon, then I can earn that much money or even more.

- So, how has the group influenced you?

It has influenced my level of effort. What I believe is that money brings happiness, and my friends think the same, so I say I work hard to earn a lot of money to be happy." (Negin, 13-years-old).

7-2- Promotion of Consumerism

Members of the BTS group, while striving to present themselves as individuals who understand young people and engage with them without judgment, introduce themselves to the youth through their spectacular performances characterized by stage design and the combination of music, singing, and dance. Furthermore, by offering a plethora of side programs that effectively elevate BTS's music to the entertainment and leisure industry, they embed themselves in the minds of young people and other segments of society.

These recent attractions lead every individual or entity to seek to leverage these appeals. Thus, the prevailing capitalist system in South Korea and the global capitalist system benefit from the members of the group and their appeal to audiences to promote various products.

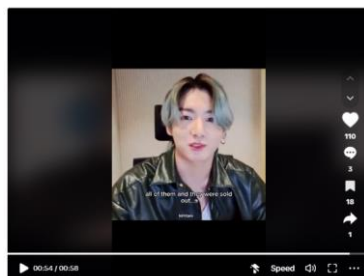
Fereshteh, 18-years-old, provides an example of the economic appeal of idols that has attracted the capitalist world towards them:

"...Jungkook was drinking juice during a live stream and praised it a bit, and in the next live stream, when he wanted to order juice, it was sold out, and ARMYs had done that; there are even photos of it.

- Can you send me those photos?

Yes, of course. May I send other examples too?

- Sure, Fereshteh, take your time.



In less than 24 hours of this livestream, the product sold out on Coupang, one of the biggest e-commerce platforms in South Korea. The 12 and 24-pack sets of the drink still remain out of stock on the website at the time of writing this article. To put Jungkook's brand influence into numbers, according to reports, the sale of this drink increased 100 times on the website compared to the previous day. Even in the physical Atem shops, the product's sales spiked 12 times than the previous day.

In another example, the members of BTS wore streetwear brands in the "Euphoria" video, and those clothes sold out immediately. After BTS wore clothing from the brand A Piece of Cake in "Euphoria," the products became sold out. BTS has officially reached that ideal style image, and while we know their outfits are flawless, they took a step further this week in their

new video "Euphoria," where J-Hope and Jungkook both wore clothes from the South Korean brand A Piece of Cake, which, according to the brand, sold out completely.

In a statement from this brand, they wrote: "It was great that they showcased our products in such an interesting way. Thank you, BTS, for your interest." It seems they did not expect such a quick response for items worn by BTS.

The brand also stated, "Due to the high demand we received, we decided to produce those two items again. It may take a few days to reach you, and we want to thank you for your patience and love."

"In another case, just one day after Jungkook drank Sangiovese wine during his V Live, it sold out.

Jungkook, who has been dubbed the "Sold Out King" by Korean media, once again proved his popularity and influence in this area, as two T-shirts--one worn during J-Hope's live stream and the other worn in the Summer Package--sold out in record time. Additionally, it should be noted that the Jungkook doll made by Mattel (the company that produces Barbie) is currently on the best-seller list.

According to published information, Shin, the author of the book 'Life Energy of Language,' which sold out after being seen in Taehyung's hands, has recently published a book titled 'Humanities,' in which he thanks Taehyung in the preface and expresses hope that the beautiful stories of BTS and their fans will continue to spread".

Many fans have witnessed the promotions by BTS members and, naturally, due to their admiration for these individuals, have developed a desire for the products endorsed by the idols based on classical conditioning. Reihaneh, 15-years-old, Samaneh, 17-years-old, and Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, in their interviews describing the presence of BTS members in various brand advertisements, say:

- "Does BTS introduce their products?

Well, they are mostly used in advertisements or as models, like in the Samsung phone ads, food ads, even chair ads! Since they have good looks and bodies, they are models too. There are drinks with BTS members' pictures on them, and they do mukbangs¹ with them, or cookies and other

¹ Mukbang is known as an eating show, an online audio-visual broadcast in which a host consumes a large amount of food while interacting with the audience. It became popular in South Korea in 2010 and has since turned into a global trend (Wikipedia).

snacks that have BTS's pictures on them, and they make mukbangs with them.

- Well, BTS boys are slim and follows strict diets, so how do the members do mukbangs with a lot of food and drinks? This creates a contradiction for me.

Well, it's mostly for promotional purposes, and they don't always eat that much food. They do it for filming clips or advertisements. They should be fatter, but many of them are even slim. I think it's more about the promotional aspect.

- Well, BTS promotes slimness and dieting, but don't you think their fans are betraying them by doing this?

No. They are promoting it for them!

- So, is it advertising at the cost of abandoning the group's principles?

Well, the group's principles are mostly for the idols themselves; fans don't have to follow them so strictly.

- But a true fan cares about the principles of their favorite idol, right? They try to be as similar to them as possible.

Well, they have to follow certain principles because of their work, and if they weren't in this line of work, they might not be like that. So, an ordinary person who isn't under any special pressure doesn't have to be".

- "Do BTS members do advertisements too?

Um, yes, accessory and clothing brands send them products to promote. Every time, they wear a brand's clothing, usually all at the same time, and they do the advertisements, or they wear accessories and promote them. They usually change their outfits every time".

- "Do idols do advertisements?

Yes, they promote immigration to their country a lot. They talk about the beauty of their country and how much everyone cares about their bodies and how happy everyone is there, and how close the people are. For example, they wear brand clothes and come to concerts or promote them as models; Koreans are very visual".

An important issue that Iranian BTS fans face is the lack of availability of most of the products endorsed by BTS in Iran. The reasons for the unavailability of BTS's promoted products in Iran can be attributed to factors such as the low

income levels of the Iranian people, the ineffectiveness of some advertised items in Iran—such as light sticks at concerts, which create significant excitement with Bluetooth management—and sanctions against Iran. For example, Golar, 14-year-old, in her interview, states that she has given up on buying the multi-million toman light stick¹, which has little utility for Iranian fans due to the lack of BTS concerts in Iran:

- "Why are you not very insistent on buying albums and such items?

Because my priority in life is myself first and then BTS. My parents understand me to a certain extent, so I understand them too, because I know they can't spend several million just for me to have a light stick. So, I take that into consideration. That's why I've been led to think it's better not to think about these things".

Reihaneh, 15-years-old, expresses her frustration in her interview about the absence of all the products endorsed by BTS in Iran:

- "Why do you think their pictures are on snacks or other products?

Well, because they are famous and everyone loves them. When they see their picture on a product, they are encouraged to buy it.

- Do you also want to try those products?

Yes, but not everything is available in Iran. However, there are some items and products that have pictures of BTS members or their symbols on them.

In the challenging conditions of importing products promoted by BTS, some Iranian fans turn to searching various malls in hopes of finding original BTS merchandise. Some also resort to acquaintances abroad, asking them to bring original BTS products for them:

- Where did you get BTS branded clothes?

Sometimes I would spend a whole week searching all the malls in Tehran and Karaj with my friends to find the clothes we wanted." (Shirin, 22-years-old).

- "Have you ever bought an original album?

Yes, one of my relatives lives in America. Once, when they were coming to Iran, they called and asked me what souvenir I wanted. I told them to get me the "Wings" album and "You Never Walk Alone" by BTS. The albums were

¹ A light stick is a portable and luminous electronic device designed in various forms for each idol or group.

really cool. If I had access to them in Iran, I would buy all their albums, but unfortunately, they are not available here." (Maryam, 18-years-old).

Given the low income levels in Iran and the sanctions, many Iranian fans have informally agreed not to take the use of fake BTS merchandise seriously and to show a positive attitude towards it. Sahar, 15-years-old, and Mohsen, 22-years-old, expressed in their interviews:

- "How much of the BTS-themed items do you buy?

My whole room is filled with them. Of course, not everything is from BTS; I have items from all of K-pop.

- Where do you buy these items?

I usually find pictures online, print them, and stick them in my room. Sometimes I browse Digikala and find good stuff there, and I order them. Sometimes I also buy items like pins and mugs from some stores.

- Have you ever bought an original album?

No way, I don't have money for these things (laughs). I only have one fake album that I cherish like my life. It's the "Wings" album.

- Have you ever bought BTS products yourself?

Honestly, yes, but I'm not really into it. Because my friend, who is in the same university as me, really liked BTS, I got her a t-shirt with the BTS logo for her birthday. But you know, the stuff we buy in Iran is fake.

- So the company didn't produce it?

Exactly. They produce it in Iran, and sometimes they sell it to kids as original.

- Was the t-shirt you bought original or fake?

It was fake, but we don't really care about these things."

The statements of the interviewed fans indicate that despite being deprived of the original merchandise that BTS promotes, fans entertain themselves with fake items that carry the BTS label:

- "How did you get to know BTS and become interested in them?

2016 was a very successful year for BTS, and they were just becoming famous. They had just released the "Wings" album and the song "Blood Sweat & Tears," which was a hit. They kept winning awards at various festivals, and BTS was making a name for themselves, and their fans were gradually increasing. I started hearing their name a lot around that time and

got attracted to them. It's been six years since then, and now being a K-pop fan and an ARMY has become trendy, and more teenagers are drawn to it. The situation was different when I became a fan.



- How was it different?

Well, now in any gathering you go to, there's bound to be an ARMY there, and you can easily find people who share your interests. But back then, I didn't know anyone, and the only ARMYs I had access to were the admins of fan pages. In short, there was no one around me who was an ARMY or even knew BTS. On the other hand, back then, BTS-themed items were hard to come by and very scarce. Only a few pages on Instagram had them, and I didn't have much trust that they would send you quality items. There were also some pages where you could choose your own design to print on t-shirts, mugs, and pins, but you had to provide them with some pictures of BTS. It wasn't like now, where you can find BTS merchandise everywhere in malls and stores, even bed sheets or curtains with BTS designs...

- Have you bought any items related to BTS that have their designs on them?

Yes, because in the early days of being an ARMY, I couldn't find any items from them, so I was really eager. Now that everything is everywhere, I want to buy everything I see. I've decorated my room with their items; my room's theme is completely K-pop. Of course, I don't buy everything myself; most of it is given to me as gifts by friends and relatives who know I love BTS. For every occasion, they buy me things related to BTS. For example, on my birthday, all my gifts had BTS designs, so I don't really need to buy anything myself; I've received almost everything as gifts." (Maryam, 18-years-old).

- "Do you use clothes that have the BTS logo?"

I bought a BTS headband and a BTS jacket for my birthday; my mom bought it for me because she knew I loved it" (Sana 16-years-old).

"Saeedeh: I have a room full of gifts that Negin bought for my birthday. (laughs and says) What else could Negin buy me besides something related to BTS?! Only things related to them can make me extremely happy. I've put everything in a place where I can see it. Sometimes I draw BTS. Or I always search for BTS products on Digikala; anything that has the BTS logo on it. In that bookshelf, there are BTS photocards. There are two types of photocards for the "Butter" music video. Then there are two posters of BTS. The rest are pins, notebooks, masks, clothes, and other BTS-related items. I've also made a notebook where I stick BTS pictures or draw. (Saeedeh, 20-years-old, and Negin, 19-years-old).

In summary, it can be stated that the slogans of BTS, which emphasize self-love, alongside the promotion of various products by the group members, lead fans to seek happiness in their individualism and consumerism (the most serious issues in capitalist systems). This point is reflected in the statements of some interviewed fans:

"Namjoon says, if you want to love others, you must first love yourself. I really like this, and Namjoon once said at a concert, use us to love yourself, and they talk a lot about self-love.

Yoongi also says, those who don't have dreams, it's okay. The important thing is to live happily. I really like this; there are times in life when you feel down and tired from running and trying, and this sentence from Yoongi always gives me hope that the important thing is to be happy. I listen to this song when my motivation is low; I really love it.

I have many favorite lyrics; I love them all, but right now, my favorite song is "Still With You" by Jungkook. Oh, it's such a good song; I want to get a tattoo of it." (Baran, 20-years-old)

7-3- The Influence of Power Centers in Art

Some interviewed fans, who had a more critical perspective, described Big Hit Entertainment and the BTS group as being under the control of the capitalist system and, beyond that, introduced them as being contracted with the Illuminati.

The secret Illuminati group, according to some theories, seeks to gain control over the present world by contracting with celebrities, asking them to support and display Illuminati symbols, and in return, they receive supportive resources from this group, achieving significant fame and financial opportunities. However, as expressed by some interviewees, celebrities must sell their souls to

the devil and become unquestioning and complete executors of their new masters.

Shokoufeh, 18-years-old, in her interview, mentioned the influence of power centers in art, stating that in her view, Big Hit Entertainment has come under the control of the Illuminati to gain more money and credibility:

- "Does the company operate independently or under the supervision of another organization?

It seems to operate independently, although there are rumors about a contract between the company and the Illuminati, which, if true, means that the Illuminati is the higher authority over the company. But no one is sure about this.

- What do you know about the Illuminati?

The Illuminati is a Freemasonic organization that contracts with content production companies or celebrities around the world, asking them to subtly incorporate their symbols, signs, and ideas into their content and performances in exchange for fame. It is interpreted that celebrities sell their souls to the devil. This organization has a lot of power, and just as it can astonishingly cause celebrities to gain fame, it can equally erase them from their field of activity, so that their works are no longer seen globally, which is very frightening. In Korea, the military service age is up to 30, and the Illuminati contracts with idols from their teenage years, with contracts lasting 10 to 20 years. By the time their contracts end, they have reached military service age, and after their service, they have neither fame nor income.

- Can you name any artists who have contracts with the Illuminati?

Yes, people like Eminem and Rihanna mention in their performances and lyrics that they sold their souls to the devil, and there are some songs that if you reverse them using an application, you can find phrases expressing satanic beliefs, and it is said that they are members of this group. Also, Sony is a subsidiary company of the Illuminati. The wife of the owner of Sony was Mariah Carey. When Michael Jackson was alive, Mariah told Michael that her husband was not a good person and was crazy, and Michael sang against Sony in one of his songs, and after that, Michael Jackson mysteriously died. It is said that the company supporting BTS is a subsidiary of Sony.

- Can't celebrities sign another contract with the Illuminati after their current one ends?

Usually, they want to leave the Illuminati as soon as possible. For example, it is said that Britney Spears acted crazy on purpose to get out of her contract sooner.

- What is the symbol of the Illuminati?

The symbol is the famous triangle, and it is said that if they show the triangle sign with their hands during performances, it means they are using the Illuminati symbol and announcing that they have become members of the Illuminati.

- Can celebrities achieve fame without a contract with the Illuminati?

It is said that such a thing is impossible, and the path to fame is completely closed.

- So why are there so many rumors about BTS?

Well, people who are famous and well-known definitely have a lot of rumors about them, and haters, because they hate them so much, try to portray them negatively, and many people believe these rumors, such as the issue of homosexuality and that they sold their souls to the devil."

Sahar, 15-years-old, who wishes to immigrate to Korea and become a singer, also addressed the issue of the Illuminati in her interview, stating that many K-pop groups have come under the control of the Illuminati, and due to her aversion to this, she aims to enter the K-pop scene as an idol on her own, without the backing of a company, through extensive practice to achieve the credibility and fame she desires:

- "Given that you have this awareness and have heard about what goes on behind the scenes, how can you still decide to enter this space and become an idol?

My motivation is my childhood dream. I have wanted to be a singer since I was a child, so I think I can cope with these things. I am really looking for a company that has no connection to the Illuminati, but there really isn't one. Of course, I prefer to work without a company, but if someone is talented and doesn't work with a company and doesn't collaborate with the Illuminati or show symbols, they won't become famous like the K-pop group Apink and will be pushed out of the music industry. The Apink group wasn't allowed to become famous or progress until they got involved with the

Illuminati, but recently, after signing some contracts with the Illuminati and showing their symbols a couple of times, they have become somewhat famous. They had been active since 2010 and hadn't gotten anywhere, but immediately after that contract, they became somewhat prominent and are progressing. So I think this issue is unfortunately mandatory for progress in music."

Masoud, 20-years-old, also sees the company that owns BTS as being under the control of America and the capitalist system, noting that the political stance of the group has created a significant gap between their slogans and actions:

"... If we pay close attention and look wisely at the dimensions of these slogans and the different performances of the idols with these slogans and messages, we will fully understand that the idols are playing a role, and unfortunately, I realized this very late, and I thank you for creating this change in me.

- You're welcome, but why are there still so many fans despite all these contradictions?

One reason is that most fans are young teenagers and react emotionally and impulsively. Secondly, the idols are very professionally trained and know how to push the right buttons for their fans.

- Masoud, don't you think it's time to make teenagers aware of the dimensions of fandom for BTS?

Exactly, it should be done sooner, and teenagers should be informed about the company's plans and the political strategies behind the scenes in America before it's too late, and a large number of our country's teenagers and young adults get caught up in fandom for BTS

- As a young person who was a fan of BTS and has now withdrawn, what message do you have for fans?

My message is that BTS fans should pay close attention to the slogans and messages of BTS and then evaluate their actions to see if they practice what they preach. For example, they say they oppose discrimination and talk about the equality of all humans, but how lavishly and comfortably do they live, and what billion-dollar birthday parties do they throw around the world? Where is the equality of humans in that? Our teenagers, seeing the luxurious lives of idols and their billion-dollar birthday parties, can only feel envy and nothing else.

