



**HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)**

**HUMANITIES RESEARCH PAPER 2020**

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Topic: "Of Oppas and Flower-Boys" An analysis of Vulnerability and Masculinity in BTS

Slant: Literature

Total Word Count (excluding appendixes, footnotes & references): 5206

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**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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## **Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter**

### **1.1. Background**

BTS, also known as the Bangtan Boys, is a seven-member South Korean boy group that was formed in Seoul in 2010. BTS stands for the Korean expression Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates to Bulletproof Boy Scouts. Their music genres are Hip-Hop, EDM and R&B and other genres. They are immensely popular and as one of TIME's Top 25 Most influential people on the Internet (TIME 2019, July 16), their influence is huge. The group is known for touching on issues like mental health, the societal expectations and troubles faced by youths and the journey of loving yourself through their songs. "No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin colour, your gender identity, just speak yourself" Kim Namjoon(2018) , the leader of the group, mentions in his speech at the United Nations. They have continued to embrace their identity, not as traditionally masculine men, but as individuals true to themselves. The group subverts these toxic traits of Hegemonic Masculinity throughout their journey as a group through their display of soft masculinity, where more feminine traits like emotional sensitivity and vulnerability are prevalent, in their songs and music videos. I will analyse the Soft Masculinity portrayed by BTS in their music videos and the traits that constitute this masculinity like emotionality and vulnerability in comparison to Hegemonic Masculinity.

### **1.2. Rationale**

This analysis of soft masculinity in BTS is worthy of research because of BTS's unique position as an Asian K-pop group in the global music scene. They are set apart from the other artists because of their unique performances alongside their soft masculinity. In the global context, their portrayal of masculinity is rare and worthy of research because it has feminine qualities yet is still regarded as masculine to the general public due to the Identity Control Theory (Burker,1991) where their fans enable their masculinity by supporting them. The

significance in researching BTS specifically is because they are a boy group, something generally associated with conventional notions of masculinity yet they also possess these so-called feminine traits. In Comparison, Hegemonic Masculinity in society can breed “toxic” masculine behaviour such as misogyny and violence. It is a pressing issue in our modern-day society with trending hashtags such as the #MeToo movement yet no one is trying to fix the root of the problem -- Hegemonic Masculinity. Soft masculinity is not commonly accepted in society as part of masculinity because it is still subjected to the same domination that Hegemonic Masculinity enforces onto non-hegemonic masculinities. However, the presence feminine qualities in Soft Masculinity as well as the rise of Soft Masculinity can help to solve these problems of Hegemonic Masculinity by highlighting why these behaviours are problematic.

Thus, I want to research how this soft masculinity differs from Hegemonic Masculinity and what traits or characteristics constitute it. I hope to break some stereotypes about soft masculinity in this paper and provide new insights into soft masculinity as a subset of masculinity. The stereotype that it is not socially acceptable for heterosexual men to possess feminine traits is problematic and is an exigent problem in our society. Hence, my paper aims to spread awareness that it is fallacious to assume that all men have to fit into the umbrella of Hegemonic Masculinity.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. How does BTS portray soft masculinity through their song lyrics, music videos and performances?
2. How does BTS portray vulnerability as a component of their masculinity?

### 1.4. Thesis Statement

Their soft masculinity is portrayed through their vulnerability being portrayed as positive, subverting the dominant characteristics of Hegemonic Masculinity, and empowering those who are more feminine in the process. It is through their portrayal of being vulnerable yet confident at the same time, that subverts the notion that one is antithetical to the other, and further moves them away from hegemonic masculinity

#### 1.5. Scope of Research / Delimitation(s)

In this paper, the analysis will be focussed on a few songs that I have chosen that are more relevant to my analysis, namely “IDOL” (2018), “Black Swan”(2020) and “Anpanman”(2018). These themes , like self-love and vulnerability, are more relevant to soft masculinity and are much more prevalent in these songs

My research will be structured around my research questions on how BTS displays their masculinity and the various components of this masculinity in relation to vulnerability and how it differs from Hegemonic Masculinity. I will also explain how the Identity Control Theory enables BTS to continue to portray this Soft Masculinity confidently.

