Community, Soul-Searching and Pleasure: The Significance

of Real Person Fanfiction in BTS Fandom

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> *"Tell me your story. I want to hear your voice, and I want to hear your conviction."*
> — *Kim Nam-Joon, Remarks at the UN General Assembly*

Abstract

Fanfiction is a kind of literature that is strikingly difficult to define. A genre and medium all at once, it brings fans together in community around their favorite pieces of media ranging from television programs to boy bands. Real Person Fanfiction is a subset of this phenomenon, utilizing real people (frequently celebrities) and their public lives as source text rather than fictional characters or works. With an ongoing source text and frequently vibrant digital fandoms, Real Person Fanfiction serves a critical role in fandoms centered about real people. In an attempt to unravel the intertextual phenomena that unite archives of Real Person Fanfiction and determine the role fic plays in fandom, I address the following question in this thesis: Focusing on fanfiction centered about Korean pop group BTS, how are character archetypes produced and maintained in fanfiction and what cultural work does fanfiction do within fandom itself?

By conducting a close reading of BTS music videos, fan videos, articles, and other material about the members of BTS, I argue that character archetypes initially rise as a result of a general reading of official and easily accessible material such as music videos. The persistence of character archetypes evinces a reliance both on source text and larger fan text, including the vast archive of fanfiction about BTS hosted on websites like Archive of Our Own. By conducting a survey of BTS fanfiction readers and writers as well as several in-depth interviews with fans, I conclude that fanfiction does the cultural work of bringing fans not only into conversation with the source texts but also into conversation with each other, facilitating the formation of digital community and establishing fanfiction as a site of personal development, soul-seeking, and pleasure.

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS (REAL PERSON) FANFICTION?

Fanfiction, as a whole, is strikingly difficult to pin down. All literature, to at least a certain degree, relies on and draws from previous works. Arthur Brooke's long poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* was almost certainly the primary source for William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, among others such as Chaucer's *Trolius and Criseyde* (Thompson); James Joyce's *Ulysses* "demands… that his reader have a thorough knowledge of the *Odyssey*."[1] Past this general acknowledgement that much canonized literature has identifiable roots in other works and that all literature is, to a certain degree, interdependent, fanfiction is primarily characterized by its roots in easily traceable source material. Judith May Fathallah succinctly defines it in her book *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts*, as, "the unauthorized adaption and re-writing of media texts… Fanfic is typically freely shared, makes no money and, though it has an analogue history, now exists primary on the internet." (Fathallah 9) This digital space, as I will examine later, is crucial to the dissemination of fanfiction and the facilitation of online fan communities.

Graduate student Katharine McCain simplifies Fathallah's definition in her Masters' Thesis "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction," defining the genre as "works based off another author's characters, settings, or ideas." However, certain particularities of fanfiction — its focuses on relationships that may never be realized in source material, its concurrent production alongside its source, and its "corrective" function in which fans attempt to

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[1] Wykes, David. "The Odyssey in Ulysses." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 10, no. 2 (1968): 301-16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40753991.

write perceived wrongs in the source — separate it from other literature as a kind of subgenre largely populated by unprofessional, young, and female writers.[2]

As an avid reader and occasional writer of fanfiction, I define fanfiction as a written work that draws characters, settings, or plot lines from an existing work. Informally, fanfiction is a medium that provides writers the space to make whatever they desire or envision out of both everything or nearly nothing. Writers have the capacity to reimagine characters in alternate universes or settings; fans can consume fanfiction that features two of their favorite characters getting a happy ending together. It is a locale of sexual freedom and expression.[3] Additionally, it provides an opportunity for young writers to cut their teeth in a low pressure environment focused on amateur writing. This is, perhaps the most crucial element, and one that Rebecca Tushnet, a professor of First Amendment Law at Harvard Law School known for her fanfiction-related legal work and scholarship, echoes in her definition where she describes fanfiction as "any kind of written creativity that is based on an identifiable segment of popular culture, such as a television show, and is not produced as 'professional' writing."[4]

In particular, fanfiction's unprofessional nature, roots in popular culture, and contemporary digital nature distinguish it from adaptation. In her work *A Theory of* Adaptation,

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[2] McCain, Katharine E. "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction." Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2015. https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/760842/McCain_georgetown_0076M_12977.pdf;sequence=1

[3] A short venture into popular fanfiction hosting site Archive of Our Own's tags reveals approximately 395,000 works tagged "sex;" nearly 100,000 are tagged "Plot What Plot/Porn Without Plot as of April 2019. These numbers take into account derivative tags such as "Anal Sex" or "Demon Sex."

[4] Tushnet, Rebecca. "Legal Fictions: Copyright, Fan Fiction, and a New Common Law." *Loyola of Los Angeles Entertainment Law Review* (1997): 651-686. https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1347&context=elr

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art."[5] Hutcheon describes adaptations as transpositions that frequently involve a shift from one medium to another (frequently literature to film), a change in genre, and a change in context. Furthermore, adaptations are best understood as "palimpsestuous," continuously considered and interpreted in relation to their adapted texts. Hutcheon also argues that interpreting adaptations as *adaptations* (as opposed to standalone, discrete works) is essentially treating adaptations as "texts" rather than "works" per Barthes' argument in "From Work to Text."[6] While fanfiction is "palimpsestuous" in the sense that it is also haunted by its source text, Hutcheon argues that fanfiction is not adaptation. Given that fanfiction is written and published by amateurs on digital sites that don't necessitate payment for works, fanfiction doesn't hold the same financial appeal of adapting works that Hutcheon describes.[7] Furthermore, fanfiction is less of a "transposition" of a work and more of an extrapolation. Of prequels and sequels, Hutcheon writes, "There is a difference between never wanting a story to end… and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways."[8] Like sequels, fanfiction is most frequently a product of a desire for continuation rather than a drive for re-interpretation.

Fanfiction is also a genre and a medium all at once. A genre is "a particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose."[9] Fanfiction is a taxonomic label which denotes a particular kind of informally

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[5] Hutcheon, Linda. "Final Questions." In *A Theory of Adaptation,* 169-177. New York: Routledge, 2006.
[6] Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." Translated by Stephen Heath. 1971.
[7] Hutcheon, Linda. "Beginning to Theorize Adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?" In *A Theory of Adaptation,* 1-32. New York: Routledge, 2006.
[8] Ibid.
[9] "genre, n.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/77629?redirectedFrom=genre

produced work; works within conform to certain forms and archetypical settings, plots, or

narrative structures. Its purpose varies; frequently presented as a corrective to writing style or

"incorrect" turns in plot[10], fanfiction allows for writers to reimagine the "correct" version of both

fictional material and reality. While, per Hutcheon, this corrective nature is typical of adaptation,

corrective fanfiction isn't transposition like adaptation is — rather, it allows writers to selectively

changes major details that significantly differentiate the fanfiction from the source material.

In this purpose, fanfiction also strikes me as a kind of medium in multiple senses of the

word. It is a kind of writing that is of "a middle quality, degree, or condition"[11] and exists as a

middle point between the fan, or the individual consumes and "continues" the source material

through fanfiction, and the perceived authority of the author. In this sense, it also functions as "a

person or thing which acts as an intermediary;"[12]it is a medium of exchange — "anything

commonly agreed as a token of value and used in transactions in a trading system"[13]— within

fan communities and online spaces that share fanfiction both informally and through gift trades

or commissioned work. Aside from being exchanged as something worth monetary value, it is

also social currency in fandom circles in the same way that the source material is as well.

Arguably, given the reality of fanfiction's simple dissemination (through websites such as

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[10] Fathallah outlines "corrective" perceptions of work in the chapter "'I AM YOUR KING':
Authority in Game of Thrones," describing how fanfiction is corrective to what fans perceive as
an incorrect text; one writes that "I mean the [first novel] and maybe the [second novel] are great
but then the characters start acting very strange." Fathallah also describes how fanfiction allows
readers and writers to retain the plot points they love from *A Song of Ice and Fire* while
deviating from author George R.R. Martin's writing style. One reviewer of a *Game of Thrones*
fanfiction writes, "you take what's good about Martin's world; the loose political set up and
court intrigue, the cutthroat characters and wrap it up in your own clean, crisp prose that is so far
superior to his, it's unbelievable."
[11] "medium, n. and adj.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/115772?redirectedFrom=medium
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own or social networks like Tumblr and Twitter), it is also "a channel of mass communication"[14] that functions as locus of ideation and concept dissemination within fandom; it is crucial to the establishment of character archetypes and popular relationships between characters. To this end, I tend to prefer "medium" as a way to define fanfiction: echoing McLuhan's assertion that "the medium is the message,"[15] fanfiction's function as a medium within fandom is just as important as the concepts that are conveyed through fanfiction writing. Considering fanfiction as a medium most effectively conveys the significance of fanfiction within fandom and as an intermediary between fans, authors, original works, and reality. This definition echoes McCain's definition of contemporary fanfiction, which she argues is "defined primarily by its communal nature, its reliance on the Internet, and its desire to combine the creative with the critical."[16] It is this fanfiction with which I am primarily concerned; the kind embedded in online forums, Twitter threads, and the aforementioned fanfiction hosting sites.

However, it is within the function of fanfiction as a medium between fan and reality that things become more complex, particularly in reference to the relationship between fans and celebrities. Britta Lundin's *Ship It*, a young adult novel that stages questions about the relationship between fanfiction writers and creators, the ethics of writing fanfiction about real people, and the implications of fandom as a whole. The novel is focused on Claire, a sixteen-year-old wildly popular fanfiction writer who feels isolated in her hometown of Pine Bluff, Idaho. She writes about a fictional television program titled *Demon Heart*, a series that follows Smokey, a demon hunter, and Heart, a demon trying his best to get on Smokey's good side. After

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[14] Ibid.