And also, another one of their messages is that they are ambassadors of peace in the world. What kind of ambassadors are they when, during the pandemic, our country was under sanctions, but not sanctioned for medicine, then why South Korea refused to provide us with medicine and vaccines? Each of us has lost a relative or friend to COVID-19. It's better not to support a group whose leaders and bosses have withheld medicine and humanitarian aid from our compatriots during the pandemic. South Korea is under American domination; is a member of American team acting against our country and has severed trade relations with us. What could be more blatant than this enmity towards our country? Like others, I was a fan of BTS until a few minutes ago, and right now, I regret my support for BTS and apologize for my ignorance. I hope this issue serves as a lesson for me and others so that we do not make the same mistake and do not make impulsive decisions."

7-4- The Political Activities of BTS

In today's world, physical wars and conflicts are gradually disappearing, and soft power or cultural warfare, which is much less costly than physical wars, is increasingly replacing them. Therefore, the emergence of celebrities and artists as foot soldiers in the soft war around the world is not far-fetched.

Some interviewed fans emphasized that BTS, due to its multifaceted attractions, has caught the attention of power institutions, which make use of it as their foot soldiers in the soft war.

It has been previously stated that BTS, more than other K-pop groups, pop groups, and other music groups, has engaged in some political and social issues beyond their artistic performances. Their speech at the United Nations, accepting the role of UNICEF ambassador, meetings with the President of the United States, and their talks about the discrimination faced by Asian Americans, as well as some of the group's political stances (for example, regarding North Korea or Israel), have given BTS a relatively political-social image.

On the other hand, some interviewed fans with a more critical perspective have seen BTS's political actions as deeper than what is superficially apparent in society, viewing Big Hit Entertainment, the owner of BTS, as essentially a tool of the South Korean political system, which follows the capitalist system of the United States, thus attributing a more serious political role to BTS.

The presence of BTS members in advertising space and promoting many American brands, along with significant profits flowing into companies like McDonald's and Coca-Cola, are among the evidence cited by these fans.

The political activities of BTS cannot be seen as limited to supporting the political systems of Korea or the United States. Some of the group's side activities indirectly carry political implications. For example, encouraging fans to participate in various polls and voting can be seen as a form of practicing democracy for the fans. Similarly, BTS's profound impact on fans can pose a potential threat to many political systems governing different countries, as a possible call from BTS members (and in fact, Big Hit Entertainment, which is itself subject to the policies of the capitalist world) could lead some extreme and fanatical fans to challenge the ruling system in their country.

Shaghayegh, 19-years-old, in her interview, discussed the collusion between the company that owns BTS and the South Korean political system, stating that BTS's stance on North Korea or Israel aligns exactly with the political stance of Korea and the United States:

- "So they are also used for political issues?

Yes, definitely. They are actually aligned with the government. If something happens politically or economically in the world, they have to support that side they say should be supported. For example, in the case of North Korea and its bomb-making, they came out with a lot of hate, saying these people are not human, they don't know human rights, they are criminals, and they are making bombs to kill everyone, creating a hostile atmosphere. Or in the case of Israel and Palestine, well they always side with Israel subtly, saying it is the land of the Jews and it is their right. In fact, they are always aligned with the capitalist system."

Perhaps criticisms like Shaghayegh's have prompted some fans to express dissatisfaction with BTS's political activities, seeing them as inconsistent with their artistic endeavors. Mohsen, 22-years-old, critiques the political-social activities of BTS, saying:

- "Is there another weakness you would like to point out?

One thing I forgot to mention is that an artistic group should not mix with politics; anything that becomes political gets ruined. Everyone around me knows that I am against politics and political games.

- If I understand correctly, you mean that initially, BTS had nothing to do with politics, but later combined politics with music?

Yeah, for example, in my opinion, a music group should work in a specific area and not grasp at everything within reach to be seen more.

It's unclear what they are doing, or rather, what they want to promote! No matter how hard I try to understand, I haven't figured out what their main goal is! What is clear is that politics has mixed with this group's activities. What reason is there for a group to speak in international forums, especially about political issues? Your job is something else. Moreover, you should respect my opinions as a fan. I've talked to many friends who are BTS fans, and they also say that all fans' voices should be heard. If there were a poll, perhaps many fans like me wouldn't want this group to enter politics. Didn't you say this group belongs to the fans? Then why is there no consideration for fans in determining the group's policies."

Nastaran, 19-years-old, in her interview, views the political function of the BTS group from a relatively different perspective, primarily seeing it as a means to divert public attention from political scandals within South Korea. According to her, a group like BTS, which enjoys public favor, is drawn into the spotlight during critical times, such as when a political scandal arises in the Korean political system, to shift the community's focus away from the political scandal towards the distractions created by celebrities.

- "Have you heard about these scandals that are now referred to as idol scandals and the issue of covering them up?

Yes, there are many, and it has become quite frequent recently.

- How is that, can you give an example?

Sure I will provide an examples. We, who are quite aware, know that Korea is a very corrupt country, with very corrupt officials and a lot of corruption. Because of this, they have a scandal every once in a while. For example, recently, I don't know if it was the president or the president's son who did something. They came out with news about a singer dating someone to shift people's focus onto that news and away from the political scandal, or for instance, a while ago, there was news that the Korean women's volleyball team, who are twins and quite famous in Korea, had bullied other students in school, to downplay the political news in the meantime."

Mahshid, 21-years-old, and Golnoosh, 14-years-old, have mentioned different perspectives on the political activities of the BTS group.

In an interview, Mahshid talks about the political heroism of BTS members, who, despite their significant status in their country, have chosen not to become

pawns of the politicians in their society. Instead of exploiting their fame, they are individually going to military service, halting their artistic careers:

- "Have you ever heard about the use of BTS scandals and controversies or K-pop to cover up political corruption?"

Let me tell you about political issues. If BTS were to involve themselves in political matters, Jin wouldn't be going to the military now. For instance, there was an election in Korea this year. Korea has elections every five years, unlike us and the U.S., which have elections every four years. It is once in every five years in Korea. The previous president, Moon Jae-in, through careful studies, realized how much BTS has brought in revenue and how beneficial they are for the country. He proved this with numbers and data. He is truly a knowledgeable person. Then, you guess what he did... He did a lot to support BTS in every way. His efforts were really excellent. He only made one mistake, which was that during his presidency, he said BTS should be exempt from military service, and this was close to the elections, but he didn't make it official. If he had made it official, none of the members would have to go to the military now. So what happened was, two years of military service means two years where they can't be active, two years where they can't do anything, and this two years is part of their contract. They really suffer during these two years; it really affects the group. During these two years many groups can debut.

This poor guy didn't make it official and left. The next president came in and saw what a great group this is, how much revenue they generate, how many positive points they have for the country, and how popular they are. During Moon Jae-in's time, they were invited by Biden, once for a UN event and once by Biden to speak as ambassadors from Asia on various topics like racism and so on. Then, seeing that this is how it is, Biden invited them from the embassy, and when they gained this kind of recognition in the world, the new president said, instead of going to the military, you should participate in political events, meaning don't go to the military, but during those two years, participate in political events we have with other countries, alongside ministers and the president. This is when BTS stood firm and said, 'I don't want to, I absolutely don't want to get involved in political games. We will enter political matters only when it benefits the people, whether it's about children, patriotism, or anti-racism. Concepts like these, but we don't want to get involved in the games of politics and power.'

This happened right after their concert in Busan. The concert they held in Busan was because a very important art festival is set to take place in the

world in 2030, if I'm not mistaken. I don't want to delve into that, but Korea is one of the countries participating in that art festival. They announced they would hold a concert for free to promote that 2030 festival worldwide. The president said, 'Yes, let this concert happen, and we will decide afterward.' When they did this, the oldest member of the group, who turns 30 in December, after the Busan concert and before the president could say anything, knowing they would eventually be linked to political games, went to get his military service order."

Golnoosh, 14-years-old, in her interview, points to the powerful political potential of the BTS group. She notes that the BTS fan army, no matter where they are in the world, is ready to respond to their favorite idols, and upon their request, the vast number of fans will mobilize to carry out their wishes.

- "Why do you think some people want to discredit idols?"

Because they don't want them to gain too much power. If they have power, they can do anything they want.

- For example, what kind of things?

With power, you can do things you wouldn't even imagine. If a lot of people are fans of BTS, any command they give will be followed, and they can take power from anywhere in the world and shape it the way they want.

- So do you think singing can give the chance to manage the world?

Yes, it can actually be much easier and more impactful.

- If they give any command right now, would you follow it?

Yes, I would do anything the boys want with all my heart; why wouldn't I do something that benefits me?

- Well, anything they ask of you might not be in your best interest or could be wrong!

Rest assured, BTS will never do anything that makes the world a worse place than it is. Their only goal is to make the world a better place. Even if they make a mistake god forbid, it is okay. When so many politicians make thousands of mistakes every day. Don't we do the things they tell us to do? The difference is that BTS gives these commands and is much cooler and more compassionate than politicians."

However, as mentioned, aside from the fans' opinions regarding the political stances of BTS members, the effort to create political heroes out of the group

members or the potentially threatening political capacities of BTS boys, some fans have noted that supporting the group has, in practice, been a form of practicing democracy for them. This means that fans' participation in voting for BTS songs on international music sites or engaging in various polls somewhat familiarizes them with democracy and the sovereignty of people's votes (although some other fans view participating in these polls as falling into a trap created by capitalism):

- "Masoud, do you participate in online polls about idols?

Yes, if I have time, I definitely participate.

- What do you know about the polls?

The last poll I saw on Instagram was about choosing one of the seven members as the most attractive person in the group, where everyone supported their favorite idol and tried to help them win. There was another poll about the impact of BTS on fans' personal lives, and another about the best BTS song of the year, and I participated in all three polls and shared my opinion.

- How do you evaluate the impact of these polls on fans?

The polls are great, and everyone freely expresses their true opinions. Sometimes fans get so excited about the polls that verbal conflicts can arise among them. For example, when they had a poll for choosing the leader of the group, the excitement for the promotion was as intense as a real election.

- What impact does directing young people towards excitement have on them?

Creating excitement for young people and teenagers can lead to tension and disruption in their personal lives.

- Can you give a clearer example of how excitement causes tension and disruption?

Of course, for example, a fan might be so excited about their favorite idol winning a poll that their mind is preoccupied with it for almost a week, and they might not be able to control themselves in polls with other fans who vote for a different idol, leading to verbal conflicts. Or, because their mind and time are consumed by this issue, if they are a student, they might fall behind in their studies, or if they are working, it could harm their business, and overall, these polls bring tension, stress, and anxiety with them.

- When fans face all this excitement, doesn't it harm their health?

They suffer mentally and psychologically, and they might not have the necessary focus during their work, which can also lead to physical harm. For instance, a fan who is engaged in polls on Instagram until 2 AM and then goes to work at 6 AM might suffer physical harm due to lack of sleep and mental preoccupation, especially if their job is something like carpentry or mechanics, where lack of focus and fatigue can lead to accidents" (Masoud, 20-years-old).

- "You said that the fandom atmosphere made you attracted to it and become an ARMY; can you tell me about this atmosphere and the vibe among ARMYs?

Yes, it was during COVID, and we were all stuck at home, and I was getting bored. A friend suggested I join Twitter, saying it would be fun, we have streaming parties, we participate in polls, and we connect with many ARMYs. When my friend told me this, I joined Twitter and created a fan account, and honestly, those were really good days. I will never forget those days. Although there were downsides, overall, it was good. I made a lot of friends. There were nights we stayed up until morning for voting or for VMA or Grammy events, and we didn't get frustrated. Now it has decreased a lot; the traffic to twitter has reduced due to the situation in the country, and since schools have reopened, the atmosphere is not like during COVID anymore. But I can confidently say that for a time, Twitter fandom was my home, and from the moment I woke up until night, I spent time on Twitter with the kids. It got to the point where my mom, who usually doesn't interfere, would comment, asking what's so interesting about Twitter that all the time your head is in your phone, what do you get from it? I really miss those days a lot" (Pooneh, 18-years-old).

Based on what has been mentioned, it can be stated that from the perspective of some fans with a more critical mindset, Big Hit Entertainment and the BTS group essentially operate in line with the global capitalist system, acting as foot soldiers in a soft war, aiming to entertain the youth so that they remain oblivious to the injustices perpetrated by the global capitalist system against humanity, ensuring that no threat arises from them towards the capitalist system.

At a lower level, the political stances of BTS (such as their rejection of North Korean policies) represent lower-level political objectives that the group undertakes. Ultimately, promotions like the political heroism of idols, suggesting that they have not engaged in rent-seeking and prefer military service over political collaboration with their country's rulers, serve only to

obscure the group's true nature. Additionally, practices such as voting and participating in polls are seen as peripheral activities that do not directly relate to BTS's own actions. Some fans even view participation in various polls as another tactic of the capitalist world, designed to immerse young people in fandoms and lead them from one voting site to another, depriving them of the opportunity to reflect on the dire conditions faced by many people in the contemporary world, which are a result of ruthless capitalism.

7-5- Seeking a Model for Future Careers

- "Have you ever thought about becoming an idol?"

No, because I have a terrible voice, but I have thought about being a backup dancer and things like that.

- Have you done anything to become a dancer?

Yes, I practice in my free time.

- Do you practice dancing?

Yes.

- So, do you take dance classes?

No, there are no dance classes here. I learn with the help of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. I started learning by myself when I was ten because I was interested in it.

- Are the dances you learned like BTS's dances?

Yes, both BTS's dances and those of other K-pop groups." (Razieh, 15-years-old).

The appeal of BTS members has led many individuals to take them as role models and emulate them. Initial emulation is focused on the physical appearance of the idols, as fans strive to resemble them superficially. The high sales of BTS merchandise can be attributed to this factor.

At the next level, the emulation of idols extends to behavioral aspects, and ultimately, the emulation of these role models leads to the adoption of their values.

Analyzing the information obtained from interviews with BTS fans indicates that emulation occurs at all three levels: appearance, behavior, and values.

If we focus on behavioral emulation, it is observed that a significant number of fans, influenced by BTS, have developed an interest in the arts and are seeking to follow in the footsteps of BTS members by becoming singers. Similarly, individuals who recognize they do not have good singing voices are turning their attention to alternative options, such as songwriting or dancing on stage, and are pursuing these recent interests.

The 20-years-old Sheida, who is a BTS fan and a music teacher, mentions in her interview that her trainees are highly influenced by BTS and are trying to switch from conventional high school majors to artistic fields:

- "Regarding your students and your relationship with their families, do families complain that BTS has negatively impacted their children's education or focus?

I see this clearly. For example, my trainees are constantly watching their concerts, or the one who two years ago said he loved the science field now wants to pursue art due to his interest in BTS. I don't see this as a bad thing. I think BTS is like a light that has turned on and is showing them the way."

Mahlagha, 19-years-old, in her interview, talks about choosing a music major influenced by K-pop groups:

- "Do you remember what initially drew you to K-pop?

I was going through a tough time in my life due to family issues. I didn't have a close friend and was always a quiet, introverted person. K-pop made me smile and gave me joy. There was no one to understand me and talk to, but K-pop acted as a painkiller for me, allowing me to escape from the world around me. I even remember times when I found no joy or reason to continue except for K-pop. I think they were my saviors for a period, and I can't imagine how those years would have passed if I hadn't been a fan of theirs.

- So let me ask this question: did K-pop fill the emotional voids you felt?

Yes, exactly. It made me feel important. Loving people is an attractive feeling, and when you're younger, you idolize people and worship them, regardless of the fact that they are human like you and have their own flaws. In my free time, I dreamed about the future. I have always loved music, and I think K-pop had a significant impact on my interest in music and ultimately my choice of major."

Golnoosh and Hadith, both 14-years-old, in their separate interviews, noted that they do not have good singing voices but are striving to achieve success in songwriting or dancing:

- "Overall, did being in the K-pop and Hollywood space make you want to work in a related field like music, dance, or anything else?

Yes, when you see how much people love them and how successful and wealthy they are, you definitely want to be one of them, but that's just the surface. If I want to become a singer, I wouldn't go to a company; I would create a YouTube channel, cover songs, and write my own. Many people do this, and it's good money, and people really welcome them, plus no one is above you telling you what to do. It's just you and yourself."

- "Do you want to become like BTS idols one day?

Yes, but it's just a dream, and it will never happen.

- Why won't it happen?

Well, you see how famous they are now; they were discovered for their talents from a young age. With the conditions in Iran, I can't do anything; I would have to work hard just to get to Korea, and even then, they wouldn't easily accept us Iranians. Becoming an idol is a very difficult path, but it's really amazing.

- If you weren't Iranian and were, for example, Korean or American, would you become an idol?

Absolutely, I would have put in all my effort from childhood; even though I feel I don't have much singing talent, I'm good at dancing, and that could be my strength to eventually reach a point.

- Are you a professional dancer or just interested in it?

I know it somewhat professionally. I took ballet classes for six months. I also practiced Arabic dance for a while, and I love all kinds of dance. I want to create my own style in dance and become famous"

Erfan, 21-years-old, reports in his interview that after encountering BTS, he became aware of his similarities (youth and attractiveness) with them. By pursuing music and singing like the members of BTS, he has made progress in his career and is now considered a successful individual:

- "Erfan, did BTS influence your career choice?