#### 1.6. Significance of Research / Usefulness

The significance of this paper lies in the fact that much of our understanding and pre-existing notions of masculinity come from and are influenced by mainstream pop culture, which BTS is now a part of because of their increased popularity. Hence, by extension, the influence that BTS has on our notions of masculinity is much greater and far-reaching, resulting in a greater impact on what we perceive as Masculinity. This area of soft masculinity has generally been untouched in terms of explaining where soft masculinity fits into gender roles so it is important that my research covers this topic in the context of pop

culture and BTS to explain exactly what is Soft Masculinity in relation to Hegemonic Masculinity. This research will help to raise awareness and shed light on this new kind of positive masculinity globally. There has always been an expectation and societal pressure to conform to Hegemonic Masculinity and display masculine qualities in order to feel validation as a man but on the contrary, Soft Masculinity helps to empower men who do not possess these conventionally masculine traits and to tell them that it is socially acceptable to differ from the conventionally masculine celebrities we see on social media; it is socially acceptable to possess feminine traits; it is socially acceptable to express your emotions and be vulnerable. This is seen when BTS's fans support BTS's portrayal of soft masculinity and vulnerability in a continuous "feedback loop" (Burke and Reitzes, 1991) where their portrayal of their masculinity is enabled by their fans, allowing them to have greater confidence and support to be genuine and vulnerable.

This paper will help to achieve deeper understandings of this new definition of masculinity and lead to greater breakthroughs in the construction of masculinity in society.

### 1.7. Limitations

This research will not be able to cover everything portraying their masculinity from their past albums or current albums due to time constraints to their non-music related videos like their YouTube channel, or their movie documentary. Hence, the other aspects of their soft masculinity found in these other aspects like their aegyo and affectionate behaviour they display towards each other in their daily lives will not be covered but my analysis will still be substantially reflective of the masculinity BTS has portrayed in their entire career through some of their more popular songs that are more relevant to Masculinity. The English translations of their song lyrics used in this analysis will also somewhat limit my analysis as I will not be able to phonetically analyse these lyrics.

This portrayal of masculinity in BTS will not be representative of the entire K-pop industry as a whole, because ultimately most groups have different styles or “concepts” that may not be in line with this soft masculinity that BTS displays. I will be focussing specifically on soft masculinity in BTS and not any other artists because it allows for deeper and more accurate understandings of any one particular aspect of masculinity in the same artist and for conclusions based on repeated themes in BTS songs rather than broader, collective understandings of masculinity drawn from many artists.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review will be largely focused on the theories on how masculinity is constructed as well as enabled through the Identity Control Theory, including the traditional aspects of hegemonic masculinity while comparing this to the traits and components of soft masculinity such as vulnerability, self-love and emotional sensitivity.

### **2.1: Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell,1998) is the idea that “embodie(s) the currently most honoured way of being a man, requir(ing) all other men to position themselves in relation to it” and “legitimized the global subordination of women to men” ideologically or in other contentions of the theory, it is the concept that “unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy.” (Demetriou, 2001) Apart from this, other categories of masculinity that are viewed as feminine or non-hegemonic like Asian Masculinity were also part of this subordination. A modern-day example of this domination in action is “Toxic Masculinity”, used to describe harmful or “toxic” traits in masculinity such as misogyny and aggression. Generally, this stereotype of manhood

encourages certain characteristics that would form the foundations of masculine scripts of behaviour. Donaldson (1993) describes some of these traits such as aggression, emotional restraint/stoicism, courage, toughness through physical strength, athleticism, being adventurous and having competitiveness. Even though only some of these traits are harmful and unhealthy, the perpetuation of the stereotype that all men have to possess these qualities is unhealthy and oppressive.

The framework of Hegemonic Masculinity is not without criticism. Wetherell et al. (1999) dispute that although “this concept embodies important theoretical insights, it is insufficiently developed” and “offers a vague and imprecise account of the social psychological reproduction of male identities” on how exactly Hegemonic Masculinity affects and makes up masculine identities. They then argue that it leaves them “to wonder what this conformity might look like in practice”.