[15] McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message." In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964.

[16] McCain, Katharine E. "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction." 2015.

Claire asks the showrunner of *Demon Heart* whether Smokey and Heart are in love with each other at a convention panel (causing a minor public relations crisis when the showrunner responds poorly), she is invited to accompany the rest of the series' press tour in a bid to save what seems to be a dying show. While traveling, Claire gets to know the actors that play Smokey and Heart — Forest and Rico, respectively — while still continuing to write fanfiction about her favorite characters.

While *Ship It* succeeds best at its function as an "ode to the wonderful queer writing that happens in fanfic, and a plea for film and TV to follow suit,"[17] it also dives into the complexities of Real Person Fanfiction, hereto referred to as RPF**.** Real Person Fanfiction is exactly what it says on the tin: fanfiction that is written about real people — frequently celebrities, ranging from TV actors to pop stars — and their lives, relationships, and personalities. Lundin, the author of *Ship It* and a current writer on teen television drama *Riverdale*, is no stranger to fandom, fanfiction, and shipping, a term which Gita Jackson of *Kotaku* defines as "the act of writing about, drawing or being enthusiastic about a particular fictional couple."[18] However, Lundin's work succeeds in addressing the taboo side of fanfiction — RPF — in a way atypical both of other Young Adult literature about fanfiction (most prominently, Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*) and fandom itself.

While Claire spends the majority of time writing fanfiction about Smokey and Heart (the fictional characters), she also devotes time to writing about Forest and Rico as well, the actors that play *Demon Heart*'s two leads. Given that Claire is in close proximity to both Rico and

[17] Cerny, Tasha. "Britta Lundin's Debut Novel, 'Ship It,' Is 'Really Gay.'" *Shondaland*, 1 May 2018. https://www.shondaland.com/inspire/books/a20077945/britta-lundin-interview-ship-it/

[18] Jackson, Gita. "Shipping, Explained." *Kotaku*, August 23, 2018. https://kotaku.com/shipping-explained-1821927276

Forest (they share a tour bus over the course of the novel), the implications of Claire writing RPF

are immediately clear.

One chapter of Claire's fanfiction about Forest and Rico is interrupted by Claire's

narration dissecting her feelings writing real person fiction about people with whom she now

regularly interacts:

> "I mean, it's not that I haven't written real-person fic before, I have. But it feels different
> writing it about Rico and Forest now that I've met them. It's not a fantasy anymore, it's more of
> a wish. Let me re-create Forest as I'd like to see him. Let me make him vulnerable, let me make
> him uncertain, let me make him love Rico. Let me make him *understand*.
> "There might be some people who find this gross or mean, but right now it's just super
> cathartic."[19]

While this particular passage indexes some of the stigma surrounding RPF, Lundin

directly addresses some of its impact later on in the novel after several fans reference one of

Claire's fics in front of Forest, sending him on a spiral as he finally reads the fanfiction that

Claire has written about him. Interwoven with one of the climactic events of the novel itself, this

real person fanfiction is ultimately where Claire has gone "way, *way* over the line."[20] Forest,

notably, is offended: "I want to scream at her to leave me out of her little fantasies. I want to call

my lawyer and have it taken down. I want it erased from the memory of every one of the

thousands of people who have already read it. But I can't make that happen and I feel so helpless

that I want to hit something or cry or both."[21] When he confronts Claire, she defends her writing

and RPF in general.

I describe this particular subplot of *Ship It* in such detail as a way of introducing the

stigma that surrounds RPF as well as its place within the larger fanfiction community. RPF is a

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[19] Lundin, Britta. *Ship It.* Freeform Books, 2018.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

medium that connects fans with celebrities, idols, and other public figures in a way separate from social media engagement. Fans engage with their idols as characters rather than individuals, frequently writing fanfiction that pairs celebrities together as well as fanfiction that pairs readers with idols. This subset of fanfiction is predominately similar to fanfiction based on fictional characters and falls in line with previously discussed definitions and descriptions of fanfiction. In particular, RPF conforms to McCain's argument that fanfiction is "a highly communal genre that uses other authors' works as a starting point, but the stories fans then produce are unique in the narrative elements they emphasize, the language the stories are written in, and the mediums through which the readers consume them.[22] RPF takes not other authors' works as a point of origin, but rather real people and events. In this sense, the stories that fans produce are frequently unique in their exploration of new universes and imagination of "behind the scenes" events not caught by cameras or detailed on social media. Style in particular varies given the fact that there is no written narrative content (aside from that which is journalistic) detailing the lives and livelihoods of public figures.

Real Person Fanfiction, however, isn't bound to "reality." RPF can be "canon compliant," a term that signifies that characters take on the same roles as their real life counterparts. Canon compliant fanfiction about two actors could potentially feature them together on set, going over lines, or shooting takes for a film. However, many fics about real people aren't set in the "real world." Frequently, fanfiction takes place in an alternate universe (colloquially referred to as an AU), displacing characters into familiar settings like coffee shops, universities, or even fictional pop culture settings like Hogwarts, the school of magic featured in the Harry Potter series. Real Person Fanfiction is always tied to real people, but it is not necessarily bound to a "real" setting.

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[22] McCain, Katharine E. "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction." 2015.

Real Person Fanfiction is still somewhat a taboo within fanfiction communities due to its potential impact on the lives of its subjects (as Lundin explores in *Ship It*) as well as issues of consent for using an individual's image or personality while writing explicit material. In 2001, Fanfiction.net banned fanfiction about real people — on the site, there are no specific categories for actors or celebrities. However, RPF is still easily found, tucked away in the corners of categories like that of the <u>Marvel Cinematic Universe</u>, which as of June 2018, had over 3,100 RPF fics to its name.[23] Other sites like Archive of Our Own have embraced RPF with the inclusion of specific categories such as "Music & Bands" and "Celebrities & Real People." Real Person pairings and RPF on Tumblr, a microblogging platform that is widely regarded as a major locus of fandom: Tumblr's 2018 Fandometrics list named "Phan," a pairing between YouTubers Daniel Howell and Phil Lester, its third most popular ship. "JiKook," the pairing of Korean boy band BTS members Jeon Jeong-guk and Park Ji-min, is the fourth most popular ship despite the fact that neither pairing is together in real life.[24]

This thesis is an examination into RPF, its significance in fan communities, and the ways in which fans establish and reify certain character archetypes through fanfiction itself. Drawing from my own personal experience as a fan and fanfiction reader, I utilize fanfiction about BTS, the aforementioned Korean boy band, as a case study. I first began following BTS in early 2017 and began reading fanfiction about its members in April 2017; my personal (albeit non-academic) experience in this particular sub-category is extensive. Furthermore, as the largest

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[23] Donaldson, Kayleigh. "Inside the world of Real Person Fanfiction." *SyFy Wire*, 4 June 2018, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/inside-the-world-of-real-person-fanfiction

[24] Radulovic, Petrana. "Tumblr's top ships of 2018 paint a picture of a community in constant debate." *Polygon*, 28 November 2018, https://www.polygon.com/2018/11/28/18116093/tumblr-fandom-top-100-ships.

specific category of RPF on Archive of Our Own (as of April 2019, there are upwards of 88,000 BTS fanfics hosted on the site), it's evident that BTS' fandom is large, robust, and productive in terms of fanworks.

As a caveat, this thesis does not engage critically with the implications of Western fans writing fanfiction about these seven Korean men and frequently making an attempt to represent Korean culture and language in fanfiction. While questions regarding topics such as the sexualization of Korean language honorifics in fanfiction or the protective nature of Western fans over the members of BTS greatly interest me, the limited scope of this project as well as my own academic experience did not provide room to address these questions.

Overall, through this exploration into RPF, I address the following question: Focusing on fanfiction centered about Korean pop group BTS, how are character archetypes produced and maintained in fanfiction and what cultural work does fanfiction do within fandom itself? I argue that character archetypes function as signifiers of basic fandom knowledge and "novice" fan status, particularly when invoked in "bad" writing. These character archetypes are a product of the intertextual nature of fanfiction itself, evincing a reliance on source text (both official and ephemeral BTS content) and larger fan text, including the archive of BTS fanfiction hosted on sites like Archive of Our Own. Ultimately, fanfiction does the cultural work of bringing fans not only into conversation with the source text but also into conversation with each other, opening the possibility for amateur writing, identity exploration, and affective engagement with idols.

SECTION I: BTS, EXPLAINED

Given that the remainder of this thesis will be based off of conclusions obtained through the study of BTS fanfiction (and the still yet relative obscurity of the group in Western pop media), I will provide a brief background into BTS and its fandom. BTS is a seven-member Korean pop band that debuted in 2013 under Korean entertainment company BigHit Entertainment. The group is comprised of seven members: RM (Kim Nam-joon), the group's leader and a rapper; Jin (Kim Seok-jin), the oldest member, a vocalist, and visual; Suga (Min Yoon-gi), a rapper; J-Hope (Jung Ho-seok), the group's lead dancer and a rapper; Jimin (Park Ji-min) a dancer and vocalist; V (Kim Tae-hyung), a visual and vocalist; Jungkook (Jeon Jeong-guk), the maknae (youngest), a dancer, rapper and vocalist.