Yes, absolutely. Watching BTS's songs and their unique music style sparked the first idea in my mind. I sat down and thought about it. I realized that, like the boys in BTS, I have many options. I have youth and attractiveness, and with some modeling and self-improvement efforts, along with continuous practice in learning to play instruments, I was able to succeed in my work.

- Erfan, what do you think is the reason for your success in playing instruments?

It's mostly because I modeled myself after Jin. I became so skilled in my work that I started to believe I was another Jin, both attractive and a famous musician."

Finally, Masoud, 20-years-old, mentions in his interview that he had to drop out of school in his second year of high school to support his family and help his siblings continue their education. However, instead of feeling hopeless, he continued to work hard, inspired by some BTS members who had similar backgrounds, and found success by selling BTS-branded clothing:

- "Masoud, did your acquaintance with BTS lead you to drop out of school?

No, not at all. The unfavorable financial situation of my family and my sacrifice for my siblings to continue their education forced me to enter the job market at a young age.

- Do you think you made the right decision?

Yes, I did the best I could under those circumstances. Both my father and mother always pray for me. I'm sure their prayers will not go unanswered by God.

- When you started working, what impact did BTS have on you?

When I started working, I had completed my second year of high school and had distanced myself from my classmates and friends. I was far from studying and books, and it didn't feel good. BTS helped me get through that difficult time of missing my classmates and school. Their cheerful songs saved me from sadness and longing. I became more determined in my work, made plans, and I was quite successful."

7-6- Spending Money to Support BTS

Some interviewed fans have noted that they have sought to demonstrate the depth of their fandom by spending money to show their serious support for the group.

Purchasing items designed by the group members, spending money on albums, buying light sticks, paying for photo, video, and audio editing, funding fan pages, organizing meet-ups among fans, celebrating birthdays for group members, and similar activities are part of the expenses fans incur to support BTS.

Parinaz, 18-years-old, mentions in her interview that although she cannot afford to buy the items designed by the group members, there are fans who spend money on these expensive items:

- "The members apparently set trends with certain items; have you ever bought these items?

Every group has certain items that represent them. For BTS, it's the ARMY bomb, which they call light sticks; each group has its own. These ARMY bombs are very expensive; some I've seen cost over three million. Naturally, I don't have an ARMY bomb (BTS's symbol). The members have albums that are really expensive if you want to buy them. There are also items we call BTS merch, which the artist members have designed, like a bag that belongs to Taehyung or a hoodie designed by Jungkook, which are extremely expensive. However, there are ARMYs who buy these items. There are also things like photo cards, which are small cards with pictures of the members on them. There are necklaces, earrings, and bracelets with the members' pictures, which the boys used during concerts or shows. When these items trend, some people either make them themselves or buy the originals. We have many online shops; if you search on Instagram, you'll find them.

K-pop groups have hats, glasses, and other items during concerts or shows, or even when they are going to the airport, and ARMYs go and find similar items to buy. Overall, items that trend suddenly increase in price, and personally, I don't buy very expensive items, but I might buy necklaces, bracelets, hats, pins, and photo cards related to BTS."

Zahra, 24-years-old, and Nastaran, 19-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned buying the group's new albums in dollars or purchasing second-hand albums that are cheaper:

- "How influential do you think BTS is?

"I don't consider myself a huge fan; I'm quite ordinary, but I've seen a strong interest in this group among my friends, like their continuous streaming, buying albums in dollars to support them, and other similar

activities. That's why I say their influence and attraction are extremely high."

"In Iran, second-hand albums are also bought and sold among fans, and they are a bit cheaper."

Alongside some individuals who create fan sites or pages to support the group online and feel obligated to produce content in the form of photos, videos, and audio for their followers, there are other fans who are willing to pay for obtaining idols' signatures or ordering stream sessions from streamers. Sheida, 20-years-old, and Sonia, 17-years-old, have provided examples of these cases in their interviews:

- "What about the economic effects of BTS on the lives of your friends and students? For example, do they spend any specific amount of money because of this interest, or do they earn money from fan pages and such things?

Well, their clothes are all BTS-themed, or their items like stationery, bags, and pencil cases. Some even get tattoos, either in Korean or English related to BTS. In terms of expenses, one of my friends spent a lot just to get an autograph or things you wouldn't even think of. As for earning money, those who create and sell items that fans are really interested in, like bracelets, earrings, glasses, watches, and many other things, or those who have different photos of the group and print them on clothes and sell them, have a lot of followers who are into these things."

- Does that interest make a fan stream?

Yes, many do it out of interest, but for some, it's their job. They are called streamers. They have several devices, like five laptops and twenty phones. If you pay them, they will stream, for example, they might say they will get a thousand views in an hour, but big groups really don't need to do this. Because they have so many fans that they get a lot of views, and among these fans, many stream out of their own interest for the artists' work."

Sana 16-years-old, mentions in an interview that she spends her pocket money every month to create video clips in support of BTS:

- "How much do you spend on BTS products?

Not much, but I spent a lot on the YouTube page I created for BTS.

- Can you roughly say how much and for what purpose you spent?

I pay one of my friends to edit the videos I make. He is very professional at this kind of work. Maybe about 400,000 tomans a month.

- For how many videos?

One each month.

- Has there ever been a time when you needed money for something more important, but you ran out of money because of spending on editing BTS videos?

Yes, (laughs) but my dad doesn't let me stay broke."

Razieh, 15-years-old, and Narges, 21-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned spending money to celebrate the birthdays of idols or to organize gatherings among BTS fans in Iran:

- "Sweetheart, I saw on your page that you got a cake for one of the members and celebrated their birthday. Do you do this every year?

I was at the market with my mom, and I suddenly saw a bakery and bought a cake. I told my friend, and we celebrated J-Hope's birthday together. Sometimes the conditions aren't right to get a cake and celebrate, but I celebrate in another way with other ARMYs. We stream their solo songs and celebrate together when they go live.

- Can you tell me how you celebrate their birthdays in the live?

The members come live on their birthdays with a cake and a decorated room, and the ARMYs talk to them in the comments, and the members sing the birthday song while the ARMYs also write happy birthday in the comments.

- When you celebrate for them, do you feel like they are present with you?

Yes, I feel like they are beside me, and by celebrating for them, I encourage them and wish them well, and they feel happy."

- "You said you used to use a lot of BTS posters and items, right?

Yes.

- What did you buy the most, and how much did you spend on those items?

In the beginning, I bought more regular items with BTS designs. Anything, like bags, shoes, blankets, posters, watches, and mugs. But a little later, when BTS albums started selling more, I got an album. Of course, it wasn't the original album; it was fake. After that, I spent a lot. I gave many of them to one of my friends, and I sold many of them because they were new. I remember I got some for Suga's birthday and took my friends to a café to

celebrate. A few times, the kids organized meet-ups for the ARMYs in Tehran and Karaj, and we celebrated there."

Others, inspired by their favorite idols, have focused on helping charitable organizations and, by doing so, have tried to celebrate their favorite idols' birthdays in a richer way, following the example of BTS members:

- "What do fans want in these challenges?

For example, they say let's make this birthday celebration different from other birthday celebrations, in addition to our spiritual support for our idol, let's be ambassadors of goodwill and health by providing financial support and helping those in need. For instance, this time, let's help the Autism Support Association, and in this way, fans also deliver their financial contributions to those in need with the help of fan page managers.

- What cultural impact do these celebrations have on fans?

It promotes the beautiful culture of helping those in need and people with special illnesses. Fans enjoy holding the celebrations and also do a humanitarian and philanthropic act." (Narges, 21-years-old).

7-7- Monetization of Some Fans through Promoting BTS

The group BTS is designed with thoughtful consideration. Attracting appealing individuals, addressing fundamental themes of adolescence and youth, creating widespread excitement at concerts, producing a plethora of entertainment programs centered around the group members, designing cartoon characters of the BTS boys, organizing fan meetings and fan sites, and engaging in political-social actions (such as speaking at the United Nations, meeting with the President of the United States), among other activities, have greatly enhanced the appeal of the K-pop group BTS.

On the other hand, individuals and other social entities may easily try to leverage the attractions mentioned above to advance their own ideas and interests. Therefore, fans of the group witness both the exploitation of BTS by political movements and the utilization of the group by large economic enterprises. In this context, some ordinary individuals have also realized that they can benefit from the favorable environment created by BTS. This means that some interviewed individuals stated that by creating fan pages and attracting a large number of followers, they achieve significant income through advertisements. Others attract specific followers by creating content for BTS fans and, based on this, earn money through advertisements. Some fans have

reported that they act as intermediaries between fans and stores selling authentic BTS merchandise, thus generating income. The creation of fan pages and their subsequent sale by some genuine or fake fans is also realized. Finally, others have profited from the booming market by selling clothing and items featuring the BTS logo, achieving their goal of making more and more money.

Shadi, a 15-years-old, and Erfan, a 21-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned creating fan pages and providing information about BTS, noting that alongside the ongoing and regular updates about the group that attract audiences, they have achieved their financial goals by taking advertisements and presenting them on their pages:

"... After following BTS, it feels like you gain extra energy, albeit negative energy. This excess energy is strange for me too.

- What impact has this group had on your friends?

They have a similar experience, and in a way, it has become an identity for them that they are BTS fans or that they have a virtual page, that they are BTS fan page owners and earn income, and they consider this as their identity and job.

- What do you mean by earning income?

They have fan pages where they post advertisements and make money.

- What do they advertise?

BTS necklaces and bracelets or advertisements for scarf and clothing pages and mugs (coffee mugs with various designs)."

- "Erfan, what benefits do these fan pages and channels provide for fans?

Fans make their fan pages or channels famous with advertisements, photos, and sensational news about BTS, gaining a lot of followers and posting real-time updates about the group and their songs and albums. After their page grows, they earn a lot of income by placing advertisements for venues, clubs, hotels, and stores.

- Can you give an example?

Yes, for instance, one of my high school friends has had an Instagram page since the early days of his fandom for BTS. Since the group's establishment, he has documented everything that has happened to the members, detailing each idol's story and posting all their photos, albums, and travels, and he excitedly informs about the countries where concerts are held and their

times. In between these updates, he places a lot of advertisements for clothing, shoe models, canned goods, and food, and he earns a good income."

Negin, 13-years-old, and Ehsan, 17-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned creating fan fiction themselves and noted that these stories (some of which include erotic literature) attract audience attention, increasing their follower counts and consequently allowing them to obtain more advertisements and achieve greater financial benefits:

- "Anyway, people read, and writing fan fiction continues?

Yes, well, when they earn from this work, you can't just stop doing something that brings in income. Sometimes, the fan fictions aren't even about ARMY; it's a person who wants to ruin the idol and continues doing this."

- "Ehsan, what in BTS has led everyone to think they promote homosexuality?

It's that they have feminine appearances but are male, and secondly, they wear makeup like girls and have feminine grace in their dances.

- How do fans react to this?

Most fans, as much as they want, fuel the rumors of the group's homosexuality with the stories they create about the idols in their fan pages. Some fans, whether intentionally or not, confirm these rumors with their fictional stories and shared images of the idols.

- Why do fans do this?

I don't think the main fans do this. Some fake and selfish fans do this to advance their fan pages and get advertisements for income. They increase their follower counts with these photos and ongoing stories."

Shirin, a 22-years-old, reports that she receives commissions by directing her followers to stores that sell authentic BTS merchandise:

- "Where did you get BTS-branded clothes?

Sometimes, I would spend a week going through all the malls in Tehran and Karaj with my friends to find the clothes we wanted. Clothes were very important to us, and if we couldn't find them, we had to get similar ones. Later, I found a few reputable boutiques that brought in all branded and

original clothes, and I was able to become a sales intermediary for branded clothes to BTS fans through my fan page on Instagram and earn income."

Marzieh, 19-years-old, in her interview, states that some individuals, due to the attractions of the BTS group, create fan pages centered around BTS, attract fans, and then sell their pages for other purposes, thus benefiting from their business.

- "How do fan pages earn from this?

If someone is clever, they do.

- Why do you use the term clever?

Someone might create a fan page just because they know they will gain a lot of ARMY followers, and then sell the page."

Erfan, 21-years-old, in his interview, recalls that his fame in playing music and singing in his city is attributed to his imitation of the makeup and style of the BTS members:

- "Erfan, how has modeling yourself after idols affected your social life?

It has boosted my career; I have become well-known among organ players in my city, and I owe it all to BTS and their great idols.

- How has modeling after BTS idols contributed to the success of your business?

Since my job is related to music, and people seek variety in music, I need to have a stylish and well-groomed appearance. Hundreds of eyes are on me in a ceremony hall. By modeling my hairstyle, makeup, clothing, and accessories like necklaces and bracelets after the idols, I have made significant progress in my work, and all the music groups in my city choose me for their events.

- Which BTS idol do you model yourself after the most?

I mostly imitate Jin's clothing style and his gestures during performances, and sometimes for variety, I use V's makeup and hairstyle and his poses."

Finally, Masoud, 21-years-old, notes in his report that he earns income by selling BTS merchandise:

- "Masoud, you mentioned that you are self-employed; does your job relate to BTS brands?

Yes, because BTS clothing is popular among young people, I always acquire BTS t-shirts and shirts. When there is high demand for them, I procure them in larger quantities and distribute them throughout the city and in remote shops. Sometimes, I even sell directly to vendors in the subway, and I see how much BTS has influenced people's clothing purchases.

- Are most of your customers men?

No, it doesn't matter; both women and men use BTS brands or even similar ones, and this breaking down of gender in clothing has greatly benefited us sellers because we no longer fear our items being unsold, as there is always demand for them.

- Do you think BTS has impacted your business?

It has had a significant impact; I draw my ideas for my merchandise from BTS. I don't buy items that will remain unsold, and I owe my effort and perseverance to BTS. BTS motivated me and saved me from despair. I have been able to achieve most of my desires and gain financial independence over the three years I have been selling."

From the descriptions provided, it becomes clear that each person approaches the attractive BTS group with their specific goals in mind and seeks to achieve their objectives through it.

8- Artistic Effects

Supporting various groups, including BTS, encompasses various effects such as psychological, social, cultural, ethical-belief, educational, economic-political, artistic, aesthetic, health, and family impacts. In this section, the artistic effects of supporting the BTS group will be examined and discussed.

Some interviewed fans have also paid attention to the artistic dimensions of BTS, comparing the group to other musical groups and considering it superior to others due to factors such as "superiority over Western pop," "the presence of meaningful, complex, and enigmatic content in BTS's music videos," and "the addition of dance to the performance of BTS's songs." These points will be elaborated upon in the following statements.

8-1- The Superiority of BTS K-Pop Over Western Pop

Reihaneh and Sayeh, both 21-years-old, in separate interviews, have mentioned the "superiority of BTS K-Pop music over Hollywood pop" and have outlined some reasons why K-Pop sometimes surpasses Western pop:

- "So Reihaneh, what attracted you to K-Pop in the first place?

Honestly, I was already interested in American music. I still am, but I had no interest in their music videos and lyrics. I found that most of them lacked interesting meanings and seemed very superficial and without complexity or a specific concept. After watching a few short clips of Korean music videos, I was first attracted to the vibrant and colorful atmosphere and the high-budget, eye-catching music videos. The fact that these few-minute music videos contained a story, a theme, and several theories and analyses with a proper depth was very appealing to me. I was used to the contentless, often sexual, and low-budget Hollywood music videos, so the amount of attention given to their content was very new and interesting to me, and I wanted to watch them, read about them, and understand the story behind these scenes and images and their analyses.

The next point was the content of the songs. The lyrics of BTS's songs were mostly far removed from the sexual and romantic themes of American and European songs, and they contained philosophical or psychological concepts. This was one of the main reasons I was drawn to BTS.

Because the lyrics were very strong and followed a coherent and well-structured storyline, and in every presentation and phase of their music, they

addressed a deep content, such as youth, teenage problems, issues with the educational system, self-acceptance, self-love, and all aspects of ourselves.

I inherently like things that engage the mind positively and have a positive and educational outcome, and I am attracted to them, especially if they have visual appeal."

"BTS's stages are something very captivating, with every second meticulously crafted. Now, when I see American stages, they seem boring to me. They are more of a musical show than a concert.

- So, do they have a story?

Not necessarily, but they have a dance that conveys a concept. Each member coordinates according to the concept they want to convey, and in the end, you receive a comprehensive image. Besides that, if the dance segment is longer, you still see that the level of work is different, even if they perform a mediocre song. The clothes they wear, their style, the stage, and everything is different, and this gradually attracts you, even if at that first moment you don't say, "Okay, from now on, my life revolves around this." I watched their stages and also the funny BTS videos, and I just kept watching and watching until I don't know what happened, but during their "Fake Love" comeback in 2018, I realized I hadn't slept for 24 hours to boost the views on YouTube and Spotify for them."

8-2- The Presence of Meaningful, Complex, and Enigmatic Content in BTS Music Videos

The "presence of ambiguous and enigmatic content in BTS music videos" is another important topic that many individuals have drawn attention to, referring to it as the innovation, creativity, and originality of the BTS group. Reihaneh, a 21-years-old, in her interview, mentions how BTS's music has transformed into a story and a film that addresses specific issues:

- "Do most of BTS's music videos have theories?