Although hegemonic masculinity leaves out the fine details of what exactly hegemonic masculinity consists of and how to determine what exactly is the current dominant masculinity, the original idea of Hegemonic Masculinity was intended to fit society’s standards of Masculinity at that time and provide a concept of social norms and notions of masculinity instead of being a study on the specific qualities of Hegemonic Masculinity and how it “looks like in practice”. It is already stated that Hegemonic masculinity “came into existence in specific circumstances” and is “open to historical change” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) which helps to prove my point that Hegemonic Masculinity will always be subject to “historical change” which makes studying the exact nature of its domination and “conformity in practice” very unfeasible. Demetriou (2001) argues something similar that since Hegemonic Masculinity “takes place within different historico-cultural contexts” and is “performed by agents of different race, class, or

generation”, it is more logical “talk about masculinities/femininities, not masculinity/femininity.” This adds on to my earlier point that Hegemonic Masculinity should be more open-ended and cannot be generalised to any specific context because of its role as a framework to refer to the dominant Hegemonic Masculinity at any point in time.

Hence, I will be using this theory of Hegemonic Masculinity as an ideal of the current dominant type of masculinity and not as a specific set of behaviours that showcase how the domination and oppression is shown.

## 2.2: Soft Masculinity

Soft Masculinity is the kind of masculinity that BTS has. It is a newly emerging type of masculinity that is stereotypically feminine in general, with traits that are more passive and gentle as compared to traits of Hegemonic Masculinity. It is described by Jung (2010) as “a hybrid product constructed through the transcultural amalgamation of South Korea's traditional seonbi masculinity (which is heavily influenced by Chinese Confucian wen masculinity), Japan's bishōnen (pretty boy) masculinity, and global metrosexual masculinity.” Louie (2000) explains Confucian wen-wu masculinity as the “ideal Chinese masculinity” that “comprises both wen and wu so that a scholar is considered to be no less masculine than a soldier.” There is also a strong relationship between Soft Masculinity and Asian masculinity because of this. Another study by Chua and Fujino (1999) finds that many Asian-Americans of Chinese and Japanese heritage think of "caring characteristics such as being polite and obedient" when asked about their “Asian” masculinity and associate such traits and ideas with masculinity from their culture. BTS, being an Asian boy group, also portrays some aspects of Asian masculinity as part of their Soft Masculinity be it through their affection for one another and their fans.



In addition to these Asian roots, the Hallyu wave (the Korean trend as a result of the increased popularity of Kdramas and K-pop) was also a key factor in introducing this new type of Masculinity to the world. However, soft masculinity is not only categorised as Asian or limited to Asian cultures but should be used to describe any aspects of masculinity that are not traditionally aggressive or masculine such as traits like vulnerability and emotional sensitivity.

The very concept of soft masculinity to allow the current concept of masculinity to adapt into something more passive where the harmful aspects of masculinity such as misogyny and aggressiveness are replaced by more “soft” or less dominant characteristics. This is definitely helpful in combating these toxic qualities of Hegemonic Masculinity as well. One of its key applications is in criminal rehabilitation to help convicts deal with their hyper-masculine behaviour that may have caused their crimes. Hegemonic Masculinity has given rise to new problems of toxic masculinity with “concerns (like) the intersections of masculinity and violence, the social networks that positively and negatively affect young men, identity construction, emotional expression, and literacy in the lives of male youth.” Pleasants (2007) says in his paper on teaching young men in correctional education and male identity development. These more passive qualities can help these offenders to improve. With the increased awareness on Soft masculinity, we can help to disprove the belief that these “feminine” qualities are less important and allow Masculinity to progress to a more ideal, inclusive one where all qualities are welcome. I will be analysing how BTS portrays their masculinity in a positive light and helps rewrite this unhealthy gender narrative.