BTS' Korean name, 방탄소년단, (bangtan sonyeondan), translates as "Bulletproof Boy Scouts," and was born out of their producer's desire to create a group that could withstand social pressures. Intended to serve as a kind of voice for the young generation, the group debuted with the single "No More Dream," a brash, confrontational hip hop track that challenged societal academic expectations for Korean youth struggling to become top students. Since their debut, the group has found massive success both in Korea and abroad. In October 2018, the group not only wrapped up the first half of their Love Yourself tour, which made sold-out stops in seven cities in North America as well as four European cities, but also received an Order of Cultural Merit at the 2018 Korean Popular Culture & Arts. They are the youngest recipients of the award in history (the youngest member of the group is 21 and the oldest 25).

Similarly, BTS' worldwide fandom has gained recognition for its coordination in pushing the group's records towards chart success (both in South Korea and on American charts such as the Billboard Hot 100 and the Billboard 200 Albums Chart) as well as organizing projects that

necessitate international coordination. Heavily relying on social networking sites such as Twitter and Discord, BTS's fandom is thoroughly interconnected to the extent that members are able to coordinate international projects such as organizing fans to help create safe paths amidst crowds at airports awaiting BTS's arrival.

Additionally, the fandom is highly interdependent and thus highly interconnected. Given that nearly all official BTS content ranging from songs to tweets is originally in Korean, fans who don't speak Korean are forced to rely on other fans to provide translations. Language barriers are mitigated through fan cooperation and facilitated through social networking sites such as Twitter and YouTube. Furthermore, Fans of K-pop groups are frequently given official names by the group's entertainment company, and these names are used to formally identify fans of a specific group and serve as a highly specific marker of fan identity. BTS fans are called A.R.M.Y., an acronym that stands for "Adorable Representative MC for Youth." The name, which was announced by BigHit Entertainment (BTS' entertainment company) in 2013, also plays into the group's original "Bulletproof" concept while also saddling the fanbase with connotations of agency and power.

Ultimately, this strong, clearly defined fandom identity facilitates an online environment ripe for collaborative ideation and the exchange of content and fanworks. The fandom is not just concentrated in South Korea and the United States; rather, it is robust and international with fanbases in countries in Asia, North America, South America, Europe, and Africa.

SECTION II: ARCHETYPES AND AWARENESS

I employ of archetype in a colloquial sense as a signifier for "a first model or prototype of that which has often been made or imitated."[25] More specifically, I am discussing character archetypes in fanfiction as base structures for the most common characterizations of certain characters in a particular fandom. This is in reference to personality traits, habits and vices, particular physical traits, and in some cases, relationships with other characters. I outline the nature of one of these character archetypes that is frequently "made or imitated" in BTS fanfiction and attempt to apprehend its origins.

Dominant character archetypes in BTS fanfiction frequently become the butt of jokes for seasoned fans. Referred to colloquially as "AO3 characterization,"[26] these archetypes are the simplest characterizations of the members of BTS fanfiction following a surface-level consumption of official BTS materials. Of course, implicated in the humor of these archetypes is the realization that everyone was, at some point, a novice fan. In fact, BTS fans collectively refer to this novice stage as the "no jams" phase, in which new fans relentlessly reference old fandom jokes and are wont to subscribe to certain archetypal conceptualizations of the members of the group, both in real life and in fanfiction. The term "no jams ARMYs" comes from a 2014 Bangtan Bomb[27] titled "Let's speak English!" in which the members of BTS have short conversations in English while on a plane to Los Angeles. At one point during the video, Nam-

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[25] Ibid.

[26] AO3 is an abbreviation of *Archive of Our Own*, a fanfiction hosting site. The term broadly signifies fanfiction characterization.

[27] Bangtan bombs are short videos released by BTS' company, BigHit entertainment. They range from music or dance practice videos to short vlog style videos filmed by either crew members of members of BTS.

joon tells Ji-min, "Ji-min, you got no jams."[28] The phrase itself became emblematic within the fandom, first as a popular joke but later as a signifier for fans having just begun to follow BTS — and thus, theoretically more prone to relying on old jokes.

"No jams ARMYs" resonate with Katharine E. McCain's understanding of "bad" writing in fanfiction. McCain employs "bad" in a subjective sense, but defines "bad" or "badly written" fanfiction as that with "poor grammar and an awful plot."[29] McCain argues that what mainstream fiction readers may consider "bad" may still be acceptable (if not "good") to fans, who seek emotional impact over perfect characterization or more original work. On the flip side, fans have particular criteria that are not as pronounced in mainstream fiction. Fans will turn away from fanfiction that they find misrepresents a character, even if the work is "well written," i.e. lacks grammatical mistakes, has a complete narrative arc, is complete, etc. On the authorial side, McCain argues that "the fan who writes a repetitive fic filled with grammatical errors is still generally catering to what her readers want and she is thus serving the community well; the fan who works to produce something overly 'original' — presumably with the hope of becoming a BNF (Big Name Fan) — is sometimes seen as trying too hard."[30] Furthermore, reifying clichés or archetypes in fanfiction does not necessarily signify lazy writing. Rather, referencing certain hallmarks of fanfiction such as turns of phrase or particular character traits signifies deep knowledge of fan culture and the particular fandom within which an author is writing.

Thus, fanfiction reads have different priorities while reading fanfiction in comparison to mainstream, professionally published literature. A perception of "correct" characterization

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[28] "[BANGTAN BOMB] Let's Speak English!" YouTube video, 3:42, posted by "BANGTANTV," July 18, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDlSqljhHD0.
[29] McCain, Katharine E. "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction." 2015.
[30] Ibid.

("correctness" being a subjective judgment made by fans) is more important than a character

having a fleshed out personality or full developmental arc. Even if characters fall into repetitive

or simplified archetypes, this isn't necessarily a detraction. Fans perceive repetition of character

archetypes, inside jokes within fandom, or tropes is valuable rather than negatively reductive.

Take for example the ubiquitous "Coffee Shop AU,"[31] a phenomenon that fandom writer Gavia

Baker-Whitelaw describes as rewriting "familiar characters as baristas and coffee shop

customers, setting the scene for cozy romance."[32] Baker-Whitelaw argues that the "Coffee Shop

AUs" success lies in its simplicity. The "Coffee Shop AU" is formulaic — barista meets

customer; they fall in love — but also relatively unique to fanfiction. It's emblematic of the ways

in which fanfiction readers prioritize repetition and relationships over originality.

Turning more specifically to boy band fanfiction, fandom scholar Kristina Busse offers

another layer of understanding to the concept of "No Jams ARMYs." Even when moving

towards a complex characterization or understanding of a character's subjectivity, fans are

"initially interested in these celebrities precisely because they are famous."[33] Thus, when

approaching characters for the first time, novice writers and fans begin working with "a

simplification of the real person behind the star function"[34] rather than a more complex

understanding of a band member or character.

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[31] AU is a frequently-used acronym in fanfiction circles. It stands for "Alternate Universe," or
the displacement of characters from one piece of media to an alternate setting.
[32] Baker-Whitelaw, Gavia. "Millennials can't stop writing fanfiction about coffee shops." *The
Daily Dot*, September 28, 2018, https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/millennials-coffee-shop-
fanfiction/
[33] Busse, Kristina. "'I'm jealous of the fake me': Postmodern Subjectivity and Identity
Construction in Boy Band Fan Fiction." In *Framing Fanfiction: Literary and Social Practices in
Fan Fiction Communities*, 41-56. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017.
[34] Ibid.

Members of BTS' fandom have a particular awareness of these archetypes and their repetitive nature. However, utilization of these archetypes and actively reifying them is at times met with scorn despite their prolific nature. In a post on the ARMY Amino site, a BTS-centric forum, Amino apps user "JOON ☾" wrote "A guide to No Jam ARMYS," in which they detail (and condemn) the most prevalent character archetypes attached to the BTS members. For example, they write, "Jin isn't a princess eomma[35] that like pink [sic] and only cares about eating…Yoongi isn't just some lazy sleeping grandpa that's a mean savage."[36]

This awareness also exists among BTS fans to the extent that popular character archetypes are a kind of inside joke within fandom and serve as a base level of humor. For example, BuzzFeed community member tokyonamgi created a quiz titled, "Which BTS Member's AO3 Personality Do You Match?" The quiz aims to match users with a BTS member's archetypal personality, but is more so an exercise in jest than a genuine personality quiz.

In the interest of collecting anecdotal evidence, I gave the quiz a pass myself. While answering the questions, I didn't spend time deliberating between which response best suited me because they were purposefully outlandish and directly tied to certain members. The first question of the quiz is innocuous enough: "What's your favorite food?" However, the answers range from "lamb skewers" to the winking ";)" emoji (accompanied by a picture of BTS member Jimin's posterior) to "just a little something i threw together" (accompanied by a photo of a full-

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[35] Eomma (엄마) is a Korean familial term of endearment meaning "mother." Seok-jin is frequently equated with a motherly role given his culinary skills and position as the eldest member of the group.

[36] Amino Apps user JOON ☾. "A guide to No Jam ARMYS." *ARMY Amino Apps*, July 24, 2018. https://aminoapps.com/c/btsarmy/page/blog/a-guide-to-no-jam-armys/1JVb_3JlU6ud7zEGmblGo6REZXJaWn86NDa

fledged holiday feast). To the trained fan, it's simple to match up each answer with a member: Suga is frequently teased for treating the younger members (in particular, Jungkook) to lamb skewers[37]; Jin is often depicted as a motherly character who consistently cooks lavish meals for younger members of the group.

The personality quiz is far from an actual personality quiz. Rather, it's an exercise in archetypes. Having consumed a great deal of BTS fanfiction (and having been a member of the fandom for two years now), it was simple for me to match outlandish responses ranging from "reading nietzsche" to "In case you haven't noticed, I'm weird. I'm a weirdo. I don't fit in" to respective members of the group. This quiz — far from Twitter or Archive of Our Own — is testament to the prolific nature of these archetypes within the fandom as well as the startling awareness (and mockery) of their existence.

