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Unrealistic Weeds of Love and Romance: The Korean Drama and the “Flower Boy” Genre

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Abstract

The concept of love has intrigued many social critics, and has led them to accuse media of perpetuating unrealistic notions of romance that are unattainable for a healthy and satisfying relationship. Unrealistic expectations of love and romance are a primary cause of relationship dissatisfaction among real couples. It is imperative to critically analyze media sources in order to gain knowledge of how to counter unhealthy notions of romance. Korean dramas typically present a scenario in which strong mutual love and desire between two people come into conflict with existing sociocultural values. The kkonminam (Flower Boy) genre in particular, caters to young women, and focuses mainly on the romantic lives of young adults, making it a prime genre to analyze Korean portrayals of modern romance. This study used Galician’s myths of hegemonic portrayals of love and romance to see if common themes of Westernized “status quo” love can be detected in Korean dramas. The current study was a textual analysis that examined how love and romance is portrayed in Korean dramas, particularly in the Flower Boy genre, and does so by examining two texts, Boys Over Flowers and Flower Boy, Ramen Shop. This study adds to previous literature on hegemonic ideals of love and romance. Ultimately, this study examined ideas of romance in the media to learn what portrayals present themselves in Korean dramas, a form of mass media targeted at a younger audience whose views and expectations on romantic love are still forming, and may be influenced by media depictions.

Cultural Hegemony: “The spontaneous consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)

SUSTAINING STATUS QUO NORMS

Galician’s Love Myths

1. Your perfect partner is cosmetically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you.
2. There’s such thing as love at first sight.
3. A true soul mate is a feeling (without your having to tell).
4. If your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful.
5. To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold.
6. The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from a beast into a “prince.”
7. A woman really love each other passionately.
8. The more you spend the more you love your partner. Money is the measure of love.
9. Nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you.

Galician’s Prescriptions

1. Consider Countless Candidates
2. Consult your Calendar and Count Carefully
3. Communicate Courteously
4. Concentrate on Commitment and Constancy
5. Cherish Completeness in Companions (not just the Cover)
6. Create Equality: Cooperate
7. Cease Correcting and Controlling: you Can’t Change others (only yourself)
8. Courtesy Counts; Constant Conflicts Create Chaos
9. Crave Common Core-Values

The Romantic Utopia

Three components:
- a) Glamorous and elegant gifts are attributes of romance.
- b) Romance involves intensity and excitement that is created through nature and travel.
- c) Intimacy and romance are associated with spending money (Illouz, 1997)

Research Questions

RQ1: How are hegemonic notions of love and romance, as defined by Galician’s (2004) ten love myths, presented through the physical appearance, personality, interactions, and narratives of characters in the dramas?
RQ2: How are counter-hegemonic notions, or prescriptions, of love and romance, as defined by Galician (2004), presented through the physical appearance, personality, interactions, and narratives of the characters in the dramas?
RQ3: How are characteristics of the romantic utopia, as defined by Illouz (1997), depicted in Boys Over Flowers and Flower Boy, Ramen Shop?

Findings

Overall Hegemonic Themes in the Flower Boy Genre:

1. Love is a Panacea
   Differing values, physical distance, and even death—love overcomes all.
2. Romance is not Free
   The more you spend the more you love your partner. Money is the measure of love.
3. Flower Boys Are Superior to Women
   Beauty, emotional expression, intellect, and status—Patriarchy is reinforced in the Flower Boy Genre

Babies Over Flowers

Surrounds a group of beautiful, upper class, Flower Boys, known as the Flower Four, at the prestigious Shinhwa High School, and their interactions with a working class, scholarship female student.

Mainly focuses on the love triangle between Jan Di, Jun Pyo, and Ji Hoo.

Flower Boy, Ramen Shop

Surrounds a group of beautiful, upper class, Flower Boys working at a ramen shop, and their interactions with a fellow employee, who is a working class, average girl.

Mainly focuses on the love triangle between Eun Bi, Chi Soo, and Kang Hyuk.

References