Most of them have their own specific theories and analyses, meaning they convey a story and a particular narrative that makes the music video resemble a film and a story, adding more appeal to the content or analyses that relate to the overall concept of the album. For example, the music video for "Fake Love" contains analyses about true love and false love, which it conveys through images or the lyrics of the song. True and genuine love is the love one has for oneself, and a person, until they accept and love

themselves, will find that any external love is insufficient and can even be harmful."

Mahtab, 18-years-old, and Kowsar, 25-years-old, in their interviews, emphasize that the lyrics of BTS songs sometimes draw from philosophical and psychological works, discussing these recent concepts. Additionally, the presentation of some concepts in a serial format in BTS's K-Pop music and the prompting of users to think after engaging with the group's music is a noteworthy point that some interviewees have mentioned:

"What attracted me to them was, first of all, their performances and concerts, and the energy that exists in their concerts. The second thing that drew me in was the message they wanted to convey with their songs.

- What message or messages?

First, the members of BTS usually write their own lyrics and compose their songs. This allows them to write from their own youthful experiences, which helps teenagers connect with the message the song wants to convey. For example, Suga talks about the problems he faced during his teenage years in one of his songs called "The Last," which might help many teenagers feel better about themselves when they hear those experiences. That song is one of my favorites because, you know, it creates a sense of empathy, as the problems mentioned could also be your problems. At least, they were for me.

Another point is that BTS's work is deeper than that of other groups, or I might say broader. They draw inspiration from films and books and use various symbols. Even RM and Suga study psychology and philosophy and use that knowledge to write their lyrics. For instance, for the album "Map of the Soul," they used Jung's book "The Map of the Soul." That's why I say the message they convey makes us sit down and think about the concept of their song, which usually revolves around self-love, hope for life, and such themes.

These are important concepts that I believe need attention in today's world, whether in the West or here in Iran, because a lack of hope or feelings of anger and hatred have increased significantly in modern times, leading to higher rates of crime, violence, and mental health issues. In this regard, we can refer to the song "Life Goes On," whose message is that life never waits for us and always continues, even in difficult circumstances; life goes on, and we must strive for the future even when we feel hopeless and sad.

The message behind the song "Butter" is also that we should not be soft and fragile like butter in tough situations and that we should not break easily in the face of challenges.

The album "Love Yourself" carries the message of self-love, which is also the main message of BTS that they have always conveyed everywhere. It means that we should love ourselves as we are and not change our true selves for others."

"BTS's music videos are also different. This means that BTS was the first group to use a very deep and profound storyline¹ in their music videos. For example, in a given year, the music videos they released were interconnected. It was like a narrative where the viewer was waiting to see what would happen next, ultimately conveying a main message that was usually very meaningful and profound. They also developed characters in their music videos and used philosophical books in their work.

Of course, I should mention that this approach was later copied by many other artists after BTS became famous, which I find quite cliché now.

- How do they utilize philosophical books in their music videos?

For example, they have a music video called "Blood, Sweat & Tears," which was entirely based on the book "Demian²." This book is very deep and heavy. They used the characters from this story in their music videos, and it was precisely because of this music video and album that BTS suddenly exploded in popularity. With the album "Wings," they achieved tremendous success on global charts, and then they became famous in Korea, and their upward trajectory of fame continued. For two or three years after that, their meaningful and conceptual music videos continued, and no other K-Pop group was doing this in the same way

- Can you give more examples of these different contents?

For instance, they had a series of music videos; think about this album that they released over two years. The name of their album is HYYH 1 and 2, which in Korean means "The Most Beautiful Moment in Life." I don't remember the exact details, but it was something like that. There were two albums. The music videos for this album were about seven characters who were friends, each with their own life. For example, one of them had a father or stepfather who was bothering his sister, and this character was involved in

¹ the backstory of a song, movie, or any other content

² Demian: The Story of a Boyhood is a bildungsroman by Hermann Hesse, first published in 1919; a prologue was added in 1960.

such a situation. One day, he has a very intense fight with his stepfather, and then he comes out in a very chaotic state, picks up the phone, and calls his friend, who is another member of the group.

This is one aspect. Have it in your mind. Then, another member shows that he is in a bathtub, and all the shower and tabs are open, which indicates that this person has suicidal thoughts.

- Uh-huh.

It shows the struggle of this character. These themes were really not present in K-pop. I mean, I want to say that artists in K-pop were afraid to express such things before this, or if they did, it wasn't done well enough...

- Were they afraid that it wouldn't be accepted by the public?

Yeah, that people wouldn't like it.

- The people of Korea or the people of the world?

Korea. Because K-pop wasn't really known worldwide before BTS. It had very few fans, mostly in Asia, like Iranian fans or from other countries. Or another character shows that he is in his room, and his room is on fire. Then you have these scenes, and in the next music video, it shows what actually happened. For example, it shows what happened that made him set his own room on fire. It shows that he was previously in a mental hospital, or the one who was in the bathtub, in their music video two years later, his story is shown, indicating that something happened that the bathtub represents his thoughts, not that he was actually in the bathtub. There are many philosophical dimensions that are satisfying for the viewer. While if you sit down and watch these from the beginning, the way these stories connect in your mind makes the music you are listening to enjoyable.

And there's also a sense of suspense, as this music video is being released over the years, and each time it engages you more.

Like a series where you are waiting for the next season, and it ends at a critical point. And this is another reason. The connection you make with a series cannot be made with a movie because it's much longer and engages you much more".

8-3- Diversity of BTS's Songs

"The diverse songs of BTS" was another point that many people in the research population mentioned. Mahtab, 18-years-old, and Ehsan, 17-years-old, in their

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reports emphasized that the creators of BTS's songs are the members of the group themselves, highlighting the authenticity of their work:

- "What is it about BTS that made you a fan of this group?"

Honestly, what really caught my attention about BTS and made me a fan is that I get a really good feeling from their songs, and they give me positive energy. Another advantage they have over other K-pop groups is that they create everything from scratch, their songs and performances are all theirs, and it has authenticity. I think that's a very important point about the group. When you know that the lyrics or choreography or anything else is not created by this group and is given to them by the company or something else, you don't like it as much. What value does it have? Then a person should go and be a fan of that company, not this group".

- "How come their songs are so pleasant?"

Look, BTS oversees the entire music process from start to finish. They not only write the lyrics based on the problems and concerns of the general public or the joys of all young people, but they also produce and perform them themselves. As a result, because they are the creators of their songs, they easily connect deeply and emotionally with the songs, and this feeling does not go unnoticed by the audience and fans; it is transmitted to them as well".

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, and Sonia, 17-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned the personal and social concerns of individuals in BTS's music, considering it a valuable aspect:

In every period of their career and in every album, a general concept¹ is chosen, and for BTS, most of the time, these concepts are about personality recognition and psychological concepts and personal and social growth. For example, the song 'Black Swan' is about the concerns of the members and the group regarding singing, their future careers, the problems of fame, and the dark sides of this fame and popularity.

Or the single 'Permission to Dance,' which, influenced by the conditions of society, is about energizing people during the quarantine and COVID-19 period, and it also supported jobs that were affected by COVID-19 and even supported deaf individuals.

¹ Concepts are specific ideas and styles that K-pop idols consistently pursue, both as groups and individually, for the creation of songs, music videos, and albums. These concepts can be expressed through genre, lyrics and song texts, the mood of the music videos, and the fashion styles of the idols

A combination of the social and personal concerns of each member, as well as the entire group and even a large group of people like teenagers or students, forms the concepts of the lyrics."

- "What are the themes of BTS's songs usually about?

Since these seven members are not very old, it seems they know what issues young people and teenagers are facing in their lives right now. For example, one is depressed, one is not satisfied with their appearance and wants to change themselves, one lacks self-confidence, and one wants to do things they are interested in, but they are in an environment where they are controlled, meaning they don't have the choice to go towards what they love. I see these kinds of things among my friends.

When you listen to songs that reflect your own problems, you get that good feeling from them".

Pooneh, 18-years-old, and Sheida, 20-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned the coexistence of both sad and happy music in BTS, which can be enjoyed during both joyful and sorrowful times:

- "So their songs make you happy and also sad?

Yes, it depends on my mood. If I'm not feeling well, I listen to their sad songs, and if I'm feeling good, I listen to their happy songs.

- Does their sad music make you sadder?

Yes, it does.

- Then why do you listen to it? You should definitely do something to get out of that mood.

Maybe because at that moment when I'm sad, that song expresses my feelings, that same empathy I told you about. I listen to the song for a bit, cry, and then I feel okay".

- "Overall, does being a fan of BTS fulfill an emotional need for you?

Their songs are very much like that for me. I mean, their sad songs can really make me sad, and their happy songs can genuinely make me happy. They really have an impact."

Maryam, 18-years-old, and Fereshteh, 19-years-old, emphasized that BTS has the courage and boldness to experiment with different music styles, attributing their diversity compared to others to this:

- "So, Maryam, what first attracted you to BTS?

The first thing that attracted me was their high energy during performances. I felt that they were genuinely enjoying performing and doing it with all their heart. Their movements and coordination were very interesting, especially considering that their dances are also difficult and intense. After that, I was drawn to the various songs they had sung; they had tried different styles and were not afraid of this diversity and new styles. I think one of the reasons they have gained so many ARMYs is that no matter what kind of music taste you have, BTS has something for everyone and can satisfy people with different thoughts and tastes".

- "BTS was the first Korean group to be seen at this level internationally. What do you think is the reason for their success?

Certainly, advertising, timing, and proper planning have played a role. Some of it is luck, because, for example, BTS and EXO are very similar in many ways if you pay attention. The lyrical concept of BTS is much more diverse, but in terms of composition, visuals, and dance, they are similar, and I think their subtle differences made BTS more prominent, even though they had a smaller company and started later than EXO.

The fact that not all their songs are very dark and they don't only sing about love, and that there is a lot of diversity in their work, I think has also contributed to their success.

And the BTS fandom is really different from others. How can I say it? It seems more global? Because, for example, unlike many K-pop groups whose fans are mostly Korean, BTS has so many fans that you can't say most of them are from one country."

Finally, Taranom, 18-years-old, in her interview, emphasizes that the content offered by BTS is healthier than that of other K-pop groups:

"For example, in the song 'Dynamite,' Jungkook starts by saying he wakes up in the morning and drinks milk. Not like this girl group BLACKPINK, where Lisa in one of her songs talks about alcohol and drinks, saying, 'Since 1895, that I wasn't born they've kept it for me' and in a way encourages their fans to consume such things. I didn't like that because most fans, whether it's BTS or another group, start being fans from the age of 12 and grow up imitating their words. Of course, BTS also talks about +18 topics in some places, but they have only recently started doing that; it wasn't there in the first chapter. Overall, one of the reasons I consider BTS to be beyond K-pop is their style of work, which is different from K-pop."

The presentation of BTS's music in Korean, English, and Japanese, on one hand, and their collaborations with some Western artists, on the other hand, are other aspects that some interviewees have noted, seeing it as an advantage for the expansion and popularity of BTS's songs:

- "Do you think BTS's collaborations with Western artists like Halsey can help increase their fame?

What you said made me realize that factors like collaboration definitely help with fame. For example, Sia¹, Halsey, Coldplay², and Nicki Minaj³ are very famous, and their collaboration with an Asian band will definitely make a splash, or the English lyrics that are trending nowadays, like 'Butter,' which was similar to Jungkook's English part combined with one of Dua Lipa's⁴ songs, became very trendy."

- "Shabnam, in your opinion, what effects does BTS have on its fans, and why are they so popular?

These groups, because of their dances, the styles they wear, their hair colors, or their cuteness, make their fans very influenced and imitate many of their behaviors. More than 80% of their fans are teenagers, and their popularity is mainly due to their dance, coordination, and looks, and because they sing in three languages."

8-4- Adding Appeal to the Stage

Many interviewees noted that BTS has captivating performances and the appeal they create on stage is less observed in other musical groups.

Sarina, 13-year-old, in her interview, recalled the burning of many cars during the filming of the music video for "Fire," describing it as exciting and different from others:

"... In the MV for 'Kill This Love,' BLACKPINK had to use a gas that could even cause blindness in large amounts, or in this MV, Jennie had to sit on swans that had very little stability from a great distance, or in the MV for 'Fire,' BTS had to actually set someone on fire in the first scene, and that's what makes K-pop different from the rest."

¹ a pop singer from Australia who is best known for her aversion to fame.

² Coldplay is a British rock band that was formed in 1996 in London

³ Nicki Minaj is a rapper, singer, and songwriter, born in Trinidad and Tobago, who resides in the United States.

⁴ Dua Lipa is an English singer, songwriter, and model

Sheida, 20-year-old, in statements similar to Sarina, expressed that when she first got to know BTS, she was scared when she saw the music video for "Fire" due to the fire in the scene and the eerie, quiet atmosphere, along with the strange dances in the background, but later she came to like this unique performance:

- "What attracted you to them?"

It was the feeling that they relied on their own talent, and even though many didn't take them seriously and mocked them, they gradually improved and reached good places. Another reason is that I myself loved music and dance, but I saw that in Iran, these activities are forbidden for girls, or there is no opportunity for progress at all, but there, the environment is open, and they can engage in these activities and progress, which was appealing to me. Then I thought that I could also go there and progress like them. The first music video I saw from BTS really attracted me. Its name was "Fire." It had a scary atmosphere at first that frightened me. It was very wild, and their dances were strange. The music video started with a man coming in front of one of the boys in the group. Then the man catches fire! There's no music playing at the beginning of the music video; it's completely silent, and then suddenly it goes to a dark place where there's a man with very long hair who is the DJ. Then with his movement, as if he's mixing the song, the music starts. The first time I saw this, I was scared because I was very young. But later, I really liked it."

Sonia, 17-years-old, in her interview, expressed that she is influenced by the group's intense performances and refers to their hard work as a unique appeal of BTS:

- "How are their performances usually?"

When they hold concerts, they have performances that involve dancing, but it's not just chaotic (laughs). They perform a specific type of dance for each track, and it has a beginning and an end; it's well-planned and really difficult. For example, in one of their performances, they used a pole, which was very appealing, but executing it was extremely hard.

- Is it necessary for the performances to be this difficult?

Not really necessary, but having so many fans isn't without reason. You have to present something special in a performance for someone from another country to come and see it. If it's something ordinary, then people will just go see the ordinary performances in their own country; they're not sick to spend so much money and time" (laughs).

Sahar, 15-years-old, and Hilda, 19-years-old, mentioned that BTS's performances are intertwined with dance, noting that the boys' ability to dance while singing is an appealing aspect that others have done less of. They also pointed out that K-pop music is generally more cheerful than American music, making it easier to incorporate dance:

- "What do you like most about BTS's music: their rhythm, their content, or their performance?"

I like their rhythm, lyrics, and performance. I really haven't seen any other country's music where everything is so well integrated. In other countries, you see a singer singing, but they don't dance, while there are many dancers around them. But these guys dance and sing at the same time, and they even write most of their songs themselves. Their dances and performances really attract me. K-pop was the first genre I saw where the singer sings and dances at the same time, which is why I got into K-pop. I also really love BTS's songs."

"K-pop, compared to Western pop music, is 'younger' and 'happier' and has a newer appearance. There's a lot of energy in K-pop, and the music videos are really bright and colorful. So I think many people are interested in K-pop because it's sometimes happier than American music, and it's also easier to dance to, and I guess younger fans are attracted to K-pop because it focuses on appearance."

Masoud, 20-years-old, in his interview, found the harmony of the group members after their solo performances interesting and praised the boys' synchronized dancing:

- "What did you enjoy about BTS's songs?"

At that time, I didn't understand the meaning of the songs; I just enjoyed their beautiful voices and the order in their singing and dancing.

- What kind of order did you see in their songs that you liked?

For example, when one of them sang solo, the others would later harmonize together, and they maintained the arrangement very well, and there was a specific order in their dancing. They weren't chaotic at all."

Mahtab, 18-years-old, in her interview, noted that the excitement present in BTS's songs is not found in American songs, and if someone watches BTS's songs, they probably won't want to see American concerts anymore:

"... I've been following K-pop since I was about 16 or 17, and the first time I encountered such a phenomenon was in high school when I asked one of my friends who was listening to a song by BLACKPINK what she was listening to. She said, 'Come listen, I'm listening to this,' and I listened and liked it, and then I went and listened to more BLACKPINK. After that, when someone listens to K-pop on Spotify or YouTube, it suggests various other songs from the same genre. Then BTS was among them, and I had heard the name BTS a lot because they are very famous, so I went and listened to them and watched their concerts. The thing that attracted me the most was their concerts because they are a different kind of experience. If you look, there's a special excitement and energy that isn't present in American or European concerts, regardless of the genre. Whether it's pop, rock, or anything else. BTS concerts have a unique style of dance with a special performance, and once your eyes and ears get used to it, it becomes hard to sit through concerts of other groups, like Americans. Anyway, what attracted me first was their performances and concerts, and the excitement that exists in their concerts, and the second thing that attracted me was the message they wanted to convey with their songs."