Particularly in reference to boy band fanfiction, this kind of mockery of bad fannish practices is not an atypical occurrence. In a case study of early 2000s *NSYNC fanfiction, when fans are not inserting themselves into stories or narratives featuring boy band members, they frequently identify and empathize with celebrities over those that they consider to be improper or out of line fans. In particular, when fans write canon compliant fanfiction that features other fans, fanfiction writers identify against the kind of fans they despise or do not wish to emulate. Busse writes, "the community identifies with the celebrities against the fans that they themselves are — or at least the kinds of fans that they do not want to be."[38] To this extent, fans attempt to create a

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[37] "Jungkook's Lamb Kebab," YouTube video, 0:32, posted by "Wasyubie & Kimchim," Dec 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQSt8yWLYHQ
[38] Busse, Kristina. "'I'm jealous of the fake me': Postmodern Subjectivity and Identity Construction in Boy Band Fan Fiction." 2017.

distinction between themselves and "bad" fans — or in the particular case of BTS, "No Jams ARMYs" — but still exist within the social structures of celebrity and fan interaction.

In order to better comprehend how these archetypes develop and how fans reify them both through fanfiction and extra-textual material such as BuzzFeed quizzes, the next section of this thesis is a close reading of a variety of music videos, song lyrics, and fan content (among other media). This is a case study of BTS member Min Yoon-gi and the formulation of his respective character archetype in fanfiction about BTS.

Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi (Suga)

Min Yoon-gi, also known by his stage name "Suga," is the second eldest member of BTS and one of its main rappers. Born in March 1993 and raised in Daegu, South Korea, Min was an underground rapper before joining BigHit Entertainment and eventually debuting with BTS in 2013.[39] Much of Min's personal music is heavy hip-hop and rap, boasting a brash and in-your-face attitude.

Many of Min's rap lines (especially in BTS' earlier EP's such as *2 Cool 4 School* and *O!RUL8,2?*) are particularly scathing, spit out with an intensity and speed that gives him a rather standoffish image. Furthermore, his ego as a rapper is often central to his verses: in one of BTS' debut singles, "We Are Bulletproof Pt. 2," Suga raps, "All you who are called rappers because you can't sing / the rapper title is an extravagance for you;"[40] in the title track to his 2016 mixtape *Agust D*, he raps, "I'm sorry, you should change your job / I'm sorry that your rapper

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[39] Herman, Tamar. "Get To Know BTS: Suga." *Billboard*, June 30, 2017. https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/k-town/7850096/bts-suga-get-to-know

[40] pop!gasa "BTS (방탄소년단) — We Are Bulletproof Pt.2." Color Coded Lyrics. https://colorcodedlyrics.com/2013/07/bts-bangtansonyeondan-we-are-bulletproof-pt-2

sucks compared to me."[41] Although some of his music (such as "The Last," a track off of his

mixtape) fields heavier topics such as mental health and therapy,[42] Min's title tracks frequently

lean towards the gleefully egoistic and aggressive with a fantastical visual element to accompany

them.

The music video for title track "Agust D" follows Min as he finds himself tied to a chair

in an empty train car, manages to cut off the duct tape binding his wrists, and climbs out of the

moving car to perch on top of it. Handcuffs, bursts of flame, and fleeting images of police flash

across the screen; water haphazardly spills out of a tank and cans of alcohol tumble to the ground

in the environmental chaos. During the bridge of the song, Min beats the hood of a car and tosses

his lighter onto it while he implores other rappers to change their career. The juxtaposition of the

ultimately impossible-to-confine Min against police imagery and chaos clearly implies a certain

kind of deviancy and ego on Min's part. His character is boastful, uncompromising, and rude —

at one point in the video he raises his middle finger to the camera while sarcastically apologizing

for ruining everyone else's careers.[43]

Min's character in the overarching plot of BTS music videos further reifies this self-

centered (and self-destructive) characterization. Colloquially referred to as *HYYH,*[44] this plot ties

together a gamut of BTS content including music videos, social media posts, a series of notes

that accompanied physical albums, and assorted other content. The plot began in 2015 and was

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[41] ilyricsbuzz "Agust D (BTS' Suga) — Agust D." Color Coded Lyrics.
https://colorcodedlyrics.com/2016/08/agust-d-bts-suga-agust-d (Accessed January 8, 2019)
[42] Herman, Tamar. "Get To Know BTS: Suga." *Billboard*, June 30, 2017.
https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/k-town/7850096/bts-suga-get-to-know
[43] "Agust D 'Agust D' MV," YouTube Video, 3:06, posted by "ibighit," August 15, 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=186&v=3Y_Eiyg4bfk
[44] *HYYH* is an acronym for *Hwa Yong Yeon Hwa*, the Korean title of BTS' two 2015 EPs
(English title: *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life*).

spearheaded by the music video for "I Need U," the title track of *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life, Pt.* 1. Currently, this narrative is being repacked as a webcomic titled *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* that serializes weekly and will serve to unify the disparate threads of the plot given that they are scattered across platforms and formats. While the story invokes certain supernatural elements such as the power to go back in time and the concept of shared fate, it is the story of seven boys, "their fates intertwined through the good times together, but also the tough times, as they have gone their separate ways and suffered greatly as a result."[45]

Each member of BTS corresponds with a specific character within the plot. Similar to his "Agust D" persona, Min's character is rather rough around the edges. In the music video, "I Need U," he douses a motel room in gasoline and sets it on fire while still inside in a suicide attempt. In the music video for "Run," he incites a physical fight with Jungkook, eventually throwing a chair at a mirror and breaking it out of anger. In a teaser short film for the group's 2016 *Wings* album, he smashes open the window to a store while searching for Jungkook after wandering alone along a dark road. In reference to this particular short film, a Twitter account associated with BTS and the *HYYH* storyline ("Smeraldo Books") wrote from Yoon-gi's point of view, "The car had just barely missed me. The remaining buzz of the alcohol all made e feel giddy."[46] In the 2018 Highlight Reels, short films that served as promotions for the group's *Love Yourself* series, Yoon-gi's character tries to quit a persistent smoking habit with the aid of his girlfriend.

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[45] Herman, Tamar. "'Save Me' Webtoon Released as Part of BTS Universe Narrative." *Billboard*, 19 January 2019. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/bts/8494091/save-me-webtoon-bts-universe-narrative

[46] Smeraldo Books. Twitter Post. January 7, 2019, 6:00 PM. https://twitter.com/Smeraldo_Books/status/1082456970416648193

Across the materials that comprise *HYYH*, Yoon-gi is frequently associated with violent and at times self-destructive actions. He is narratively tied to Jungkook, who eventually saves him from the aforementioned flaming hotel room and continues to stay close to Yoon-gi later down the line. Yoon-gi's character continuously pulls and pushes away from Jungkook, attacking him in one video ("Run") and helping him cough up poison in another ("Blood, Sweat, and Tears –Japanese Ver.'"). Overall, however, his character is strongly associated with vices like alcohol and cigarettes, and he frequently acts out violently and self-destructively, obviously caring but unable to effectively aid Jungkook, who pushes him away.

This official material in addition to Min's *Agust D* mixtape is the foundation of his character archetype. In certain fanfiction, Min Yoon-gi is callous, egoistic, and edgy, frequently found giving little care about rules and only doting on other characters when no one else can see. Sometimes sadistic and frequently dominant (both interpersonally and sexually), "AO3 Yoon-gi" is rough around the edges and typically plagued by some kind of tragic backstory. Furthermore, he is almost constantly sleepy, a trait rooted in Min's comments in other, non-*HYYH* official material such as one instance in which he introduces a new neck pillow as his new lover or swears at Ho-seok when he accidentally wakes him up from a nap.[47]

Returning to the previously-discussed self-awareness of archetypes in fandom, fans on Twitter and other social media platforms make jokes regarding the archetypical Min Yoon-gi. The aforementioned Buzzfeed sums up many of "Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi's" character traits:

> "oh you big grump! you don't really understand how you tolerate your friends and frankly, we don't get why they tolerate *you* either! besides being rude, boring and lazy, you have an unhealthy obsession with calling your friends 'kid'. i guess you are an old man at heart already, and if you keep up that chainsmoking habit, in a year or two you

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[47] "[BANGTAN BOMB] BTS Waking-up HOBI CAM @Dream concert," YouTube, 1:22, posted by "BANGTANTV," July 5, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CMMeDZGP5w

might be 50 on the outside too!"[48]

Another tweet from user @todorokth riffs off of the archetype:

"me: im sad
ao3 yoongi: [taking a long drag from his cigarette, clunking his spiky boots and spitting
on the floor as a gunshot is fired] what's wrong :("[49]

One fanfiction, aptly titled, "You're An Asshole, Min Yoongi," immediately

characterizes Yoon-gi as "the biggest asshole in the entire school. He's emotionless, rude, aloof,

and couldn't care less about anyone other than himself."[50] On a related note, the Archive of Our

Own tag "Min Yoongi | Suga Being an Asshole" (which is tied to other tags such as "Asshole

Yoongi" or "Yoongi is lowkey a dick") is attached to 85 works (out of the total 88,809 works

categorized under the "방탄소년단 | Bangtan Boys | BTS" tag). Another tag, "Min Yoongi |

Suga Is Bad At Feelings" is attached to 2204 works.[51]

While it is simple to attach this particular archetype to McCain's concept of "bad"

fanfiction, even works that are objectively "good" in terms of grammar, completion, and a

cohesive plot also invoke "Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi." One example of this (and an example of a

"Big Name Fan") is the novel-length, complete fanfiction *The Songbird and the Sea* by user

Misster-Maia. Published chapter-by-chapter from May 2017 until December 2017, the work is

approximately 250,000 words long with a sequel on the way. Yoon-gi and Park Ji-min are the

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[48] tokyonamgi. "Which BTS Member's AO3 Personality Do You Match?" *BuzzFeed*, 3
November 2018, https://www.buzzfeed.com/tokyonamgi/which-bts-members-ao3-personality-
do-you-match-3o24g?quiz_result=121912312_363401665
[49] @todorokth. Twitter Post. November 10, 2018, 10:59 AM.
https://twitter.com/todorokth/status/1061287241975193600
[50] springrain21. "You're An Asshole, Min Yoongi." *Archive of Our Own*. Accessed 8 January
2019. https://archiveofourown.org/works/8810086/chapters/20200225
[51] All numbers as of April 2019.

story's two central characters; the fanfiction is centered about their relationship as it transforms

from that of enemies to reluctant acquaintances to lovers. The story is set in a fictional world in

which pirates rule the seas, constantly in combat with other pirates and Mariners, government

soldiers who (theoretically) work to uphold the law.