### 2.3: Vulnerability as an aspect of Soft masculinity

Vulnerability is a characteristic in the Soft Masculinity portrayed by BTS and is also a show of their confidence and willingness to be emotional and expressive in their behaviour. It is the “capacity to be wounded and suffer. As bodily, social, and affective beings, we all have the capacity to be vulnerable to one another and to condition of inequality, discrimination, exploitation, or violence, as well to the natural environment.” (Koivunen et al. ,2018) This definition of vulnerability is useful in my paper because everyone should possess some form of vulnerability as beings capable of emotions and experiences. However, there is a major social stigma around the gendering of this trait where Vulnerability is seen to be characteristic of females as well as non-hegemonic groups. It can be seen as deeply related to other qualities of Soft masculinity like emotional sensitivity and expressiveness, which are also treated as signs of weakness due to the vulnerability that expressing your emotions causes. On the contrary, BTS can be seen as willing to be honest and vulnerable in front of their fans. We see this through their song lyrics that open up about their insecurities and other displays of affection between them and their fans. On the other hand, this is uncommon in Hegemonic Masculinity where “men avoid help seeking behaviour and hide apparent weakness and pain to maintain their dominance and social position”. Moore, et al. (2013) thinks that “this may be a part of a problem in the gendering of stoicism”. I agree with them that Stoicism is indeed characterised to the gender narrative of a masculine man in Hegemonic Masculinity, resulting in any feelings or characteristics such as emotional expressiveness being suppressed due to the mindset of stoicism that tells men that it is a sign of weakness and vulnerability to complain or show your feelings of emotion over an issue. Hence, it is problematic that Hegemonic Masculinity perpetuates the gendering of Vulnerability and the portrayal of vulnerability in BTS can help break this stigma.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

I will be using the comparison of Soft masculinity and hegemonic masculinity (Connell,1998) as my main framework and comparing these conventional stereotypes with certain unconventional traits of BTS's masculinity. I will be observing what their masculinity is like and compare it to other more conventionally masculine examples to see how it differs and why it can be considered as part of this new, more inclusive soft masculinity. I will be focussing on the vulnerability aspect of their masculinity as well and seeing how it differs from the traditional traits of hegemonic masculinity like stoicism where the suppression of emotions and emotional insensitivity are often associated with. Connell (2017) says that "Research has shown the multiplicity of masculinities and their internal complexity— and sometimes, their internal contradictions. (...) Research has mapped relations between different forms of masculinity: hegemony, marginalization, violence, and fearful avoidance." I will be exploring how the dominance of masculinity and the marginalization of non-hegemonic masculinities does not affect BTS and their image as a masculine boy group as a result of the Identity Control Theory, despite their soft masculinity. I will be using the group's song lyrics and music videos alongside other aspects of their performances such as dance as my basis of analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis**

### **4.1: Vulnerability in Soft Masculinity**

BTS portrays vulnerability as something that they do not need to be ashamed of possessing; it is something that they are quite open to share about with numerous displays of vulnerability throughout BTS' song lyrics where members have expressed their fears of losing their

passion for dancing, losing someone, not being able to live up to society's standards and etc. They prove that there is no need to put up a strong, confident front all the time.

Black Swan (2018) is one such song that is representative of how they display these fears and vulnerabilities through their song lyrics. In the song itself, the group shares that after producing music for so long, they are afraid that the music they produce will no longer cease to touch them or move them emotionally and creating music, singing or dancing will no longer be something that they can find joy in.



Fig.1 A shadow dancing on the screen behind Suga

*No song affects me anymore*

*Crying out a silent cry*

*Ocean with all light silenced shut yeah, yeah, yeah*

BTS, Black Swan (2020)

*I hear the far-away ocean*

*Across the dream, over the horizon*

BTS, Euphoria (2018)

*But I'm even thirstier than before*

*Is what I know really the ocean?*

BTS, Sea (2017)

They describe the “ocean” as something that they “thirst” for and “dream” over from their old songs yet after having reached this ocean symbolic of their newfound success, they now feel that they no longer have the same “light” or passion that they once had for their music. Black Swan flips this “dream” on its head that the success they had been hoping for is now no longer a success because they no longer find any joy in their music and find that their ocean has “all light silenced”. The idea of BTS’s hearts no longer *racing when they hear their own music play* contrasts with messages in their previous songs where members like Suga have even said that the piano was his first love in “First Love” (BTS, 2016).

*The heart no longer races*

*When hearing the music play*

*Tryna' pull up*

*Seems like time has stopped*

*Oh that would be my first death*

*I been always afraid of*

*(...)*

BTS, Black Swan (2020)

The quote “A dancer dies twice — once when they stop dancing, and this first death is the more painful.” by Martha Graham appears at the start of the Art Film for the song, further reinforcing the idea that they now fear this “first death” that they have “always (been) afraid of” as they are no longer touched by their own music.