Nastaran, 19-years-old, in her interview, stated that she was drawn to the dance and atmosphere of BTS's performances as a child. However, as she grew older, she realized the richness of BTS's lyrics and now sees their content, performance, and dance as a complete package:

- "What attracted you to K-pop after 2013?

I became a fan of BTS after the series "Dream High¹."

- Well, you didn't say exactly why. Was it their music style, their dance, their performance, or what?

At that time, I was a kid and didn't pay much attention to music, but I think it was mostly because of their dance and atmosphere...

- Well, you said BTS's music was different and you preferred it. In what way did you prefer their music? Their rhythm, lyrics, or performance?

I'm someone who focuses on lyrics. For me, lyrics are very important.

Overall, K-pop has a lot of sparkle. For example, it has a colorful atmosphere. Some music videos have a lot of effort put into their

¹ "Dream High" is a K-drama series about the education of teenagers in an arts school and their preparation to enter the K-pop industry.

performances. They have elaborate performances and good dances. It all seems like a complete package."

8-5- Side Attractions of the BTS Group

While BTS has an appealing presence on stage, they have also been creative in the side aspects of their work, striving to enhance their attractiveness to audiences through various performances. Elements such as filming BTS music videos in historical and artistic locations, incorporating fashion from different cultures, producing dance tutorial videos for their performances, and winning numerous international awards are all side attractions that have added to the appeal of BTS's performances in their concerts, resulting in a more significant outcome.

In a recent interview, 15-years-old Diba praised BTS's tradition of thoughtful production, referencing the music video for "Blood Sweat & Tears," which was filmed in a palace:

- "Can you give an example of how much thought goes into their music videos?

For instance, the music video for 'Blood Sweat & Tears' was full of various colors and filmed in a palace-like location, and their dances seem to be quite challenging and require a lot of practice. Now that I think about it, their dances were one of the aspects that attracted me because they were truly beautiful and unique."

Seventeen-years-old Reyhane expressed appreciation for BTS wearing Iranian paisley-patterned outfits during one of their performances (something that local celebrities typically do not wear):

"I think it was at the LA concert; their outfits in 'Permission to Dance' had paisley patterns. I have a few photos, but there's one performance, I think it was on 'Music Bank'¹, where they all wore Iranian outfits.

I'm not sure if they were from the Amiri brand, but there were many outfits that were from that brand and they have put them on."

Nikoo, 15-years-old reported that the BTS boys release dance tutorial videos after each performance so that fans can learn the choreography:

¹ Music Bank is a music program that is broadcast in South Korea

"One good thing about BTS and K-pop groups is that they produce a tutorial video for their dances after every new song they release, and that really helps people learn."

Narges, 21-years-old, mentioned in her interview that BTS songs can also be used in dance classes:

- "You said you were taking dance classes; did you use BTS songs?"

Yes. Now I know hip-hop and Zumba professionally, and yes, BTS songs were perfect for dancing. In the morning, when I woke up at home, I would play their songs because I was alone at home. My mom would go to the salon, and my dad had a job that required him to be away. He was rarely home. My little sister hadn't been born yet. So, I was home alone. From morning till night, I would dance to their songs. I had also watched their dance videos in the music videos, and I tried to dance like them. Their songs were like a godsend to me. Before that, I wasn't a K-pop fan at all; I didn't know their songs could be so useful for my dancing. I was so captivated by them that I remember for our dance class, everyone was supposed to perform a self-choreographed dance to a song. I chose BTS's song 'No.' after two weeks of practicing with their song, I performed in class and came in first."

Finally, 25-years-old Kowsar, in her interview, criticized the fading depth of BTS's early songs as the group changed their style to win international awards, noting that while this was a significant achievement, it drew attention to those who had won many awards:

- "You emphasized several times that it was back then and now it seems different; what made you feel you were no longer a fan?"

I feel like a person's intellectual maturity makes them seek something more. For me, up until the moment I filled that void in my life with an artist from the other side of the world, it was enough, and they really did their job. But at some point, it felt like I was looking for a deeper meaning in life, and K-pop no longer satisfied me.

- So, the content no longer satisfied you?

Yes, it felt like I wanted something deeper to be satisfied and content. But the fact that I distanced myself didn't lessen my affection for them. I still had their photos on my bedroom wall. Even though I wasn't following their news anymore, that positive feeling from before remained, and I say it had a positive impact.

Of course another reason was that since I was a BTS fan, I couldn't establish a connection with other groups no matter how hard I tried. BTS had shifted their style in the last one or two years towards a Hollywood style. For example, they were singing in a way that Hollywood songs are made, in a way that they would win awards at festivals. That feeling... the songs no longer had the same meaning as before... the deep stories were missing from the music videos, and honestly, their appeal diminished for me, and this was also the company's policy to produce such songs to win foreign festival awards. Because there were no awards left in Korea that they hadn't won; they had swept all the awards. In a way, they wanted to follow a path of progress, which they did to a large extent... but it no longer mattered to me personally."

8-6- The Combination of BTS Music with Challenging and Exciting Dances

"The combination of BTS music with difficult dances" is another topic that some interviewees have highlighted as an important advantage for the boy group BTS.

In an interview, 21-years-old Reyhane attributes her interest in dance (as well as music, writing, and even learning the Korean language) to her engagement with BTS.

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old and Pooneh, 18-years-old, have also stated in their interviews that they practiced and learned their dances through their engagement with BTS:

- "Rokhsareh, have you ever practiced to learn their dances?

Yes.

- How was it?

For me, it took a long time to learn, but I learned two dances from two of their albums. Some K-pop idols post their dances online, and I watched and practiced from there.

- Where do you see their dance tutorials the most?

You can find anything about BTS in various places: Pinterest, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram."

- "What do your family members think about K-pop and BTS?

My mom is okay with it and has no problem. She even buys me things related to BTS when she sees them, and she promised to take me to Turkey so I can get merch and BTS albums, but my dad doesn't like it; he says they look like girls and so on, but he doesn't constantly interfere. Sometimes he sees me dancing or listening to their songs and says, 'Kid, sit down and study' (laughs), but it's not very serious.

- Do you know how to dance?

Yes, I watch BTS videos and have learned a bit."

9- Aesthetic Effects

The concept of beauty has always been a focus in various human societies. Beauty can manifest in tangible aspects such as facial features, body shape, clothing, and so on, or in the beauty of thought, ethics, and behavior of individuals.

An examination of the statements from the research population regarding beauty primarily reflects tangible beauty, with interviewees mentioning that they were initially influenced by the beauty of the faces, bodies, hair colors, jewelry, and clothing of K-pop (and K-drama) stars.

The topic of "the physical attractiveness of BTS members" has become so prominent among fans that "modeling after stars in physical beauty" and consequently "fashion trends" have been influential and significant in the research population. However, beyond the aforementioned modeling, some fans, comparing themselves to the stars, feel a significant gap between their beauty and that of the stars, leading some to feelings of disappointment and sadness, and some have even considered cosmetic surgery to bridge the gap between themselves and their favorite stars.

Therefore, following the presentation of evidence regarding "attention to the physical attractiveness of BTS stars," the topics of " modeling after stars in superficial beauty," "modeling after stars in fashion and trends," and finally "self-deprecation and reliance on cosmetic surgery among fans" will be discussed.

9-1- The Physical Attractiveness of Stars

The topic of "the physical attractiveness of stars" is significant, and many fans have cited this as a reason for their admiration of BTS stars.

In her interview, 21-years-old Reihaneh notes that historically, in Korea, the beauty of individuals has been considered important, and remnants of this tradition continue to this day:

"Since ancient times, South Korean culture, and even East Asian culture as a whole, has placed great emphasis on physical beauty. The clothing, the design of palaces and gardens, as well as the historical arts of this region, such as painting, and even their emphasis on the beauty of deities and revered figures in their ancient religions, all indicate that this attention to physical beauty has a long history in this country. It has even been said that

in ancient Korea, people believed that kings and emperors should not have any scars on their faces or bodies. The face of a king or queen had to be flawless, and a person with a scarred face was deemed unworthy of ruling. This perspective has remained, with some changes, to this day. Currently, it is somewhat believed that an artist represents the face of a country and the face of an art form. Therefore, they must certainly have a beautiful, flawless, and acceptable face to be accepted by the South Korean society."

Twenty-four-years-old Zahra, in a statement similar to Reyhane's, notes that since Korean companies consider stars to be representatives and embodiments of Korean culture, they place a particular emphasis on the beauty of the stars without exception.

Another reason that Korean film and music companies emphasize the design of beautiful, well-proportioned, and well-dressed stars is the youthful audience's objective view and interests in exciting matters, including fashion and beauty, which can attract more people.

Twenty-years-old Mahdieh mentions in her interview that at a very young age, she became aware of K-drama due to the attractive outfits of the actors in the series "Jewel in the Palace," but when she watched the same series at an older age, she became aware of more abstract elements that she had not noticed during her teenage years due to the dominance of objective views and tangible matters in her mind:

- "What was the first Korean series you watched?

I was very young, and it was when 'Jewel in the Palace' was being aired. That was the first Korean series I watched in my life, and it was the first series I followed completely.

- What was it about that series that attracted you?

I was very young at that time. What attracted me was their very beautiful and luxurious clothing. So the first thing was the color and style of their outfits. After a few years, when I grew older and the series was aired again, I was more attracted to that girl's effort and determination to live as an independent and purposeful young woman."

Saba, 16-years-old, Pooneh, 18-years-old, and Tina, 19-years-old, have shared similar experiences in the K-pop realm, noting that they were initially attracted to the looks and fashion of BTS members and later became drawn to their music:

- "Did their appearance attract you more?

Yes, you could say their songs were appealing, but the first thing that got me to follow them and become a fan was their cute style and looks."

- "Did you get more attracted to their appearance than their music?

Yes. Of course, I liked their songs too, but when I decided to become a fan and follow them, it was mainly their faces and styles that attracted me, and then I got into their music.

- What specific features of their appearance did you like the most?

First, of course, their faces. Namjoon, Taehyung, and Jungkook were very handsome in my opinion. Of course, they all looked good, but these three stood out to me. Then I went to BTS's Instagram and saw some photoshoots of them, and I was like, 'Oh my god, are you kidding me? How have I not known you until now?' I had heard their names before. I had even seen their photos on news pages a few times, but I hadn't paid attention. Yes, I was saying that I saw their photos and videos on Instagram, and I seriously couldn't resist all that beauty. They were so beautiful to me, and I liked everything about them. Then when I heard their voices and songs, I liked them even more. I found their clothing and appearance very interesting."

- "Tina, when you saw BTS at the Grammys, what attracted you the most at first?

At first, it was one of the members' looks. But no, before their looks, it was their style. Their clothing was very appealing to me. Each member wore different things, and it wasn't like they all dressed the same as other bands. At the same time, they maintained a certain cohesion; everyone had their own personal style. I found that some of their styles were very close to my taste. Initially, I thought, 'Wow, their clothes are so good,' and then I noticed their faces and thought, 'Wow, their faces are also really nice.' At first, I was only following them because of one or two members who were good-looking, but then I suddenly found myself completely immersed in it.

- So you were initially attracted to their appearance, not their music, right?

At first, yes."

Diba, 15-years-old and Samaneh, 17-years-old also mentioned in their reports that the attractiveness of the stars' faces was a fundamental factor in their attraction to BTS:

..." At that time, one of the physical characteristics that caught my eye was that they were very colorful. For example, we always see men with natural

hair colors, and we don't see anyone dyeing their hair, but theirs was colorful. Another feature was their eye shapes, which I found attractive. In addition, their clothing, style, and makeup were also appealing to me.

- What was it about BTS's styles that made them seem attractive to you?

Well, if I talk about their faces, I think they have beautiful and unique faces, and their faces have a delicacy that some people like, while others say it looks too feminine. Regarding their clothes, the outfits they wear on stage are very new and interesting to me".

"Well, their clothes were colorful, and their hair was light-colored, and they wore cheerful colors, which attracted me a lot. I paid more attention to that in their posts, and I thought their faces looked cute and adorable (laughs), just like little boys."

The strong emphasis by Big Hit Entertainment on the beauty of the stars has been criticized by some audiences and fans, who have taken issue with this practice. Eighteen-years-old Sofia questions the company's efforts to present its stars as whiter.

"... From their perspective, the first thing is that they should be white. It seems they don't care that we are of this race and have yellow skin. They change the skin color of all idols, whether male or female, in many programs through whitewashing, making them look whiter. Meanwhile, their real photos often look quite different."

In their interviews, Reihaneh, 21, and Fereshteh, 18, have noted the beginning of some taboos being broken in K-pop:

- "You mentioned that idols are gradually starting to talk about self-love and such things. But at the same time, there is pressure on them to always be perfect and without flaws. They adhere to this. Isn't that a contradiction?

The issue is that this intense obsession with beauty even bothers the artists and companies themselves. But it's a matter of supply and demand. The general public wants this appearance and beauty in an exaggerated way. So companies and artists have to follow this trend. On the other hand, when artists who are role models for many people in a country behave this way, it significantly perpetuates this behavior. It's like a cycle where two elements affect each other. So this chain needs to be broken at some point, and especially the new generation of idols should gradually take the lead in

breaking these taboos. Like Jungkook from BTS, he was the one who broke the taboo of having tattoos for artists.

Or the concept from the recent album of the girl group ITZY, which encourages the audience to accept themselves as they are, and even one of its members shared images of herself with her skin in a natural way, with minimal makeup and without shaving her face."

- "There are two things that often happen with Korean idols: the first is strict diets, especially from the trainee period, and the second is the cosmetic surgeries they undergo, right?"

Absolutely right, and this is because an idol who does not meet Korean standards tries to get closer to those standards through surgery or dieting.

- Have there been instances where idols have suffered serious harm over these issues or refused to undergo these procedures and opposed the company?

Well, sometimes companies put so much pressure on their idols that the trainees realize they cannot continue in that company, so they leave, and many have done this. Even after debuting as idols, due to the company's strictness regarding surgeries and diets, they were forced to leave the group or became very unwell, leading them to issue false statements to clear up any confusion among fans so that the idol could focus on themselves, as they were under pressure and needed time to heal before continuing the process.

- In these procedures or diets, were the idols' opinions important, or was it solely the company's demands?

Definitely, all these actions, including plastic surgery or even these diets, were not at the request of the idols; in fact, it was at the company's request because the idol did not meet the company's standards.

- What are these standards like?

Well, the standards in Korea are quite unconventional, and when someone starts to mold themselves according to those standards, it leads to various illnesses. You could say that the physical harm these idols suffer is quite significant, but their standards usually include a small face, slim and Barbie-like body, large or "doll-like" eyes, tall height, and so on.

However, one of the idols progressed according to her own standards, meaning she followed the "Love Yourself" standard and accepted herself as she is, and to some extent, she promoted this. After she spoke out, she said,

‘Okay, I have no problem with this body, and anyone who has a problem, that’s their issue.’ After that, many female idols were inspired by her and did not adopt very strict diets, meaning they said, ‘I am beautiful with this body, so I don’t need to change myself.’ Now, the number of individuals who feel this way has improved significantly compared to five years ago, and there are many idols who do not conform to the Korean idol standards but are satisfied and have no issues."

9-2- Modeling After BTS Stars in Superficial Beauty

"Modeling after BTS stars in superficial beauty" is another important topic that has emerged among BTS fans following Big Hit Entertainment’s (and similar K-pop and K-drama companies’) emphasis on the physical attractiveness of their stars.

In her interview, 20-years-old Mahdieh mentions that her friends have developed a heightened awareness of their bodies due to their engagement with BTS:

- "Mahdieh, don’t you think this kind of behavior has negative effects on those who are fans? That they might overlook ethics and human perfection and only care about their appearance like these companies?"

Look, when you become a fan of a group, a set of their good and bad behaviors influences you. Just as we learn many good things from them, unfortunately, we might also learn bad things. For example, I’ve seen that many of my friends have become very sensitive about their bodies. If they go on a trip and gain two or three kilos, they feel bad and worry a lot. The reason is that they see the flawless bodies of the members and want to be like them. Unfortunately, this does exist."

Samaneh, 17-years-old mentioned undergoing a nose job, lip injections, and skin tightening to resemble BTS stars, while Sahar, 15-years-old talked about her efforts to change her curly hair to straight hair (like the BTS members):

- "What impact has BTS’s focus on appearance had on fans?"

Well, it definitely has an impact. For example, now their photos are on bags, mugs, and even clothes; people order them to be printed, or they often hold mugs with their images. Even kids at school carry empty mugs, and many things have their pictures on them (laughs), or their clothing styles are imitated by fans and others.

- What impact has it had on you?

To be honest, I made some changes to my face that I now regret. For example, I had a nose job to achieve a Korean style, and I spent a lot of money at a beauty center trying to look like them, but it didn't work out. In the end, I got lip injections that aren't very noticeable, but they did have a good effect, and that is that they promoted light makeup, which is good overall.

- So you felt your appearance wasn't good?

Yes, when you see their skin, your confidence drops a bit, thinking your skin is ugly and your nose is big and such things."

"I just recently had my hair keratin-treated; they probably ask me what I did to my curly hair. I did the keratin treatment influenced by Koreans because I had curly hair, and Koreans have straighter hair among them.

Narges, 21-years-old, and Nikoo, 15-years-old, in their interviews, mentioned how they and their friends copy BTS's styles in makeup and clothing:

- "My dear Narges, can you first tell me since what year you became a fan of BTS and what made you turn to them?

