

Apr 20th, 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM

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

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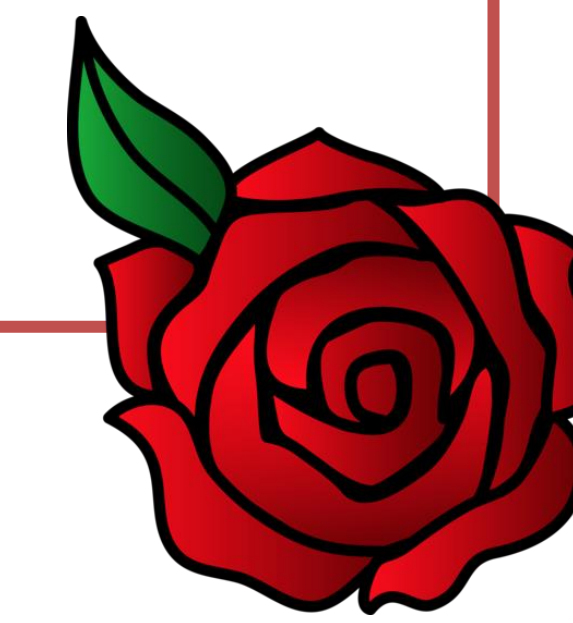
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Unrealistic Weeds of Love and Romance

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 cosmically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you.
2. There's such thing as love at first sight.
3. Your true soul mate should know what you're thinking or 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 man should not be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman.
7. The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from a beast into a "prince."
8. Bickering and fighting a lot means that a man and a woman really love each other passionately.
9. All you really need is love, so it doesn't matter if you and your lover have very different values.
10. The right mate "completes you" –filling your needs and making your dreams come true (Galician, 2004, pp. 55 & 225).

Galician's Prescriptions

1. Consider Countless Candidates
2. Consult your Calendar and Count Carefully
3. Communicate Courageously
4. Concentrate on Commitment and Constancy
5. Cherish Completeness in Companions (not just the Cover)
6. Create Coequality; 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
10. Cultivate your own Completeness (Galician, 2004, pp. 55 & 225).

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)

The Flower Boy

Kkonminam (koon-min-aam)
Kkot → Flower
Minan → Handsome man



Elements of the Flower Boy (Jung, 2010)

- Girl-like pretty looks
- Toned and hairless body
- Vulnerable attitude
- Inconsiderate and immature personality

Flower Boy Genre focuses on young love, dating, and the growing up into adulthood.

Viewership mainly females between 15-30 years of age (Kim, 2013)

Boys 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.



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

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"Life has taught us that love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction"
- Antoine de Saint-Exupery