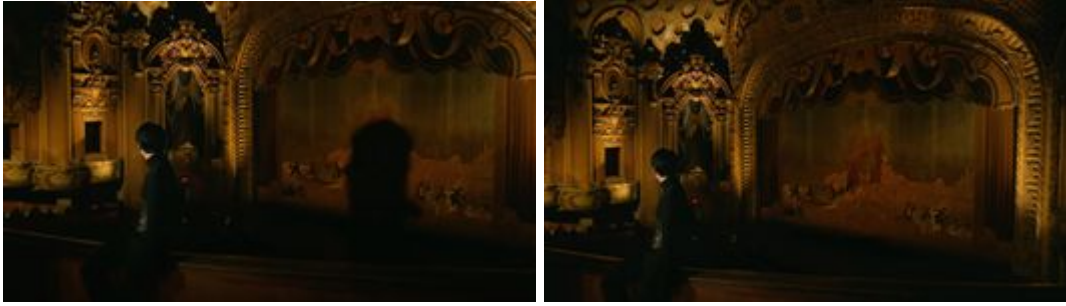


Fig. 2 and 3 of Jungkook's shadow disappearing at the end

In the M/V itself, the shadows play a huge part in conveying the inner struggles of the members. The idea of a shadow can also represent the idea of their conventional femininity being the part of them that they want to hide as it makes them vulnerable to others. These shadows also represent the side of an artist that is deeply personal and not visible to the public eye, suggesting that the shadows of the group are actually in a lot of emotional distress and struggles regarding this issue. Notions of depression, insecurities and your own suppressed emotional struggles are often associated with these shadows and the way they are presented as mismatched and in a frenzy compared to their public persona on stage when they are performing insinuates this disconnect. This symbolism is taken further due to the fact that the video is set in the Los Angeles Theatre, where the idea of a theatre suggests that the members are simply acting and putting on a facade of their public persona; one that is still passionate about their music and not one that is fearful of losing that passion. However, the very act that they are sharing these fears with their listeners is a display of their vulnerability; they are not afraid to show the inner side of themselves or their "shadows" that they do not normally show.

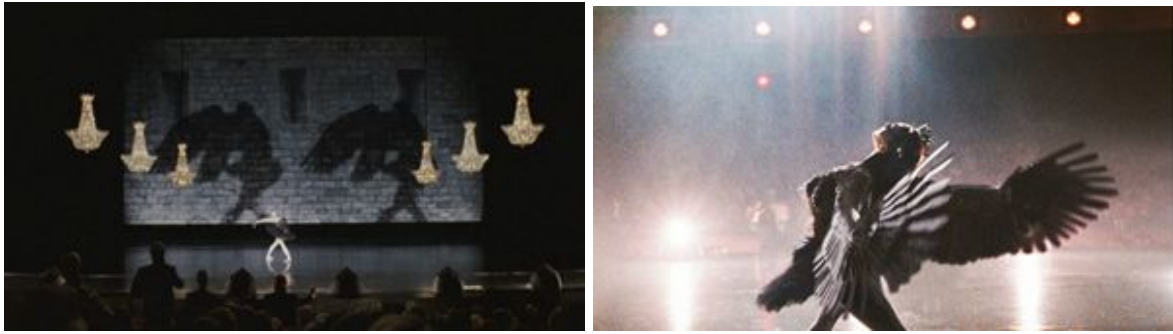


Fig. 4 and 5, taken from the movie Black Swan (2010)

Apart from the significance of the setting, the music video also has many allusions and similarities to the 2010 movie “Black Swan” starring Natalie Portman, reinforcing the message about an artist being afraid of losing their passion for the art and “dying” as an artist when they lose this passion. The music video seems to bear a similarity to a scene in the movie where the ballet dancer is shown to have a distorted and unmatching shadow, showing that she has sacrificed so much of her own sanity because of her passion to succeed in ballet that her inner self or her “shadow” is driven crazy to the point that she grows black swan wings. Similarly, this allusion to the movie in the music video through these shadow scenes.