Ji-min is a young man from the island of Jeju (located just off the coast of mainland

South Korea). He possesses the Blessing of the Canary, a gift which grants him a beautiful

singing voice, considerably heightened agility, and later in the story, the ability to shape-shift

into a canary itself. Yoon-gi is a pirate captain known as the Black Fox of the East who holds

hegemonic power over the seas in Asia; the two meet when Yoon-gi's crew pillages Ji-min's

village. Following an insufficient harvest, the village offers up the only item of value it has: Ji-

min, who possesses a rare Blessing. The story follows a series of predictable turns as an initially

resistant Jimin begins to feel at home aboard Yoon-gi's ship, the Agust, eventually befriending

the crew, breaking his attachments to law and the Mariners, and falling in love with Yoon-gi to

the extent that he is willing to risk his life for his once-captor.

Concurrently, Yoon-gi's image softens over the course of the novel, but his initial

depiction is well in line with his rough archetype. In his first appearance, he is described as

speaking in a "low and hoarse drawl, laced with bored disdain."[52] He consistently refers to Ji-

min as "boy" within the second chapter of the story, and backhands him within several minutes

of them meeting following Ji-min's noncompliance and refusal to speak during his first few

minutes on the ship. He gazes at Ji-min with "irritated contempt" and carries an intimidating

presence, consistently frustrated with and snapping at Ji-min and other members of his crew.

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[52] MissterMaia. "Cast Out and Caged." In *The Songbird and the Sea*. *Archive of Our Own*. Accessed 8 January 2019. https://archiveofourown.org/works/10795731/chapters/24031440#workskin

After spending several days on the ship, Ji-min remarks, "Not once had he seen even an ounce of kindness in him, not in his harsh, degrading words and his violent demeanor."[53] While "The Songbird and the Sea" eventually moves past the flat archetype towards a more complex characterization, it's testament to the pervasive nature of this archetype even within "good" fanfiction.

Who is the "real" Min Yoon-gi?

Yoon-gi's true personality — or at least, what we as spectators are able to glean of it from interviews, vlogs, and other material not tied to the group's music — starkly contrasts with his fanfiction archetype. There is, to a certain extent, a hierarchy of source material. For Western (particularly American) fans, interviews with easily accessible, English-language publications like *Billboard* or *CBS Sunday Morning* hold particular value, especially when they provide translators which allow the members of BTS who do not speak English fluently to express themselves more freely in conversation. Variety shows, such as BTS' series *Run BTS!* are also highly valued within the fandom as testament to the members' true characters; Yoon-gi frequently playfully (and obviously) cheats on the show, a fact that fans humorously associate with his real life personality.[54] Other sources of information ranging from fan videos at public events to fan stories of interactions with the members of BTS are also privileged as insights into the members' lives.

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[53] MissterMaia. "The Songbird's Resolve." In *The Songbird and the Sea. Archive of Our Own.* Accessed 8 January 2019.
https://archiveofourown.org/works/10795731/chapters/24173556#workskin
[54] @holybangtan. Twitter Post. Jan 3, 2018.
https://twitter.com/holybangtan/status/948423743499526144

It's critical to note that any notion of the "true" Yoon-gi is by definition performative: "any declaration, any revealing interview, any behind-the-scenes recording is by default a public statement"[55] and thus cannot be considered to be an accurate or wholly truthful presentation of a celebrity's true personality. Despite the fact that "Min Yoon-gi" as we best know him is still a public performance that functions as part of a system designed to make money, there is a strict contrast between the Bad Boy archetype frequently found in fanfiction and fans' conceptualization of the public, "real" Min Yoon-gi that fans have developed in the six years since BTS's debut.

Where Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi is rude and unapologetic, Min Yoon-gi is staunch in his opinions but respectful and well spoken in interviews. During a feature interview with Billboard, interviewer E. Alex Jung asked BTS' leader RM about an instance in which he had tweeted about liking the song "Same Love" by Macklemore, which is explicitly supportive of LGBTQ rights. RM, the leader of the group, gave a vague answer that avoided Jung's original question of whether or not his endorsement of the song signified his support of gay rights, telling *Billboard,* "It's hard to find the right words. To reverse the words: Saying 'same love' is saying 'love is the same.' I just really liked the song. That's about all I have to say." Yoon-gi, however, stepped in with a more assertive statement, saying, "There's nothing wrong. Everyone is equal."[56]

There's further difference between the archetype and the "real" Yoon-gi in his manner of speaking. Bad Boy Yoon-gi is gruff in vitriolic when he speaks or raps; in contrast, there are numerous video compilations on YouTube with titles similar to "YOONGI'S CUTE

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[55] Busse, Kristina. "'I'm jealous of the fake me': Postmodern Subjectivity and Identity Construction in Boy Band Fan Fiction." 2017.

[56] Jung, E. Alex. "BTS Speaks Out In Seoul: The K-Pop Megastars Get Candid About Representing a New Generation." *Billboard*, February 15, 2018. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/bts/8099577/bts-interview-billboard-cover-story-2018

NOISES/VOICES :- A SOFT COMPILATION"[57] or "Suga being cute." Sometimes, the

whiplash between Min Yoon-gi and his harsher counterpart is immediate: in behind the scenes

videos for BTS' Highlight Reels (a series of short films intended to complement the *HYYH*

storyline of the music videos), Yoon-gi staggers across the street after raising his voice at his

girlfriend and storming away. Immediately, the video cuts to Yoon-gi's personal commentary,

and he states, "I've never raised my voice at anyone ever before." After striding purposefully

across another road, he emerges from behind a sign and playfully wiggles his arms.[58] Where Bad

Boy Min Yoon-gi grew up on the streets and joined a gang, Min Yoon-gi was a student council

member.[59]

Real life Min Yoon-gi is (as far as we know) dedicated, talented, goofy, and caring,

standing in stark contrast to his dominant fanfiction archetype. This complex characterization —

one that directly contrasts Yoon-gi's "character" within the plot of BTS' music videos —

requires more direct effort on the part of fans to fully grasp. In this case, "direct effort" signifies

time and experience within the fandom. While music videos and Bangtan Bombs are carefully

organized on official YouTube channels, other content that fans consider to be "authentic" such

as fan accounts of interactions or fan videos are more difficult to sift through on social media

sites such as Twitter or Tumblr.

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[57] "YOONGI'S CUTE NOISES//VOICES :- A SOFT COMPILATION," YouTube, 2:23, posted by "abratasas," June 1, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS5YQVTW2-c&t=53s

[58] "[ENG] 171103 [EPISODE] BTS (방탄소년단) 'Highlight Reel' sketch)," YouTube, 3:58, posted by "Bangtan Subs," November 3, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uy9KdBPpCg

[59] "[ENG SUB] 방탄소년단 BTS's SUGA was a student council (Nerd Boy?)," YouTube, 0:44, posted by "Iza Yanti," April 13, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiFRyaLwXAI

Unofficial content like this function as ephemeral traces, per Muñoz's definition of

ephemera as, "a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It…

includes traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining

experiential politics and urgencies long after those experiences have been lived."[60] In this case,

the lived experience and performance thereof are followed by ephemeral evidence in the form of

content such as fan accounts, videos, tweets, or other social media posts that are quickly swept

away in social media feeds that remain perpetually in motion. While YouTube videos are tagged,

there is a lack of strict structures on social media sites like Tumblr or Twitter that would allow

researchers or readers to re-insert themselves into a particular contextual fandom moment. While

it is possible to search particular tweets, posts, or videos from a specific time period,

reconstructing a particular moment in fandom is nigh impossible due to the vast archive of BTS

content on social media sites.

These ephemeral traces inform readers of fanfiction of the context in which fics are

situated. Busse argues that amateur fanfiction in particular necessitates an acknowledgement that

we as readers only see ephemeral traces rather than the fan text in full, which comprises "textual

and community engagement."[61] More difficult-to-track ephemera (as opposed to concrete official

content) are more difficult to follow when initially integrating oneself into fandom. It's simple to

see Min Yoon-gi (or rather, Suga) tossing lighters into cars and breaking out of handcuffs.

However, it's more difficult to find content such as video from a fansign, which is an event in

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[60] Muñoz, José Esteban. 1996. "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." In *Women and Performance* 8 (2): 5-16.
[61] Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." In *Fandom, Second Edition: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World,* 45-59. New York City: NYU Press, 2017.

which fans have the opportunity to speak with idols and ask them to sign their albums; it is common in the K-pop industry.