Well, I became a fan of theirs in 2013. Their music style and their looks were very similar to my interests. After I got to know them, I copied them a lot—makeup and clothes. I even styled my hair like theirs back then. Short, short. I had completely become like them.

- Why did you want to look like them?

I don't know. I think these things were natural at my age back then. I mean, it was quite common to model oneself after famous people. Many people at that time tried to look like artists like Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez, and Taylor Swift. Since my style was similar to BTS, I took them as my role models."

- "Did you try to imitate BTS's clothing and makeup styles and look like them?

Yes, I really did, because I like their styles, and I personally really like the style of some of the members. For a short period, when I first became a fan, I thought they chose these styles themselves. Later, as I got to know them better and understood more details, I realized that the company tells them what to wear, and they have stylists, and it rarely happens that they can choose what to wear themselves. For example, Jungkook had a style that I really liked. He used to wear hoop hats or his styles were mostly in black,

which I thought was really cool. Now, most of the time, my style is like that too. Or for example, Jimin's style was like this for a while, where he often wore striped clothes or glasses with unique styles.

- Did your friends do the same?

Yes, for example, one of my friends, whom I went out with, had a style similar to Jungkook. He even cut his hair like Jungkook and wore a mask, the same hat, the same earrings. For example, their earrings are among the most important things in their styles because they stand out a lot, and most of my friends and generally most ARMYs have these earrings, and they are known by these names, like Jimin's earrings, J-Hope's earrings. I went to the park with this friend whose style was very similar to Jungkook's, and suddenly someone came up who was also with his friend, and they were excited to see my friend and kept saying how much he looked like Jungkook, and even because of this, they got his number. They were fans of Jungkook and BTS in general.

- In your age group, if someone dresses like BTS and looks like them, do they become popular among their peers?

Yes, very much.

- Do you or your friends imitate them in makeup?

A lot of their makeup is not very noticeable because they try to make their makeup look natural, unless, for example, the lipstick they wear has a bit of a shine, but it's not full makeup. Overall, the world is moving towards natural beauty, but for example, the group Blackpink and their girl groups have more makeup, and I sometimes take ideas from them. Of course, I'm not really into makeup; most of my friends are into these things. For example, in the Blackpink group, one of their members named Jisoo went to her friend who is a makeup artist, and that friend said that now fans come here and say they want Blackpink-style makeup. Or in the group G-idle, there was a member who is no longer part of that group named Soojin, who also had a specific makeup style, and she used to put something sparkly under her eyes, like a beauty mark, and had a special eyeliner, and many of her fans followed that makeup style."

Mohsen, 22, also as an Iranian boy, stated in his interview that he has adopted continuous makeup due to the influence of BTS boys:

- "Has the BTS group influenced your lifestyle?

I'm not a die-hard fan of this group, to be honest, but yes, it has influenced me. I wasn't the type to listen to music on the bus and subway and on the way to university, but now I do. I didn't take care of myself much, but after seeing that even a man can become attractive with makeup, I started to take care of myself. It's not that I wear makeup, but I pay more attention to my appearance than before. In a way, I've become a bit obsessed with attracting others (laughs).

- If possible, please explain more. What do you mean by being obsessed?

I was a bit shy since childhood; if I wanted to talk to the opposite sex, even in my childhood, my hands and feet would shake, and I couldn't. Now in university, I can't connect with girls. I act so awkwardly that no one looks at me, let alone wanting to be friends with me. I think I'm not attractive. I saw a page on Instagram that said attractiveness starts with your clothes. So recently, I've been buying a lot of clothes to at least look more attractive. I was never satisfied and I'm still not satisfied with myself. I think, like Jin with his Korean looks, so many girls are attracted to him and love him; why can't I attract even one person? Of course, I've had a bit of success.

- So, has someone been attracted to you?

Yes, I had low self-esteem and didn't think I would ever be able to enter a relationship with a girl (laughs), but now I have, and as they say, I've made my move...

To always look beautiful, I have to constantly go to the hairdresser and dress up. I've never seen these BTS guys even once with a normal outfit and untouched appearance, can you believe it? Well, this also means extra expenses. The boys just had their makeup reduced, and now this has added to their expenses."

9-3- Modeling after BTS stars in Fashion and Trends

"The modeling after BTS stars in fashion and trends" was another prominent topic mentioned by some of the interviewees.

Sheida, 20, who is an instructor for nearly 200 trainees, commented in her interview regarding this matter:

- "What do you think the level of support for BTS in Iran is right now?

You know, it's incredibly high; I can't go a day without encountering several people who aren't fans of BTS, including my trainees. A very large

percentage of those who come to music are here because of their interest in BTS, and their music is constantly playing in all the cafes. Clothing stores are filled with the types of clothes that BTS wears. The BTS logo is on all the clothes. It's just so much. I can't go to a store in Tehran or Karaj without seeing the BTS logo on clothes, bags, shoes, or socks. When I ask about it, they say they have very high sales. Their clothes are also stylish. I mean, most of the clothes I see are beautiful and attractive. There are very few ugly clothes with the BTS logo. Many people listen to their music. For example, I have marked their songs beautifully on Google and listen to them a lot...

- Do your tranees also wear these types of clothes?

Yes, they all do. For example, all their bags have the BTS logo. Their clothes either have a BTS style or the BTS logo on them."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, notes in her report that she models her clothing after Taehyung, and Elnaz, 12-years-old, also mentions in her interview that she has learned and applied the BTS hairstyle on herself:

- Well, how do they achieve their looks? What do they do about skin color?

They also correct it with surgery and lighten it. Or if someone isn't very yellow or dark, they fix it with Photoshop in the photos. For example, if you look at BTS photos, many of their pictures show their skin color lighter than it actually is.

- Do you have any interest in these cosmetic procedures or have you been encouraged to do them or to look like them?

Not with my face. I'm okay with my appearance. I'm more inspired by their clothing choices. They have very beautiful styles, so I take inspiration from them in a way, especially from Taehyung."

- "What have you done in terms of modeling after BTS?

For example, I'm trying to learn the Korean makeup style, and I've cut my hair short like Koreans. Of course, I decided to cut my hair after watching the Squid Game series because of two of the female actors in that series, and well, my body shape is similar to Koreans; they are slim and tall, and I'm somewhat like that, and I try to maintain that look."

Mahtab, 18-years-old, mentioned in her interview that she cut her hair to resemble BTS members, and Gelareh, 14-years-old, also talked about using the unique fantasy hair colors of BTS for herself:

- "Have you ever modeled after BTS's clothing and makeup?

I think I've modeled a lot. For example, I changed my hairstyle. Before getting to know BTS, my hair wasn't like it is now; it was more curly and long, and now I've cut it short and sometimes dye it. Mostly in a fantasy style. So, I can say yes. It's not a bad thing. I think this change has been positive, and I can say that BTS helped me pay more attention to my appearance, or for a while, I really imitated their style of dressing."

"Even in the early days when I got to know BTS, I found it very strange that their hair colors were sometimes very bright. For example, gold, black, and brown were okay, but Jimin had pink hair, or Taehyung had blue hair; these were a bit strange to me. But later, when I realized that these things are natural and there's nothing wrong with it and that it should be accepted in society, it became normal for me too."

Sheida, 20-years-old, and Mohammad Reza, 21-years-old, also mentioned in their interviews the issue of nail polish or lip gloss or lipstick use among some Iranian boys who are fans of BTS:

- "So, did you think about immigration since you were nine-years-old?

Yes. I thought about it since then. Even before first grade (laughs). But since I got to know them at nine, it became much more serious for me. Another thing that really interested me was their style. For example, the fact that boys dyed their hair or could wear makeup or nail polish. Or they could wear colorful and feminine clothes. This really attracted me.

- Why did it attract you?

Because it was different from what we had learned, that these things are only for girls. It was appealing to me. It was fresh. Of course, now it has become very common. Initially, it was in Korea, and now in Iran, for example, boys are wearing different styles, using nail polish, and lip gloss, and I think it was the K-pop fans who started this trend."

- "What do you think about boys wearing makeup?

In my personal opinion, makeup is not limited to boys or girls; makeup is something for self-expression, to take care of oneself.

- Have you seen boys who wear makeup?

Yes, yes, there are. For example, one of my friends is a boy who doesn't wear makeup, but he uses sunscreen, and since his lips are darker than his face, he puts on a bit of lipstick to match the color of his lips with his face."

Since the boys of BTS have been selected based on physical attractiveness and have followed a strict diet and exercise regimen throughout their training and performances, benefiting extensively from skincare and similar treatments, and having makeup artists and specialists at their service to enhance their attractiveness, they naturally possess a level of appeal that ordinary individuals in society may not have. This can lead to some individuals developing a distorted self-image, which may result in anxiety and depression, extreme dieting, or resorting to plastic surgery to address perceived flaws in their pursuit of beauty.

Narges, 21-years-old, noted in her interview that some individuals who applied to join K-pop groups were rejected due to not having the right body type, leading some to commit suicide:

- "You mentioned that at that time, influenced by your interest in dance and K-pop, you underwent surgery. Given the standards that companies have for being slim, did you also follow a diet?

No, my body was always in shape. Overall, I was skinny and slim, but I always tried to stay slim and not gain weight suddenly. Because being slim is a very important condition, and if you're not, you're basically no different from a piece of trash in K-pop; this issue is very important to them. Many trainees have been rejected because of their weight and body shape, and many have committed suicide because they were rejected due to their appearance."

Pooneh, 18-years-old, and Nastaran, 19-years-old, mentioned in their interviews the cosmetic surgeries of K-pop trainees or stars:

- "You said that people in Korea are very sensitive about the appearance and skin color of idols. So, if someone doesn't have a baby face, are they not accepted and get criticized?

Look, they don't hire anyone who doesn't have a baby face in the companies. They attract boys who have good looks, favorable skin color, and body shape. If they have any flaws, they fix them with diets and a few surgeries. And when girls enter the companies, they completely reshape and rebuild them. I can say that. If you look at the old and current photos of female idols, you'll see how much they differ. Companies place a huge emphasis on appearance. The rate of plastic surgery in Korea is very high because, generally, Koreans don't have beautiful faces. Don't be fooled by how attractive and beautiful the idols are. In reality, very few people in

Korea look like them, which is why the rate of plastic surgery is so high there.

- Well, they fix their faces with surgery. What do they do about skin color?

They also correct it with surgery and lighten it, or if someone is very yellow or dark, they fix it with Photoshop in the photos. For example, if you look at BTS photos, many of their pictures show their skin color lighter than it actually is."

- "Well, two things happen a lot with Korean idols: one is very strict diets, especially during the trainee period, and the other is the cosmetic surgeries they undergo.

Yes.

- Has this made you want to do these things? For example, if you have extra weight, do you want to lose weight like them or consider surgery?

I have extra weight, but it hasn't really affected me. Of course, I'm mentally strong among my friends. These things don't affect me much; I mean, I see it and enjoy it, but it doesn't impact me in that way, and I'm quite confident about my appearance. I might not meet the standards that exist in the world, but I believe that everyone is beautiful in their own way. One of the big messages of K-pop is this. So, no. And about the surgeries you mentioned, it's not like everyone undergoes surgery. Some do, like many Hollywood celebrities or even Iranians. Iranians often get completely reshaped.

Korea's cosmetic surgery is good. They do it well. I don't want to say that getting surgery is bad. But it's not exclusive to K-pop. It exists everywhere. And in my opinion, the prevalence of it in K-pop isn't as high as in other countries, at least in the groups I've seen so far. Many of them have childhood and teenage photos that show they didn't have surgery or had only minor procedures. They are the beautiful Koreans (laughs). Ordinary people don't look like that much. There aren't many of them. The rate of surgery among them is high, and their work is good. I've seen, for example, people from China go to Korea for surgery. Surgery is common among their people. Poor things (laughs), they see all these beautiful people in K-dramas and K-pop, and oh, their TikTokers are also very good. They go and get surgery."

Reihaneh, 21-years-old, emphasized in her interview that when fans compare themselves to stars, this comparison can be problematic for them, as they fail to consider the unique circumstances of the stars (as mentioned), leading to feelings of inadequacy:

"On the other hand, a lot of attention to appearance causes a kind of lack of self-confidence for fans and individuals who don't recognize the unrealistic nature of this exaggerated beauty and don't realize that this beauty is largely due to edits, workouts, harmful diets, surgeries, and various makeup and styling techniques.

So, this unequal comparison can be problematic for the morale of individuals who are generally young and impressionable, and I emphasize again that all of this is due to uncontrolled emotions and the unreasonable judgments of some fans."

Samaneh, 17-years-old, acknowledged in her report that seeing stars diminishes people's self-confidence, and she personally underwent a nose job, gel injections, and similar procedures to address perceived flaws in her appearance:

"... I made some changes to my face that I now regret. For example, I had a nose job to achieve a Korean style, and I spent a lot of money at a beauty center, but it didn't turn out like theirs. In the end, I had a lip injection that isn't very noticeable, but it had a good effect, and it also promoted the idea of light makeup, which is generally good.

- So, did you feel that your appearance wasn't good?

Yes, when you see their skin, your self-confidence drops a bit, thinking that your skin is bad and your nose is big and things like that"

Shadi, 15-years-old, spoke about her feelings of self-loathing:

- How has BTS affected you emotionally?

Um, well, I've become a bit more emotional overall regarding issues. I feel like my patience has decreased, and I get angry quickly. I spend most of my time watching their clips, so I don't have time for family or studying, which stresses me out a bit. I've also become the type of person who says, 'This or that must happen,' or I completely lose interest in things. I've lost my relative perspective on everything, even my own appearance. For example, I say my skin is terrible when I get one or two pimples, or I think my eyes are ugly, even though they don't look like theirs; they have elongated eyes."

Ghazal, 16-years-old, mentioned the harm she experienced from a strict diet she followed:

- "Did you try to diet or exercise to look like the idols physically?

Yes, I did (laughs). I didn't eat anything... You know what happened? Let me say this first. I started learning their dances. Then I would buy clothes

similar to their performance outfits and wear them (laughs). It looked really bad on me; I would watch my videos... Suddenly, I got overwhelmed. I said I couldn't do it anymore. I had to lose weight. I went on a diet. I didn't eat rice at all. I don't eat bread at all. At most, I would eat a few spoonfuls of something during the day, but mostly fruits and tea. I kept that diet for about a month. I lost a lot of weight because I didn't have much to lose. I became what I wanted. I was dancing in the videos, and it didn't look bad. You'd see it and say (laughs), 'Wow, what a thing...' But then I started getting sick repeatedly. My stomach would swell. It was a really bad situation. I couldn't sleep. I went to the doctor and took pills for my stomach pain. Gradually, I increased my food intake because they said I was lacking vitamins and such. I had to eat properly. That's how I gave up on the diet. I think I gained about three or four kilos. But now that I feel better, I want to go to a nutritionist to lose those three or four kilos. But I hope it doesn't end up with me getting sick again."

Narges, 21-years-old, and Masoud, 20-years-old, discussed their experiences with nose jobs, lip fillers, hair dyeing, and similar procedures:

"... I didn't get a response from the company, and I became somewhat disappointed with them. Then I thought to myself, it must be because my appearance doesn't resemble that of female idols or female dancers, or I'm not pretty enough, which is why they didn't respond to me. My body was okay because you need to have a good body for dancing, but at that time, the idea that my skin was dark and I didn't have a pretty face bothered me.

- Of course, you have a beautiful face. Did this perception of yourself lead you to consider surgery to make yourself look like Koreans and Korean idols?

Yes, I thought about it a lot. I said that when I reach the legal age, I would definitely get surgery to become prettier so that I could be accepted more easily as a dancer. But when I reached that age, I actually got my nose done because of this issue. When I reached the legal age during my university entrance exam year, I got my nose done and also put a little filler in my lips. I intended to lighten my skin a few shades, but I didn't get to that point, and I completely set K-pop aside. However, the day I went for my nose surgery, I told my doctor to make my nose look Korean, and he laughed a lot at me."

- "Overall, do you oppose changing your appearance to look like BTS?

Personally, I oppose makeup and cosmetic procedures for boys, but I don't blame anyone who does it. It's their face and body, and they have the right to

change it however they want. Most of my friends who are BTS fans have made incredible changes with nose jobs, cheek fillers, and hair dyeing."

Shabnam, 25-years-old, emphasized that sometimes her friends have taken loans from their fathers for cosmetic surgery or borrowed money from their boyfriends for surgery, highlighting another perspective on the sensitivity and importance of cosmetic surgery among young people:

- "Have you ever thought about cosmetic surgery or weight loss surgery?

To be honest, yes. But both fear and the high costs have prevented this issue from becoming serious for me.

- Has your familiarity with BTS influenced your thoughts about surgery and changing your appearance?

Not BTS, but Korean girls and models have had an influence. Because they are very slim. The clothes they wear look good on slim people, and for example, my younger sister is very slim and wears those kinds of clothes, which makes me feel worse about my body when I can't wear those clothes. On the other hand, boys mostly prefer slim and fit girls. This puts pressure on people to lose weight and consider nose jobs, lip fillers, and such.

- But you said you've accepted your body now?