In the Music Video, we are also introduced to the ballet in their dance --- something that is generally associated with notions of strictness, performance and perfection where BTS’s songs and performances are merely for the sake of showing the most perfect side of themselves as they are scrutinised by the society around them. They are judged for any signs of weakness or femininity by others in relation to their masculinity and this song is their way of relieving and sharing all that stress they have from being so perfect in their performances year after year and sharing that they are vulnerable to these insecurities too, even as professional K-pop idols who have trained in dance and singing for years.

We can conclude that the vulnerability portrayed in these songs is genuine and subverts the standards of Hegemonic Masculinity where men are pressured into suppressing their feelings through words or emotions, causing unhealthy behaviour when these feelings. In contrast, vulnerability in their music is something that they are very open with sharing about in their songs.

#### 4.2: Portrayal of Confidence in their Soft Masculinity

BTS is shown as vulnerable and expressive of their emotions, subverting Hegemonic Masculinity. However, their portrayal of vulnerability is seen not to undermine, but to encourage their confidence in their masculinity in the next few songs by helping them grow from their fears. They also prove through their display of masculinity that confidence and vulnerability can coexist together.

In IDOL (BTS,2018), we are able to conclude that although BTS faces these problems and struggles and are vulnerable to the public eye, they are still comfortable and proud of who they are.

*You can call me artist (artist)*

*You can call me idol (idol)*

*No matter what you call me*

*I don't care*

*Cuz I was always just me*

BTS, IDOL(2018)

IDOL is a heartfelt song about overcoming their struggles as a group especially after just emerging and attracting attention in the Global Music Scene when they have always struggled with the label of what it means to be an “IDOL” or an “artist”. The femininity



associated with these stereotypes and the word “idol” is generally harmful to people’s conceived notions about BTS and how the group lacks traditional masculinity. The term itself also carries a certain derogatory meaning that they do not write their own music compared to their Western counterparts; K-pop groups often do not write their own songs because their own agencies help them to do this instead, giving rise to numerous criticisms about whether they should even be called an “artist”. Even though BTS is one of the few groups who actually write a majority of their music, they are still subjected to this judgement and generalization but we can see that despite all these fears and insecurities, BTS is able to be proud of their identity as artists. They also confront their past fears about how the 7 years of being in K-pop might have caused them to struggle with their identity distinguishing the difference between their idol-selves and them behind that image, namely the “*hundreds of me’s inside of me*”. However, they have come to accept that every version of themselves is a valid part of their whole self, displaying their newfound confidence in their own identity even despite all the criticisms they have faced.



Fig. 7 RM using a face filter on himself

*Keep on chit-chatting, saying this and that*

*I do what I do, so you do you*

*You can't stop me lovin' myself*

*(...)*

*Love my dance and my what*

*There are hundreds of me's inside of me*

*I'm facing a new me again today*

*It's all me anyway*

IDOL also confronts the aforementioned negative western stereotype of K-pop that connotes that these “idols” are simply young feminine men who dance and wear make-up. However, they do accept that these identities are “all (them) anyway” and that they still “love themselves” regardless of the “chit-chat” or criticisms that they face because their image as feminine men is simply congruent with who they actually are. BTS and their entire fandom

are very supportive of this and celebrate who they are as genuine people, not men conforming to the standards of the K-pop industry or the Western world. Fig 4 is an example of RM purposely using a cute face filter or acting “aegyo”, a cute display of affection. These sort of cute face filters are associated with femininity because generally, the standards of Hegemonic Masculinity dictate that men cannot display affection or femininity because doing these things would undermine their masculinity. However, RM uses it all the more to emphasize that it should be socially acceptable for a man to display aegyo behaviour if it is his identity; doing these things will not make his soft masculinity regarded as any less masculine compared to hegemonic masculinity. The leader of the group furthermore displays this confidence in his masculinity by acting aegyo despite the criticisms he has faced.

Alternatively, this filter also hints at the lack of authenticity and genuinity that people say these “idols” have where their persona on camera is so-called “filtered” to entice their fans with their charming and aegyo personalities. However, the use of it here can be seen as ironic that they are actually not as fake or “filtered” as people think they are. In conjunction with the previous statement that the group tries to stay authentic and true to themselves, rather than conforming to the toxic gender narrative of Hegemonic Masculinity where people are forced to display traits of traditional masculinity. BTS portrays their vulnerability as something that is positive and something that they do not need to be afraid of possessing. They continue to remain unfazed to the various criticisms they have faced and can be seen to have grown from their labels.