One such video, posted on March 2nd by Twitter user @sepiamyg, features Yoon-gi smiling, laughing, and high-fiving fans. He pouts, puffs out his cheeks, breaks into a grin, and mimics fans' actions over the course of the video. Taken in 2013 during BTS' debut era, the @sepiamyg captions the video, "Yoongi being the CUTEST [sic] at a fansign in 2013 where did the cold, scary stereotype come from he's always been a sweetheart."[62] While it's easy to sympathize with this query in the moment, it's important to note that this video takes place in the aforementioned *2 Cool 4 Skool* era, in which Yoon-gi's scathing rapping and limitless ego take center stage. While it's easy to access BTS' debut music videos "No More Dream" and "We Are Bulletproof Pt. 2," it takes a greater degree of digging to locate an "authentic" video — note that @sepiamyg uses words such as "always," signifying true character and pits this image in contrast to the "stereotype" — such as this one.

Videos like these are to a certain degree reactive (this caption both acknowledges and denies the validity of the archetype). However, they still act as sources of information and ephemeral traces that inform fans' understanding of the "real" Yoon-gi's character. Ultimately, however, information sources like fan videos are more difficult to access: while YouTube videos from official channels (such as that of BTS' company, BigHit) are easily accessible via a YouTube search, finding a fan video circulated on Twitter would require parsing through a series of tweets after searching a term like "Yoongi fancam" or perhaps "Yoongi cute." While this kind

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[62] @sepiamyg. Twitter Post. March 2, 2019.
https://twitter.com/sepiamyg/status/1101880699219570694

of information isn't inaccessible by any means, it's rarely the first content new fans of BTS find when actively seeking out information about the group.

Furthermore, music and music videos are BTS' primary product. As a result, they're also the content that fans of the group are most likely to have consumed — the music video for "DNA," the title track of BTS' *Love Yourself: Her* EP, has over 700,000,000 views.[63] It is through this hierarchy of most-accessible and most viewed content in addition to existing fantext that fans construct and come to understand dominant character archetypes.

Significance of the Archetype

I've previously argued that character archetypes in BTS fanfiction serve as a signifier of novice fan identity as well as a form of "bad" writing. However, these character archetypes are a crucial intertextual binding force within the archive of BTS fanfiction. Repetition is a hallmark of fanfiction as a medium; intertextuality is a continuous, but far from subtle, process. Busse recounts an anecdote in which, after beginning to read *X-Files* fanfiction in the late 1990s, she began seeing eggbeaters pop up in story after story. Puzzled by repeated appearances of eggbeaters in story after story (especially given that an eggbeater was never a central or even notable object in the series), Busse eventually discovered that there had been a challenge on a fandom mailing list for stories that were exactly five hundred words long and featured an eggbeater. The experience taught her that bizarre but common literary elements or choices in fanfiction may be the result of "intense meta-conversations, quirky challenges, or intra- and

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[63] "BTS (방탄소년단) 'DNA' Official MV," YouTube, 4:15 posted by "ibighit," Sep. 18, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBdVXkSdhwU

inter-fannish tropes,"[64] highlighting the integral intertextual fandom practices that are the basis

for modern fanfiction. She later explicitly states this, arguing that intertextuality — particularly a

story's dependence on community and fan text — is one of four literary aspects that are

particularly pronounced in amateur fanfiction alongside fragmentation, performativity and

community interaction, and intimacy between reader and writer.

Busse argues that fanfiction is "in conversation not only with the source text but usually

also with other stories in the fandom and the discussions that permeate the community."[65]

Busse's point echoes the fact that the invocation of tropes or salient character traits is a valuable

signifier of fandom knowledge. Busse furthers this by arguing that not only are repeated

characteristics in fanfiction valued, but that a complete understanding of a piece of fanfiction

necessitates both knowledge of the source text and of the fan text (or the archive of particular

stories in a fandom).

This centrality of intertextuality in fanfiction at large throws into relief the importance of

character archetypes like Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi in fandom. Given the fandom processes at work,

characterization that is initially strongly rooted in official material (such as the music videos

previously examined) is then amplified as fans begin to read and write fanfiction within a certain

fandom. Per Busse and McCain's assertion that repetition — of characteristics, tropes, or other

literary elements — is valued in fanfiction at large, these character archetypes signify knowledge

both of the source material and the fan text. Constructed through a fan reading of music videos,

other official content, and further sources of information such as fan videos or accounts of

events, these archetypes do the cultural work of tying together the archive. Evidence of dominant

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[64] Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction."
2017.
[65] Ibid.

character archetypes is present in discrete works of fanfiction that are differentiated by word count, writing style, or cohesiveness of plot. Furthermore, archetypes are evidence of the interdependent intertextuality of fanfiction. As threads tying together different works of fanfiction, they highlight the textual nature of fanfiction as a whole.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, an archetype like Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi signifies a lack of fandom experience or a "No Jams ARMY" status when an author invokes it in a fanfiction that aligns with McCain's description of "bad writing."[66] The aforementioned fanfiction *The Songbird and the Sea*, despite invoking the Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi archetype, is still wildly popular in BTS fandom to the extent that fans are still reading the fic for the first time even two years after its completion, signifying a still relevant place in the BTS fanfiction canon. This is testament to its novel length (upwards of 250,000 words), complete narrative, and generally polished quality in terms of grammar and assorted literary elements. In this sense, the archetype (although repetitive) is highly valued, playing into the central relationship between Yoon-gi and Ji-min and the assorted power dynamics at play.

However, the also aforementioned "You're an Asshole, Min Yoongi" more closely aligns with notions of "bad writing," particularly in terms of sentence and paragraph structure as well as plot. The particularly upfront invocation of the asshole (or Bad Boy) Min Yoon-gi archetype is striking; it's easy to know what to expect before beginning to read. At only 13,681 words (and fully complete), it's a simple fanfiction set in a familiar alternate universe — College/University. This particular work is the first that the author (AO3 user springrain21) ever published on Archive of Our Own. In this sense, the archetype invoked in a piece of "bad" writing is a signifier of novice fan status.

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[66] McCain, Katharine E. "Canon vs. 'Fanon': Genre Devices in Contemporary Fanfiction." 2015.

Overall, archetypes like Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi in BTS fanfiction are invoked by writers of varying skill levels. These archetypes serve as crucial markers of the intertextual processes at work in fandom at large, highlighting both primary text (official content) and ephemeral traces. They do the cultural work of bridging the archive of BTS fanfiction, further acting as signifiers for long-term fans of the group of novice fan status when invoked in instances of "bad" writing. This is not, however, to say that they are not valued within the fandom at large. Invoking an archetype signals a basic understanding of BTS canon at large.

Additionally, references to archetypes also form a foundation for inter-fan judgment, particularly of "No Jams ARMYs" at the hands of theoretically more experienced fans. Fans disidentify with "No Jams ARMYs" or fans that they generally do not wish to be perceived as, just as Busse describes in reference to boy band fanfiction in which fans tend to identify with celebrities and against "bad" fans. Rejecting simplified archetypes in favor of characterizations that fans judge to be more in line with their perceptions of "real" people establishes a kind of perceived hierarchy on the part of fans that feel that they have transcended archetypes and "No Jams" traits. Overall, it is impossible to deny the cultural power of these archetypes, which are amplified and reified through additions to the archive and other fandom practices.

SECTION III: WHAT CULTURAL WORK DOES FANFICTION DO?

Summary of Survey Findings

There is a plurality of ways to read fanfiction. While I've cited Archive of Our Own (AO3) as a primary fanfiction hosting site throughout this thesis, other websites such as fanfiction.net and Wattpad in addition to social networks like Tumblr and Twitter also have a significant depth of fic. Currently, Archive of Our Own hosts upwards of 80,000 individual BTS fanworks organized under the "방탄소년단 | Bangtan Boys | BTS" tag. Comparatively, searching the term "BTS" on fanfiction.net returns only approximately 3,800 search results; on Wattpad, another site that hosts fanfiction (among other stories), the #BTS tag is attached to approximately 290,000 stories.

In an effort to better understand the habits, motivations, and inspirations of BTS fanfiction readers and writers, I surveyed 119 participants. I collected data by using a Google Form that I disseminated in fan communities on both Twitter and Tumblr. The survey was intended to collect information on where and how frequently participants read and publish fanfiction, if and how they share it with others, and the kinds of fanfiction that they enjoy and that are memorable to them. The short answer questions of the survey were as follows: What kinds of BTS fanfiction do you like read/write? Why do you like reading/writing BTS fanfiction? Do you share fanfiction with your friends/ If so, how or on which platforms? How does reading or writing fanfiction about BTS (or other Real Person Fanfiction) compare to reading fanfiction about fictional characters? What makes a fanfiction memorable for you? Does reading BTS fanfiction change the way that you interact with BTS, both personally or on social media? If so, how?

Survey data collected from 119 participants reveals a wide swathe of BTS fanfiction reading habits ranging across different websites. While the vast majority (113, 95%) read fanfiction on Archive of Our Own, other sites such as Tumblr (63, 52.9%), Twitter (60, 50.4%), Wattpad (19, 16%), AsianFanFics (12, 10.1%), and Fanfiction.net (7, 5.9%). Other sites — Quotev, Instagram, Ficbook.net (a Russian-language site), and spiritfanfiction.com — were also listed by participants as sites where they consume fanfiction. This data indicates not only AO3's popularity as a fanfiction platform, but that readers consume fanfiction on multiple platforms that sometimes cater to specialized communities — AsianFanFics, for instance, only hosts stories based on Asian media, the vast majority of which is K-pop focused. The average survey respondent read fanfiction on at least two different websites, the most frequent combination thereof being AO3 and Twitter (with 27 responses) followed closely by AO3 and Tumblr as well as AO3 exclusively, each with 21 responses. In respect to frequency, 45 respondents (37.8%) said that they read BTS fanfiction "very frequently," 44 (37%) said that they read "frequently," 24 (20.2%) "occasionally," 5 (4.2%) "rarely," and 1 (0.8%) "very rarely."