Yes, well. If I hadn't accepted it, I would have undergone surgery. I have friends who force their fathers to take loans to pay for their surgeries or have their boyfriends pay for their surgeries to look the way they think is more appealing."

10- Family Effects

In a brief examination of the family effects of the K-pop group BTS, it is observed that interviewed fans primarily emphasize the issue of "being cared for by the stars" and the feeling of "being a family" with the stars. They mention the significant role of BTS in providing psychological support for themselves. Some have even stated that the BTS boys have effectively filled the "family" void for them by engaging in their struggles and family issues, thus becoming a support system for fans facing numerous psychological challenges. However, the research participants also noted that their engagement with various psychological, social, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, and similar policies has sometimes "raised concerns for the fans' families." Parents of fans express negative and opposing views regarding the members' suggested policies towards their children, stating that "these singers do not have a proper appearance," "they seem effeminate" and "homosexual," and that "they have influenced their child to the point of wanting to migrate to Korea." As a result, the unresolved worries and anxieties of the parents (or the spouse of the fan) have deepened the previously mentioned issues, confronting the family structure with "damage."

The following headings will be discussed in detail.

10-1- Feeling of being a Family with the Stars

"When I, as a young person, see that I don't receive the level of love or validation from my family, which usually happens due to generational differences, I naturally look for a place and people who will validate me. BTS does this. They respect your opinions, give you love, validate you, and say if you make a mistake, it's okay; if you fall, it's okay. They say nothing is without a solution, and there is a way for everything" (Maryam, 20-years-old).

Some interviewed fans refer to statements made by BTS members, such as "If no one in this world is your supporter, we are behind you" and "When you are alone and without support, know that someone in Seoul is thinking of you." They view them as pure-hearted individuals who care for their fans. In difficult family situations where there is often a disconnect between children and parents, BTS members effectively take the place of the unsupportive family for these fans, filling the void left by their families.

Kowsar, 25, in her interview, emphasizes that the stars care for their fans and confirms that BTS members become a substitute for her family, addressing her deficiencies:

"... and another thing is that there has always been a connection between ARMY and BTS where ARMY always felt that BTS was taking care of them.

- How did you feel this support?

When something happened, or similar events occurred, BTS conveyed through their song lyrics or certain elements in their music videos that they knew what was going on and sent a caring message in their lyrics, saying, 'Yes, we are here, we are taking care of you, we are by your side.' Another thing was that BTS knew that a large number of their fans returned to life because of them, and I can say that a very high percentage, more than half of BTS fans, felt that they found a much better feeling about themselves because of this album. The album was titled 'Love Yourself.' Love yourself as you are; there were three albums in the 'Love Yourself' series. This series took almost two years. The entire focus of this album was to love yourself just as you are, and I saw many examples of this, where someone would say, 'I really wanted to end everything and kill myself, but after listening to this album, I changed my mind.

- Uh-huh.

And it wasn't just that someone didn't kill themselves because of their attachment to the artist; it was because that artist mattered so much to them that they released three albums in a row just to instill this good feeling or to take care of them.

Well, everyone knows that money is always a factor, and all artists are making money. But at least BTS, while making money from their fans, also tried to take care of them. You know?

- Uh-huh.

And this is something that a lot of people have experienced, including myself. When I was a teenager, if it weren't for BTS, even with this 'Love Yourself' album, if BTS hadn't released this album, I would never have accepted myself as I am. Because it felt like I needed someone I loved to tell me this. And its impact was much greater than hundreds of books I could read that would keep telling me...

- Did this group somehow replace the family you felt you were lacking?

Definitely, although for me, they were more like a close friend I didn't have. But for many, yes, they were a family substitute. A substitute for a place that you could even call home. Then, for example, the members of that family are like fans who love that group just like you do. They love the same thing you love."

Shabnam, 25-years-old, also sees the BTS boys as those who give their fans a sense of belonging, reporting a feeling of being family with them: "... and one of the things that is very important for fans is the unity of the group. They absolutely do not want the group to break up.

- "What do you think is the reason that the group's cohesion is so important to the fans?

Well, there is really a strong sense of closeness. It's like being a family. It's something that keeps all these people together. A shared interest. Something that gives us, as their fans, a sense of belonging."

The statements of the interviewed fans indicate that the fewer family problems the fans have, the less they seek refuge in the stars. Conversely, the more serious their family issues are, the more they embrace the scenario of BTS as a substitute family. Sana, 16-years-old, Sahar, 15-years-old, and Narges, 21-years-old, reflect examples of "mild," "moderate," and "severe" attachment to BTS:

- "Why do you like Jimin? As a friend, an actor, or a spouse?

Not as a spouse, not as a friend, and not as an actor, but as a member of my family.

- What is his role in this family?

A supporter.

- How does Jimin support you?

Emotional support. When I'm upset, I talk to his picture and share my feelings.

- Can't you talk to your family about everything that you rely on Jimin for?

No, I can't talk to my family about everything. No one knew about my friendship; sometimes when I had a fight with Sajjad, I would talk to Jimin's picture.

- Could he respond to you?

No way, do you think I'm crazy? (laughs).

- No, I mean, when he can't answer you, how can he be your emotional support?

For two reasons: First, I want someone who doesn't give advice and doesn't talk at all, and maybe if I really got into a relationship with Jimin, I would be put off because I don't know what kind of person he is in a relationship. Second, in my imagination, Jimin gives me the answer I want to hear.

- Do you get a good feeling from Jimin?

Yes, I do."

"One of the things K-pop has is its cute atmosphere. Now, everywhere in the world has gone dark and cool, and cuteness isn't emphasized much, but K-pop has shown that being colorful, happy, and cute is also interesting. Especially in Iran, where dancing is banned and only men can be singers. Finally, K-pop shows that women can also be singers, dancing is free, and there are no restrictions in this regard, which provides more opportunities for the advancement and globalization of Korean culture.

Even with their calm songs, BTS designs a dance. The things I know about K-pop, like the hidden messages in their songs, made me feel for a while that it was better not to listen to their songs too much and to distance myself, but then I realized it didn't have a negative impact on my life, and now I've gotten used to the K-pop atmosphere and I love them. In a way, I consider them my second family; of course, this isn't very good, but that's how I feel.

- What do you think has made you consider K-pop and BTS as your second family?

Well, K-pop gives me a sense of security. When I'm not feeling well, I feel like there's a safe world I can temporarily enter, so I listen to their songs, and when I watch their performances and music videos, I feel calm and a sense of excitement that allows me to face my problems again. It's a feeling that they are supporting me and looking out for me."

- "After you felt you were interested in them, what did you do?

I remember at that time I covered my entire room with BTS posters. I was a teenage girl who would come home from school and be alone until night. I was alone, and since my social connections weren't good, I didn't have friends. I was struggling with my teenage problems. I was depressed; my parents weren't there with me. So I tried to fill those voids in my life

somehow. If you had asked me this question a few years ago, I would have never said these things. I thought I was just so attached to them because of my interest. But now I know that a part of that interest and excess was due to my problems. BTS took me away from my problems, and I was sinking deeper into it every day.

- What voids did you have that BTS filled for you?

Um, many things. I was alone; they became my friends. I didn't receive affection from anyone; they showed me love with the words they said to ARMYs. I actually didn't have a family; BTS members became my family. Every day when my life was hard, I would turn to them, and they would fill my thoughts. It felt like I distanced myself from everything and threw myself into their arms."

Some BTS fans argue that the members of the group, especially during their time together, have had close and intimate relationships with each other, leading them to conclude that they can also experience similar relationships with other BTS fans.

Negin, 13-years-old, reports in her interview that the members of BTS are like a family to each other and care for one another, while Rayhaneh, 17-years-old, shares in her interview that she has established close and intimate relationships with her followers (who are related to BTS):

"... then the BTS run has funny things, like a series, each episode being about fifteen minutes long, it's very funny, and there's a competition among the seven members.

- What message is in that competition?

Well, from this BTS run, we understood how comfortable the members are with each other, how much they care for each other, how they behave with one another, and pay attention to each other's needs, love each other from the bottom of their hearts, and are willing to sacrifice their lives for each other."

"One thing is that I am very close with the kids who are my followers. I am very close to them, and we talk about everything together. If something happens, they come and tell me, and I'm really happy about it. Even though there might be only a few of them, we are together, supporting each other, and it has really become a family for us. The love we have for each other is strong. Even though the distances are far, that feeling and intimacy are much greater than with someone we would want to be next to and talk to. These days, I go to school, and it might not happen very often that I want to be

really close with the kids because I know their friendships are only for school. For example, we have been together for about three years, and during those three years, I don't hear from anyone during the summers, but during school, they all call me to ask about something. But there, we try to be together and help each other, and we are there for each other in problems. I mean, I have people who have been with me since the beginning of my page until now. Whatever happens, we talk about it together, and I usually don't tell anyone when something happens, but I definitely tell my kids in my stories. I'm even very close with two members of my page, and with one of them, our relationship has even become familial. I don't know how this feeling came about, but it's really a strong feeling. Even Taehyung said that we, meaning ARMY and BTS, no matter how much we want to be apart, there's a purple thread that gets stronger every minute, and no matter what happens, this bond not only doesn't loosen but actually gets stronger.

- So, through BTS, you've created a connection with your followers who are also BTS fans, and this friendship is even closer and more intimate than with people who are physically present with you.

Yes, exactly."

10-2- Emergence of Family Conflicts Due to Fandom of BTS

"... BTS taught me something, which is to come out from under my parents' flag.

- Can you explain more about how they made you realize this and how you came to this conclusion?

BTS encourages its fans to fight for their desires and dreams, regardless of what family they come from, who their mom or dad is; what matters is who you are, what you want, where you stand in this world, and what you want from life" (Zahra, 16-years-old).

An examination of the statements provided by the interviewed fans indicates that a few families, when confronted with BTS, did not see it as a threat and tried to manage their child's engagement with the group in a way that allowed them to benefit from its positive attributes. However, in most cases, the presence of BTS in Iranian families has become problematic, leading to "minor," "moderate," and "severe" conflicts between children and their parents (and in rare cases, between spouses).

Diba and Razieh, both 15-years-old, in their interviews, present examples of parents who, when faced with their child's fandom for BTS, have tried to rationally explain their child's interest in the group without outright denying or dismissing it:

- "Based on what you said, your mother is aware that you are a fan of BTS. What was your mother's or even your father's reaction when they found out you were a fan of this group?"

I can't say they had a good reaction, nor can I say they had a bad one. From the very beginning, I told my mom everything, like how beautiful they are and that I like them. My mom wasn't the type to say, 'Oh no! Why are you following them?' but sometimes she would say not to waste my time on these things and would try to convince me to some extent.

Overall, my mom wasn't the type to hit me over the head with the idea of who they are and those kinds of comments, because most Iranian families have the opinion that 'Koreans look like girls' and 'What do they have that you are following them?' and 'What do you gain from following them?'

My mom tried to tell me not to waste too much time following these people because they also reached their current status through hard work and effort, and if I want to be successful like BTS, I have to work hard too... .

- Diba, my dear, have you ever wanted to buy BTS merchandise like albums and such?

Yes. I actually really wanted to buy things like the ARMY bomb (BTS light stick), but I thought to myself that I wasn't going to any concerts, so whenever I want to go to a concert, I will buy it then, but that day never comes (laughs). For a while, I was really into wanting an album, and I told my mom to order it, but after a while, I changed my mind. Although I'm not that regretful now, sometimes I still want to buy it, but it kind of fades away and the intensity decreases.

- What motivated you to want to buy an album or light stick so much?

You know, I really didn't think that buying these things would have an impact on my life, but sometimes you just want to buy something. For example, you might buy a pretty notebook but never use it, and the reason you want to buy it is because of its beauty and appeal.

Well, there are many people who don't buy albums and such, but in the album, there are some accessories like photos and CDs of the songs, and I

wanted to have those things, but if I don't have them, it doesn't really affect me much."

In some cases, the interviewed individuals acknowledged minor conflicts related to their engagement with BTS and the concerns this raised among their parents. Rayhaneh, 15-years-old, expressed in her interview:

- "You mentioned that you intend to learn Korean; have you made any efforts for it yet?

For now, I just installed an app on my phone that teaches Korean. I really want to take a class, but my mom keeps insisting that English is better and more useful.

- Well, do you think English is more useful or Korean?

If I want to go to Korea, obviously Korean. This way, I can also talk to BTS."

Fariba, 46-years-old, who has also become a fan of BTS due to her daughter, mentioned the relatively "minor" issues that her daughter's engagement with BTS has created within the family:

- "You seemed worried, right?

Yes, I'm a bit worried now. I wonder if I'm allowing my daughter to get too involved with BTS. Recently, my daughter doesn't spend as much time with me as before; she's very absorbed in herself. When I ask her why she doesn't pay attention to me anymore, she replies that she does, and I just think she doesn't.

- So, you mean that because she's busy with BTS, she doesn't pay attention to you?

It really worries me that she's so immersed in BTS that she neglects many of her responsibilities. It's true that BTS has had a positive impact on her, but this laziness is strange.

- If possible, can you give a few examples of her laziness and how it relates to BTS?

First, I should say that since she got to know BTS, her behavior has changed, and she procrastinates on her tasks. For example, she says she'll do something, but she doesn't do it or doesn't do it on time, which makes me angry. She doesn't clean her room, doesn't vacuum, doesn't organize her

closet, and even her brushing teeth and showering get delayed or don't happen because of BTS. I can firmly say it's because of BTS.

- What reasons do you have to show that these behaviors are related to BTS? There could be various reasons for a teenager to exhibit such behaviors besides BTS. You must have strong reasons to make such a claim!

She's my child; I raised her, and I know her character. When she gets absorbed in something, she forgets that she has other important tasks to do. When she gets immersed in BTS, she forgets her important responsibilities. No matter how much I remind her, 'Daughter, you have this task left,' she says, 'Okay, Mom, I'll finish it now, and then I'll come and do it.' I tell myself to wait until she comes to do it. I've seen her secretly listening to BTS songs under the blanket late at night and chatting quietly!

- So, because your daughter spends a lot of time on BTS, she neglects important tasks she needs to do?

Yes, she chats a lot.

- Well, is this chatting related to BTS?

Yes, it is related to BTS because she chats with her friends about BTS in their group. As long as her dad is awake, she chats in front of us, and when her dad sleeps, she chats secretly in her room under the blanket, but she is afraid her dad will wake up and come to see. She is very cautious of her dad. A few times, when I went to grab something from her room, I accidentally noticed. It's strange that her brother, who argues with her, has never mentioned that she chats late at night since they both sleep in the same room.

- Are there people who don't connect with any of BTS's songs?

My husband can't, because I think he doesn't have good taste; otherwise, he should like at least one of these songs. I really dislike that he mocks everything my daughter and I like. My son also doesn't like BTS, just like his dad.

- Why don't your husband and son become interested in BTS?

Because they think a song should have meaning from the first line to the last line, but most BTS songs repeat a few meaningful sentences. For example, my son goes to see the translation of the song "Mic Drop" on a website, and then he says, 'What is this?' Well, obviously, if you translate a foreign song into Persian, it won't have rhyme and meter.

- So, does everyone have to like BTS's songs?

I didn't say everyone has to like all their songs, but with so many songs, how can you not like even one? In my opinion, that shows a lack of taste in a person.

- Has this disagreement about BTS's songs ever caused problems in your family relationships?

What can I say about problems? We always have them. My son and daughter argue a lot, just like my husband and I do. During trips, there's always a fight over which songs to put on the flash drive. My daughter and I definitely want BTS songs on the flash drive, while they say it ruins our mood. Recently, I've come to the conclusion that my son really hates BTS. Just a few days ago, when we were talking about BTS, he said something that made me think a lot.

- Has there been any instance where your daughter reacted strongly because of BTS, like getting angry or upset?

It has happened many times, especially if her brother says something bad about BTS; they argue a lot. Their fights aren't physical; they mostly insult each other. For example, her brother is very interested in Real Madrid, and my daughter mocks her brother's favorite team."

In some cases, the interaction between children and parents (or spouses) due to engagement with BTS has led to more serious issues. Instances such as "transferring frustrations from interactions with other K-pop fans to the home," "the spouse's discomfort with the wife's excessive time spent on BTS," "secretly tattooing inspired by the group," "the child getting beaten by the father for dyeing their hair in a fantasy color," and similar issues have been raised with a "moderate" intensity within the family between fans and non-fans

Narges, 21-years-old, Shirin, 22-years-old, Fariba, 46-years-old, and Mahtab, 18-years-old, reported examples of moderate conflicts that arose within their families in their interviews as follows:

"The Twitter space is a very free and unlimited space where anyone can say whatever they want. They easily insulted each other. There were fights. Supporters of different groups would come and clash with each other. They would argue about everything, and I, being a person, naturally get influenced by the atmosphere. After a while, I got caught up in these fights and events. You probably noticed that I was an extremist supporter. At one point, I thought of Yungi as belonging only to me. Just imagine with such a background, I went into a Twitter space that was filled with so much extremism.