Similarly, another instance of BTS displaying their self-confidence while still coming to terms with their weaknesses and vulnerabilities is in Anpanman (BTS, 2018). The song is a testament to how a masculine man can possess both confidence and vulnerability without

undermining either of them. They are shown to be proud of their soft masculinity despite being compared to Hegemonic Masculinity.



Fig. 8 and 9 Superman and Anpanman

The Anpanman is symbolic of their soft masculinity as well; “Anpanman” appears to be very vulnerable and not the most heroic for a superhero yet he is still confident in himself and helps people in his capacity. Anpanman, (meaning “bread man” in English) is a famous Japanese cartoon about a superhero that saves starving children or animals by letting them eat a part of his head. While it may not seem like the most flashy or heroic superhero, Anpanman is often known to be earnest and willing to sacrifice a part of himself for others. In comparison, a traditionally masculine superhero like Superman would be the ideal of masculinity and male heroes for Hegemonic Masculinity; He fits all the qualities of being dominating, muscular and confident that is part of Hegemonic Masculinity. In comparison, Anpanman is almost none of those qualities, yet he is still regarded as an earnest, helpful superhero who is regarded highly as well. The appearance of Anpanman as a fluffy, rounded bread man connotes “softer” and more passive traits such as vulnerability and compassion and also implies that Anpanman is more likely to get wounded or get “covered in bruises” in the process of saving people. His superpower of giving a part of himself to feed starving children shows us this vulnerability as compared to someone like Superman, who is seen to

be invulnerable to all attacks or weaknesses and is very strong physically. We can apply this same analogy to BTS's soft masculinity where they are not regarded as the most masculine from the lens of Hegemonic Masculinity, yet they can still be confident in their masculinity and be regarded as "masculine".

*"I'm not a superhero*

*Don't expect a lot*

*I can be your hero*

*(...)*

*That young man, young man, young man*

*Keep secretly, secretly getting covered in bruises*

*But ballin', ballin' still Bangtan*

The song shows that although BTS has faced some troubles and challenges along the way, they are still "Bangtan" (translating to "bulletproof") to these challenges. "Bangtan" being a reference to the group's name "Bulletproof Boy Scouts".

*I'm a new generation, Anpanman*

*I'm a new superhero, Anpanman*

*(...)*

*Sometimes I'm afraid of all this*

*Because I came to have so many things that I love*

BTS, Anpanman (2018)

However, this sense of inferiority from these comparisons is shown to be insignificant to BTS because they are "bangtan" towards it and confident in their own identities. The song proves that their vulnerability and soft masculinity in comparison to those of conventional male pop stars from the West is also equally as valid and that they can still be regarded as masculine

nonetheless. This portrayal of their masculinity is heartwarming because it proves to the rest of the world that men can be both vulnerable and confident about themselves or their masculinity; neither quality is antithetical to the other and it is acceptable for men to be vulnerable.

The notion of “self-love” recurring in BTS’s music from “IDOL” and “Anpanman” also proves the point that they do not need to conform to Hegemonic Masculinity or seek validation from others about their masculinity; they need only seek these from themselves.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

As Hegemonic Masculinity continues to dominate and determine what is traditionally regarded as masculine in society, there is a greater need for the Soft Masculinity that BTS portrays to be more widespread and regarded as socially acceptable. Their portrayal of masculinity has been shown to possess vulnerability and the openness to share about their insecurities through their music and put them out to the world for millions to hear yet they are still confident in their own identity and by extension, their identity as males or their masculinity. Although a lot of these traits directly subvert the expectations of dominance and strength that Hegemonic Masculinity is supposed to portray, they still retain their self-confidence and assurance in their soft masculinity. It can be concluded that Vulnerability is not necessarily the antithesis of the strength portrayed in hegemonic masculinity; Instead, it can be shown as the driving force behind this confidence and strength that they are emotionally mature enough to vulnerably share their insecurities. If anything else, BTS’s soft

masculinity proves a point that the old norms of masculinity are harmful in pressuring others to conform in wanting to be “masculine” when what they need is to be confident in their own masculinity just as they are.

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**Appendices** (If Any)