While the vast majority of survey respondents (117, 98.3%) self-identified as BTS fanfiction readers, 55 respondents (46.2%) self-identified as both readers and writers. Their preferred sites for publishing BTS fanfiction were roughly similar to respondents' preferred reading sites. 43 writers (70.5%) published on Archive of Our Own, 20 (32.8%) on Tumblr, 18 (29.5%) on Twitter, seven (11.5%) on Wattpad, and one each (1.6%) on AsianFanFics and ficbook.net. Additionally, six self-identified writers stated that they didn't widely publish the fanfiction that they wrote. One wrote that they posted fanfiction on a private Tumblr account to which only their best friend had access; another explained, "I don't publish my work. When I write about BTS it's more as an exercise." In terms of frequency, the majority of writers wrote

less than 3,000 words of BTS fanfiction per week; 16 stated that they wrote over 3,000 with only one stating that they wrote more than 10,000 words per week.

For some respondents, fanfiction also serves a social purpose, facilitating friendships, working to establish digital communities, and serving as social currency in online discussions. Approximately half (49.6%) of respondents stated that they share BTS fanfiction with their friends or on social media while a majority (58.7%) of writers responded that they shared their own fanfiction with friends or on social media. In written, anecdotal responses, respondents highlighted the importance of the digital fandom community — and fanfiction — as a part of their friendships. Additionally, some responses implicated the stigma associated both with RPF and with liking K-pop. One wrote, "I share my works on my tumblr and with my friends there but not with my real life friends because most of them are not really open about liking kpop." Another wrote, "I share it only with my friends that I've made online who are in the same fandom." Yet another: "I only share my fics to online friends who also like bts, none of my irl friends have read my bts fanfics, though some know i write it."

Other responses were enthusiastic ("Oh, definitely 100%. I can't be the only one reading such great writing.") while others were more cut and dry ("Nope"). Many specified that they shared fanfiction only in private messaging or with established friends, whether they were "irls" ("in real life" friends) or friends that they had made online. Many writers indicated that they posted their work on social media sites like Tumblr or Twitter as well as in specific groups. Several respondents also cited Discord, a popular chat platform designed for gamers, as a platform where they shared fanfiction with other readers and writers. Others emphasized

discussion as part of their sharing process; one respondent wrote, "I made moodboards[67] for my fics on tumblr and talk about fics with my mutuals."[68]

While participants varied in the scope of individuals with which they shared either their own writing or other fanfiction, their answers indicated a strong sense of community between fellow fic readers and writers. Respondents indicated a clear division between those both inside and outside the fandom, which is a key determinant of those who it's acceptable to share fanfiction with. The dissemination of fanfiction through direct or group messages on apps like Discord, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Tumblr signifies a certain degree of intimacy between fans. More importantly, it is indicative of the more insular side of fandom: while many fans share fanfiction on public social media channels, for many it is something kept contained in controlled, interpersonal relationships.

This data, albeit limited in scope, is testament to the digital scope of fanfiction and BTS fandom as a whole. Despite the fact that fans read fanfiction on a wide swath of websites (some of which are more popular than others), they still form digital community on more popular websites like Archive of Our Own or social media platforms like Twitter or Tumblr. Even when not sharing, reading, and discussing fanfiction publicly online, many fans still leverage it in interpersonal relationships and in more insular communities such as a private Discord server. Understanding the reading, publishing, and sharing habits of fans is necessary to obtain a limited understanding of the scope of digital fandom and the ways in readers and writers interact with fanfiction on both a personal and social level.

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[67] A moodboard is a collection of images that align with a specific aesthetic and are thematically linked. Frequently, they are used to provide a simplified visual description of a fanfiction or a relationship.

[68] "Mutual" is fandom shorthand for someone that you follow and who follows you back on a social platform.

Interviews

Following the initial survey, I interviewed four respondents in order to further elucidate concepts that they had brought up in their short answers. The participants (who I will refer to only by first name in order to maintain privacy) were Leslie, Hilary, Emily, and Soumya. Interviews were conducted either in person or via e-mail in order to accommodate location and time differences given that not all participants were located within the United States. The questions that I asked each participant were varied according to the earlier answers with which they had provided me. Generally, my questions were centered around themes of the barrier between RPF and reality, online fanfiction communities, and personal inspiration.

I first spoke with Leslie, a fellow undergraduate student who reads (but does not write or publish) fanfiction. Given that we spoke in person, our conversation was somewhat free-wheeling. I first asked Leslie about the preferences that they[69] had indicated on the survey in terms of fanfiction content. In particular, they are drawn to particular ships — relationships between members/characters — that include Namjin (Kim Nam-joon and Kim Seok-jin), Sope (Min "Suga" Yoon-gi and Jung "J-Hope" Ho-seok), and VMinKook (a polyamorous relationship between Kim "V" Tae-hyung, Park Ji-min, and Jeon Jung-kook). Leslie's attachment to these ships is somewhat rooted in defending them: they referenced "Sope is dead," a fandom joke that is predicated both on poking fun at those who ship Sope and a perceived reality that Ho-seok and Yoon-gi are no longer close. "Y'all are wrong," Leslie told me empathetically. "Sope's not dead. Sope's never been dead." Similarly, the prefer VMinKook as an alternative to relationships between only two out of the three implicated members because shipping all three of them together transcends fan fights over ships. Leslie also said that they actively seek out the above

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[69] Note: Leslie uses they/them pronouns and will be referred to using the singular they.

ships, but don't limit themself by ships if they enjoy the plot or content or a specific ship. Despite this, they still have preferences for certain tropes or sexual roles that characters take on in relationships, particularly in terms of Dominant and Submissive power play dynamics.

Leslie also described a specific fanfiction to me that they had been following for a significant period of time despite the fact that it has been on hiatus for over a year. Given that fanfiction is frequently published chapter-by-chapter it isn't uncommon for fics to break update schedules, go on indefinite hiatus, or even be left unfinished. Leslie described the fanfiction as a kind of artifact easily locatable within an archive: they store multiple open webpages of fanfiction on their phone, but this particular fic is the very first tab. Even during hiatus, attachment persists: Leslie rhetorically asked, "If an author needs to take a hiatus, I say [I wouldn't drop a fic] because life happens, right?" Their comments are testament to Busse's claim that fragmentation is a crucial element of fanfiction as a medium. Fanfiction in this form is episodic, published and consumed in incomplete and extemporaneous parts. These WIPs (Works In Progress), which when left on hiatus may remain eternally so, leave open endings that may exist only in the mind of the writer, leaving the WIP in question to be "fragmentary ephemera at its best."[70] Similar to other, previously discussed, ephemera such as social media videos and fan photos, these WIPs are part of the overarching fan text that informs fans' understanding of archetypes, tropes, and characterizations. The prevalence of WIPs or fragments (per Busse) is a hallmark of fanfiction.

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[70] Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." 2017.

Finally, Leslie and I discussed the stigma surrounding real person fanfiction after I followed up on one of their remarks on the survey where they stated, "I'm an idiot who just really likes reading fanfiction." They told me:

"I know that there's always such negative connotations with real person shipping and real person fanfiction; that it seems very delusional to like, you know, read fanfiction about real people and have these [fics.] But I'm like… let me believe. You can call me an idiot for believing and being delusional — well, not delusional because I obviously know it's just like a friendship base level, right? — but let me have that. You can call me an idiot all you want, but that's not gonna stop me from reading my fanfiction. I took that as the idea that someone would call me an idiot or stupid or whatever for reading real person fanfiction and about real people… I guess that's where it kind of came from."

Leslie's response highlights a division between fan and outsider as well as emphasizing a perceived judgment of those who read real person fanfiction. While they are careful to maintain a distance between the fanfiction that they read and real life, they're willing to embrace "idiot" (which in this case is a fan label) because they embrace and love fanfiction. "Let me believe" more precisely signifies "let me imagine;" given their recognition of a division between fic and reality. In later comments, they emphasized that shipping and fanfiction consumption and production must be conducted respectfully in a way that honors the artists' boundaries. "At the end of the day, you're not the person who's controlling their love lives… it's that sort of respect aspect. They live their own lives and you know that they love who they want to love… There's that separation between like, this is what I enjoy for pleasure and I'm not going to bring it up to [BTS] because they are friends." They believe that there's nothing wrong with wanting to ship certain members together in a purely fictional sense so long as fans "stay in their own lane" and respect both the artist and other fans.

Other interviewees reiterated the necessity of this separation between fandom and reality. Hilary connected the controversy surrounding Real Person Fanfiction to perceptions of the Korean entertainment industry and the way that idols are marketed, writing in an e-mail, "Idols

are products for consumption… I think some fans have trouble grasping that idea. Grasping that idea, while also remembering that idols are people. Dating scandals are another extreme example." Hilary then went on to describe how these ideas of ownership and the marketing of idols themselves at product influence blurring of lines between fiction and reality in RPF. "I think it's dangerous when the consumer — the fan — allows themselves to forget that idols are actual people," Hilary wrote. "Fan fiction is actually fiction regardless of what the author is writing about."