During that time on Twitter, I was very troubled. I mean, maybe one of the reasons my interest in BTS decreased was this Twitter space, which was no different from a zoo. Then my biggest mistake was that I went on Twitter and made friends with a group that was very toxic and extreme. This group was among the most extreme on Twitter. They were extremely biased and illogical. Like a blind person who accepts nothing but what they want. Day and night, they would insult artists other than BTS and considered no one else worthy of success and progress. I became more biased by going on Twitter. I lost a bit of logic too. It was enough for someone to say there is an eyebrow above the boys of BTS. I would destroy that person. Now, this was in the virtual world. This aggression and bias reached my real life, to the point that I was constantly nervous at school and home. I was always arguing with my mom; my little sister had just been born, she would cry, and I would get angry. I had become like a wild animal. Those were really terrible days."

- "Have you ever thought about immigrating to Korea?"

Yes, I have thought a lot about it and I would love to live there, but for some reasons, I can't.

- If it's possible for you, could you tell me the reason?

Oh, yes, I am married, and my husband is absolutely against immigration and even traveling to Korea.

- Did your husband know about BTS before you got married?

No, he had no idea, and I didn't tell him before marriage that I was a BTS fan, and his ignorance about my fandom caused him some distress.

- Why didn't you tell your husband that you are a BTS fan?

I loved my husband a lot and was afraid that if he found out I was a BTS fan, he would reconsider his marriage proposal. That scared me.

- How did your husband find out after marriage that you are a BTS fan?

I have two fan pages that I work on day and night to increase my followers. My second fan page is about BTS, and when he saw my fan page about BTS, he realized I was a fan. At first, he didn't mind, but later he became sensitive about it.

- Did you try to introduce him to BTS?

Yes, I tried a lot, but I was unsuccessful. He didn't like the group BTS.

- Why doesn't he like them?

He says they are a bunch of spoiled boys and effeminate. Moreover, he is against the idea of gender segregation in clothing and makeup and says, what does it mean for a man to wear makeup? He is against men's makeup.

- Do you think the reason for hiding your fandom for BTS was the relative notoriety of this group among people?

Honestly, that's the only reason. With the accusations and rumors that are said behind BTS, one is afraid to openly support this group. Of course, I know this is a false accusation from BTS's enemies, and the group is valuable; otherwise, it wouldn't have so many fans worldwide. These individuals have worked hard to get to this point and have sacrificed many of their basic desires for the group, always thinking about their fans and their happiness. They endure hardships themselves but don't want their fans to suffer. This group truly deserves our support and fandom.

- Does managing two fan pages affect your family life?

Honestly, I run out of time and sacrifice my sleep to take care of and supervise my fan pages more because my first priority is BTS, and this worries my husband that it might affect my health. That's why he has grown to hate BTS more...

- In the polls you conduct on your fan pages, what issues do you ask about?

Please give an example. For example, I often ask questions about the group that come to my mind in the BTS fan page as polls and ask for followers' opinions. For instance, once I asked what feelings BTS gives you? Everyone gave a different answer. One said: I can't live without BTS, another said: BTS brought back my joy and youthful vitality, another wrote: BTS is my love. They taught me self-love, another wrote: I always feel good with BTS, another wrote: BTS taught me to be goal-oriented and strive to achieve my goals, and another wrote: Before BTS, I was depressed and isolated, but now I am not only not depressed, I have become the happiest person and very social, and I always want my surroundings to be lively

- In the opinions presented, do you have any negative comments as well?

No, very few.

- Can you give a few examples of negative comments?

Oh, yes, for example, one person said: the members of BTS are arrogant and self-satisfied, and another said: I can't stand their makeup. A man shouldn't wear makeup, and some other opposing remarks.

- How do other fans react to seeing opposing comments?

(She laughs loudly) These oppositions start a war and lead to ugly and vulgar comments directed at fans with opposing views in the group, and the number of comments becomes so overwhelming that it becomes tedious. Sometimes fans deliberately write opposing comments to initiate an onslaught of comments and have a lot of fun with it.

- Don't you run out of time to respond to and read all these comments?

Honestly, I run out of time and sacrifice my sleep, but I read all the comments and prepare new questions for future polls, and one of the disagreements my husband has with me is about my late-night sleeping. Suddenly at three in the morning, he would wake up, see that I was still awake and writing comments on my phone, and he would get angry and take my phone away and turn it off. In short, reading the comments was so interesting and engaging for me that I couldn't leave any of them unread."

- "Have you ever had cosmetic surgery like the idols?

Oh, yes, I had my nose done, I got lip fillers, and I had braces on my teeth.

- Did your husband have a problem with these cosmetic surgeries?

Yes, he had a big problem; he knew I was changing myself to look like the idols, so he was always upset with me. Whatever I did, he saw it through the lens of BTS. For me, as a BTS fan, it's a very difficult question. I believe anyone who is a BTS fan shouldn't get married. Because marriage brings dependency and necessitates giving up certain things to maintain the relationship, which is far from the freedom one has before marriage"

Mahtab, 18-years-old, and Fariba, 46-years-old, mentioned similar conflicts in their interviews as follows:

- "Have you done anything to look attractive like the idols because of their appearance?

Um... I don't think it was like I said, wow, for example, Taehyung is so handsome, so I should go get my nose done. On the other hand, I don't think it's right to say that I haven't done anything and haven't been influenced by them in this regard. So I can say it wasn't very conscious. For example, I wanted to get a tattoo a few months ago, and I did, but I didn't inform my family because, as you know, Iranian families are like that. Eventually, my mom found out and caused a commotion. Whatever I do that goes against my family's beliefs, they think it's because of BTS's influence. It's like if

you're a BTS fan, you're more under scrutiny both in society and in your own family. There is a negative perception sometimes, and my mom is the peak of this, saying things like, 'Our daughter is lost!'

"Jin had dyed his hair blue, and it looked very attractive, and my daughter wanted to dye her hair blue for a while, and she even got beaten by her dad over this issue. As a result, I think both the company and the idols want this attractiveness to increase."

Some of the conflicts that arise between children and parents (or between spouses) can be so 'intense' that they challenge the family and raise the possibility of fundamental damage to the family's functioning. For example, a child who wants to go to Korea due to their fandom of BTS or someone who is influenced by BTS to pursue cosmetic surgery, which the family sees as unnecessary and harmful, are among these cases.

Other families, observing the appearances of BTS members, have become opposed to them, believing that their child, due to continued engagement with them, will become a careless and unruly individual like them. Similarly, some families, upon learning about BTS's slogans such as gender-neutrality in love, makeup, and clothing, evaluate them as a group supportive of homosexuality and, in an effort to prevent their child from becoming homosexual, seek to limit or cut off their relationship with BTS.

Samaneh, 17-years-old, and Sheida, 20-years-old, in their separate interviews, mentioned conflicts such as undergoing cosmetic surgery according to BTS's standards or attempting to immigrate to Korea to be closer to the BTS boys, as follows:

- "You said imitation is possible too?"

Yes, I am one of those who said I did things to my face and now I regret it because I spent a lot of money and in the end, I didn't get results, and my appearance wasn't even that problematic and didn't change much.

- Did you have the surgery at this age?

They wouldn't do it; we have a family doctor who did it, otherwise, outside doctors wouldn't accept it at this age.

- What was your family's stance on this?

We had a lot of arguments, don't ask (laughs), especially my dad; he was completely against it, but after I insisted a lot, he agreed.

- Why do you think things like nail polish and dyeing boys' hair are good?

Because before these events, no one had the right to choose. For example, a boy who wanted to dance couldn't or didn't dare to pursue it. But now it's not like that anymore. People have the right to choose, and this choice is based not on their gender but on their interests, and no one is embarrassed about what they like or who they are. That's what I find beautiful. For example, BTS did this in Korea, or Lady Gaga raised the LGBTQ flag and supported them. Of course, families are sensitive about these issues. For instance, I have students who are nine or twelve-years-old and are in love with BTS, but their families are upset and say their style and mannerisms are becoming like them, and they don't like it.

Some kids have also thought about immigrating to Korea, which causes problems with their families, as the families do not allow it or generally do not like the idea, or they cannot take such a risk of sending their children to a foreign place at such a young age, especially since there are strict laws and not much information about it. Many who do apply say that they are very strict, and it's not easy for anyone to get accepted to go."

In some cases, families perceive their child's adherence to BTS members, whose values do not align with their local culture, as dangerous, viewing their continued fandom as a sign of their child becoming careless and unrestrained.

Fariba, 46-years-old, Sheida, 20-years-old, and Sahar, 15-years-old, reflected evidence of such serious conflicts in their interviews as follows:

- "Has it ever happened that you yourself have become angry or upset because of BTS?

Most of the arguments between my husband and me are about the kids, and one of our main disputes is because he says I give her too much freedom.

- You mean your daughter?

Yes.

- Why does he say that?

Because he thinks that role models like BTS make the child unrestrained."

- "Can you tell me more about the details of the changes in your friends and students influenced by BTS?

Look, for example, most of them come from well-off families, and their parents are very formal and classy. But they themselves are all BTS fans and are into this style, or for example, the way they do their makeup and hair color, and they don't want to conform to gender norms. Families have two

types of reactions to them. Some are very supportive and encourage them, saying what a cool group it is, but on the other hand, some feel that their child is getting lost and, as they say, is becoming more deviant, spending all their time and energy on BTS and constantly being on fan pages and fighting with others."

"My mom says I know what they are saying and what they are promoting, so I don't want you to be a fan of them and be in that space. Every time I explain to her that these things are not in their control and are forced by the company, but she doesn't accept it and says we parents have to save our children somehow."

The makeup and clothing of BTS members, which sometimes leans towards feminine styles, creates a significant sense of danger in some families:

- "What features of BTS are incompatible with your parents' beliefs?

The fact that they wear makeup, dye their hair, dance, or their clothing style is different from ours. The main reason my mom says they look like girls is because of their makeup, as she thinks makeup doesn't even suit girls, let alone boys.

- How does your parents' attitude towards BTS make you feel?

It feels really bad because when someone, especially your mother or family, insults you, it doesn't feel good, and you feel empty." (Sarina, 13-years-old).

- "How about your family? Do they have a problem with you?

My family is a bit religious, and they are not okay with it, and on the other hand, they are very sensitive about academic issues, and we always argue (laughs), and they say, I say, and they say to close the fan page and that I have studies and exams... I oppose it, and it just goes on like that (laughs).

- Are they already talking about university entrance exams?

Yes, they are saying it's exactly three years away, but they say these three years are important for you.

- So they don't have a problem with BTS itself?

Well, yes, they do have a problem with that too. They say they dress like girls, and what kind of appearance is that, and it has a bad influence on you." (Samaneh, 17-years-old).

Some parents, in response to slogans such as gender-neutrality in love promoted by the group members, evaluate the group members as individuals who support

homosexuality and, in an effort to prevent their child from interacting with such individuals, restrict their child's engagement with BTS, leading to severe conflicts between parents and their children.

- "What does BTS promote that worries your parents?

Homosexuality. Although BTS doesn't promote homosexuality much, the groups under YG Company promote it more, but my mom thinks that because of their looks, especially Jimin's somewhat feminine appearance, it indicates their homosexuality, and they are constantly showing this, while this style is normal in Korea and doesn't necessarily indicate that. They want to show that anyone can dress however they like." (Sahar, 15-years-old).

- "Given the sexual orientations you mentioned, do you have a problem with homosexuality?

No, I don't have a problem.

- Have you ever told this to your friends or family?

My friends and I have no problem, and of course, my sister, but I think my parents would have a problem, especially my mom.

- So your mom strongly opposes this issue?

Well, my mom said that if you have such an orientation, it's better to leave this country first because they can't accept such a thing here, and she said if I really have an attraction to the same sex, I should live separately from my parents." (Elnaz, 12-years-old).

10-3- Damage to Family

Some interviewed fans have mentioned the serious consequences of conflicts arising from their engagement with the BTS group and their families (or spouses). These consequences include: "divorcing a spouse to be with a favorite star," "threatening to commit suicide to go to Korea," "the possibility of killing a spouse who secretly expressed their desire to be with their favorite star in a story posted online," and similar issues.

Rokhsareh, 16-years-old, mentions a woman who divorced her husband to marry her favorite star:

- "Why did Taehyung say not to consider him as your husband, you will find someone better?

ARMYs think they can't find anyone better than him as a husband. There has even been an ARMY who divorced her husband because of BTS, which is why he said don't choose me as your husband; someone better will definitely come into your life, I'm not the best.

- Can you give examples of those who have divorced?

I don't know their names or which country they are from, but they post on Twitter.

- How did they divorce their spouses, and what do they say about why they divorced?

Yes. Sometimes, some of those who divorced, those men came to sing songs for BTS, for example, singing an English song, and the translation would be that I wish I were like Jungkook, Jungkook is the best, my wife divorced me because of Jungkook. This kind of news went viral."

Ehsan, 17-years-old, recalls his sister's challenges with the family, noting that the parents agreed to her immigration to Korea after she threatened to commit suicide:

- "Ehsan, can I ask why your sister chose Korea for immigration?

My sister was a devoted BTS fan. She watched Korean movies and music videos day and night, and her role model in life was RM. When she couldn't pass the national university entrance exam for two consecutive years, she decided to immigrate to Korea for both education and living. BTS had influenced her to believe that Korea was a good place for studying and living. Previously, one of her classmates had gone to Korea and had a place to stay and had become familiar with the people and culture there. That's how my sister decided to go to her friend in Korea, who could guide her.

- Did your family oppose your sister going to Korea?

They opposed it a lot. My mom cried day and night and tried for two or three months to dissuade her, but it was useless. She had made up her mind. When my dad saw that my sister wouldn't be dissuaded in any way, we had some savings; we wanted to change our house and buy a bigger one with better facilities. We gave her our savings, and she got a student visa and left. It's been about two years since she left, and she hasn't come back yet.

- Why didn't they try to dissuade her?

My parents tried very hard to dissuade my sister from going to Korea, but she said, if you stop me from going, I will commit suicide. That's when my dad got scared and even helped her get a visa to go.

- What is she doing there now?

She is continuing her studies in fashion design and also working at a fashion show center. My dad sends her money monthly to help with her expenses.

- Are you sad about your sister leaving?

Very much (tears welling in his eyes).

- If the conditions were right for you, would you immigrate to Korea?

No, it's impossible; I won't leave my parents alone, and I constantly ask my sister to come back after finishing her studies.

- Are you generally against immigration?

Yes, having witnessed my parents' heartbreak after my sister's immigration, I am completely against it. Every field of study we want is available in our own country, and we can continue our education here. We just need to work hard to pass the entrance exam.

- Why didn't you dissuade your sister from immigrating to Korea?

The truth is, my sister loved Korea very excessively and had become very irrational. It was impossible to talk to her. She only thought about going. Otherwise, if we pressured her not to go, she might have committed suicide. That's why my dad even helped her financially and sent her to Korea. Poor dad aged quickly after my sister left, and my mom has become depressed and cries all the time."

Sheida, 20-years-old, in her interview, reports on another fan of BTS who attempted suicide in response to her family's opposition to her immigration to Korea:

- "At one point in the interview, you mentioned that after the news of one of EXO's members getting married, several of their fans committed suicide or attempted suicide. Is there any official news about this? Or if you know someone among your friends or acquaintances who has experienced this, do you have more information about it?

I had heard that some people abroad committed suicide. But among my friends and acquaintances, many were upset, but it wasn't to that extent.

However, I remember a girl a few months ago in Tehran who attempted suicide because her parents opposed her decision to immigrate to Korea.

- Did you know her?

No. I only heard about it from my friends or my students. Fortunately, she was saved, and thank God she didn't die. But she had taken pills, and they got her to the hospital in time."

Shirin, 22-years-old, who has recently married, reports on her extensive activity in the virtual space, to the point that her late-night awakenings have made her husband complain about her. Additionally, Shirin mentions that for her followers, she expresses her romantic wishes with one of the BTS stars through a story she writes, indirectly putting herself at risk of her husband discovering the discussions in the virtual space, which could have consequences ranging from divorce to the possibility of being killed by a jealous husband:

- "Shirin, do you write fictional stories about the idols on your fan page?

Oh, yes, I write fictional stories that don't harm the idols.

- Can you give an example?

Yes, for example, last night I dreamed that I had traveled to Korea, wearing a white t-shirt and white cotton pants, and I had my bangs and short hair styled to one side. My travel gear was in a backpack, and when I got off the plane, I was waiting at the airport for RM to come and pick me up. No matter how long I waited, it was useless; there was no sign of RM, and I was here, a stranger, not knowing anyone. Suddenly, someone called me. When I turned towards the voice, I saw Jimin. He said that something had come up with RM, and he couldn't come to the airport to pick me up, so he sent me. I was happy to see Jimin, and we hugged, and I went with him to my hotel. I thanked him and, in my Iranian way, gave him a souvenir, and I spent that night resting in the hotel room. The next morning, I woke up to the sound of knocking on the door, and when I opened it, RM appeared at the door. I panicked and threw myself into his arms, and suddenly I woke up.

- What do your followers think about your fictional stories?

They really like them and keep asking me to continue the story or say they want more stories, and I have dedicated some days of the week to writing fictional stories

By examining the effects of the BTS group in various psychological, social, cultural, educational, ethical-belief, economic-political, artistic, aesthetic, and

familial dimensions on the fans of this group, it becomes clear that the phenomenon of the Korean wave, particularly the BTS K-pop group, are significant and impactful topics that should not be overlooked by parents, educational authorities, and cultural leaders in society.