Soumya echoed many of the same concerns, observing that some fans forget that RPF is still rooted in reality. "Fans would confuse fantasies with reality, would write inappropriate comments when two members would get close on camera," she wrote. Concerns over shipping, especially when rooted in content like photos or videos, carries the potential for fans to get carried away. For Soumya, the ultimate line that fans cross is spreading hate or targeting members of BTS when they get too close to a particular relationship and are then perceived as a threat.

Despite concerns over RPF, Leslie, Hilary, and Soumya all emphasized the importance of boundaries between fans and idols, particular when it came to fan content. In a certain sense, this establishes fan community which is reliant upon the members of BTS for inspiration but which considers fanfiction to be nearly entirely divorced from the members themselves. Emily, another interviewee, cited moments between members as a critical point of discussion when talking about fanfiction with friends. When discussing her favorite ships, Emily described members as having "really genuine chemistry" or having "the FATTEST [sic] crush" on each other, not explicitly making the distinction between fiction and reality. Not digging into specifics, but still highlighting the importance of content focused on the members themselves, Emily said that "any

content from BTs, even old [content] that I've momentarily forgotten about" serves as inspiration for writing content. Between official content from BTS during publically active periods and works produced by fans, there's a constant stream of content. "I'm never missing BTS because they're always on my mind," Emily writes.

Speaking more particularly, Hilary cited small moments as potential turning points or "what ifs?" that inspired her fanfiction. "When BTS attended their second [Billboard Music Awards] there was an interview in which Namjoon was asked to translate for Jimin and stumbled over his works; Hoseok flagged the translator and took Namjoon's mic. That five second moment caught my attention. What happened after?" However, she also said that hypothetical situations — an earthquake; one member hears another snoring — also inspire her fanfiction.

As previously discussed, fanfiction plays a crucial role in social interactions between fans. Hilary is a member of a fanfiction writing group chat hosted on Discord and posts her fics on Tumblr for an audience; Emily makes moodboards for the fanfiction that she writes and posts them on social media; Soumya runs a BTS recommendation blog on Tumblr. This social engagement is based on intimate relationships between readers and writers; these relationships, while having the potential to turn sour, are frequently formative and productive. "With fanfiction, assuming you post it somewhere, not only are you practicing but you are also getting feedback… The BTS fandom, though at times over the top and crazy, is really good at supporting one another and sharing positivity," Hilary wrote. Hilary also frequently interacts with readers on her Tumblr page, who leave anonymous comments on her fanfiction ranging from praise to critique to suggestions for future fic. Emily regularly speculates about fanfiction scenarios with her friends ("it's kind of like 'oh riverdale [sic] but [Jungkook and Jimin") and posts content related to her fanfiction on Tumblr for her followers. Soumya deliberately

disseminates fanfiction that is not her own on a Tumblr blog focused on Taegi (a ship comprised of BTS members Kim Tae-hyung and Min Yoon-gi) fanfiction recommendations. In this capacity, she directly interacts with fans, who ask her to recommend fanfiction based on trope, genre, kink, length, etc.

Soumya was unique in her explanation of fanfiction's impact on her understanding of identity. Coming from an environment where conversations about sex are few and far between, Soumya was initially overwhelmed but intrigued by the frequently explicit content in fanfiction. Reading fanfiction challenged her understanding of concepts such as the gender binary, heterosexuality, and masculinity and femininity. She cites fanfiction as having challenged her beliefs related to, "gender expression, asexual/aromantic persons, sexual assault… ableism, intersex/transgender individuals, polyamorous relationships, mental disorders, BDSM, etc." In particular, fanfiction was crucial in helping Soumya to further understand and accept her own gender identity. "Fanfiction opened a new world for me," she wrote. "I started researching to understand it all better. I eventually gained more confidence in myself and was eventually able to make my parents understand [my gender identity."

Speaking anecdotally, fanfiction was my first meaningful introduction into queer identity. As a child, queer characters on series like Glee or Will and Grace were frequently white, male, and cisgender. As a queer child, I relentlessly consumed fanfiction in which other young, queer authors reimagined our favorite characters as queer, happy, and in love. As a queer young adult, I relentlessly consume fanfiction as a means of learning more about sexual expression and desire. Past coming to learn about my own identity, my experience was similar to Soumya's in the respect of treating fanfiction like a queer educational tool. Fanfiction is a medium in which

authors have the capacity stage sexual and gender identities in a way that is authentic to their own queer experience.

In a May 2016, Busse spoke to Medium's The Establishment about trans youth navigating identity through fanfiction, saying, "Sometimes, the online space is the only space [queer writers] can be out. They are still negotiating what they want to be called —like what their pronouns are — and coming out as trans online allows them to explore that identity."71 Fanfiction serves as a site of identity formation and pleasure seeking for many queer youth — myself included.

Considering the responses both of interviewees and of survey respondents, the only truly clear consensus is that fanfiction contains multitudes. However, it does important cultural work in fan communities in a multitude of respects. In some ways, it echoes Busse's description of fanfiction's purpose of existence as "a series of personal — if not intimate — textual engagements" that center affect and feeling.

Additionally, fanfiction facilitates interactions between fans, ranging from the debates over ships that Leslie mentioned to the critiques that Hailey receives on her Tumblr. Soumya's administration of an archive that caters to a specific interest — in this case, the Taegi ship — is a collaborative process that brings like-minded fans together even outside of general fan communities on Twitter or even the full archive of BTS fanfiction on AO3. These archives and the fans that that maintain them are crucial to fanfiction in a specific category as a whole;

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71 Hu, Jane. "The Revolutionary Power Of Fanfiction For Queer Youth." *The Establishment*, Medium, May 16, 2016. https://medium.com/the-establishment/the-importance-of-fanfiction-for-queer-youth-4ec3e85d7519

reading fanfiction necessitates knowledge both of the source text and growing collections of fanworks.72

Within fandom, fanfiction functions as a site of contention, critique, exploration, education, fantasizing, among others. Its reliance on affect, fragmented nature, and dependence on fan dialogue makes it a binding force in fandom, especially in fandoms centered around real people. Given the breadth of continuously available BTS content, a consistent supply of fanfiction is always a given.

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[72] Busse, Kristina. "Intimate Intertextuality and Performative Fragments in Media Fanfiction." 2017.

CONCLUSION

BTS Outcast was an interactive fanfiction experience written by Twitter user @flirtaus

that played out on Twitter over a sequence of five days beginning on January 3rd, 2018 and

ending on January 8th, 2018. Published as a Twitter thread, the text of the fanfiction itself is

displayed as a series of text messages between characters based off of the members of BTS.

Yoon-gi is the protagonist; the plot begins when he downloads a game called "Outcast" at the

same time that a series of boys are announced to have gone missing. Two of the characters in the

game — Jimin and Jungkook — happen to share names with the missing boys. Despite this,

Yoongi and his friend Hoseok download and begin to play the game, only to realize that they are

unable to delete it.

What made the fanfiction a unique experience was the fact that it incorporated the results

of live Twitter polls into the continuing storyline. After the first day, readers made a choice of

whether to intensify either Yoongi or Hoseok's game. Following the conclusion of the poll,

@flirtaus posted images of a series of texts from an unknown number — supposedly the game's

creator — taunts readers directly through the fourth wall, asking, "Did you make the

WRO)$(!!=@NG [sic] ONE?" The first poll of the game was voted on by approximately 14,000

readers. The second poll received 134,000 votes and the third 366,000 votes as the audience of

the fanfiction grew exponentially. Fans rallied around hashtags related to the fanfiction, notably

#btsoutcast, posting theories about the game in addition to fanart and other creations such as

trailers for the game.

Outcast's interactive elements, time-based plot, and innovative storytelling format made

it a galvanizing force in a way that no other fanfiction has done to date. *Outcast* was more than a

fanfiction; it was a social moment in fandom during a time of little official content. Testament to the evolution of the fandom experience in the digital age and the social-media savvy of BTS' fandom, *Outcast* did the cultural work of bringing together fandom in a way rarely seen in massive digital fan communities. K-pop columnist Tamar Herman noted in a Forbes report about the phenomenon that ARMY "[brought] the fervor they used to propel [BTS] into the highest tiers of America's music consciousness" into their engagement with *Outcast*.[73]

Outcast epitomizes the cultural work that BTS fanfiction does as a whole. Loosely rooted in official content, it binds fandom together through facilitated fan interactions, explorations of identity through characters that are both familiar and beloved, and fills in gaps of official content given its responsive nature. Character archetypes like Bad Boy Min Yoon-gi thread through the archive of BTS fanfiction, serving as signifiers of both basic understanding and at times, intimate fandom knowledge.

Ultimately, fanfiction is a medium through which fans connect not only to the source text — or in this case, characters based off of the very real members of BTS — but also through which fans connect to each other. It is a site of community, soul-searching, and pleasure; it affords young writers the opportunity to write while engaging with low-stakes material. From queer readers and writers like Soumya to fans like Leslie who simply want to imagine, fanfiction is both personal and collective, facilitating connections between fans and helping them to develop their own identity. Ultimately, the stigma of Real Person Fanfiction is not of much consequence so long as fans are able to divorce reality from fanfiction, a distinction that is policed by other fans per responses to my survey and interviews.

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[73] Herman, Tamar. "Bts Fans Flock to Viral Horror Fanfic 'Outcast' Based On Band." *Forbes*, Jan 10, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/tamarherman/2018/01/10/bts-fans-flock-to-viral-horror-fanfic-outcast-based-on-band/

Whether reimagined as pirates, victims in a horror game, or just assholes, characters based off of the members of BTS serve a crucial role in BTS fandom even when divorced from the members themselves. Just as love of the group binds fandom together, so does a distinct love of fanfiction.

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