

# GIRLS & KOREAN ROMANCE DRAMA (RECEPTION ANALYSIS OF GIRL TEENAGE AUDIENCES ON KOREAN ROMANCE DRAMA)

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**Abstract:** Korean romantic dramas have become a very popular phenomenon among Indonesian teenage girls, sparking an interest in researching their impact and perceptions. This article is motivated by previous research which states that these dramas are considered to lack quality due to the dominance of love stories that are too idealised and do not match the reality of everyday life. Previous research also criticised the construction of love and romance in Korean dramas that tend not to reflect real life. The researcher in this article explores how Indonesian teenage girls' meanings of watching Korean romantic dramas. The researcher uses ethnography as a method to get answers to these questions. In addition, to understand how the informants like Korean dramas, the researcher used Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of subject formation. As a result, the researcher found that the act of reading from Korean drama viewers is a momentary release from patriarchal demands by imagining themselves as characters in the drama. However, on the other hand, the researcher found a contradiction where the act of watching Korean dramas is a form of resistance to patriarchy, but the narratives presented in Korean romantic dramas often support patriarchy by emphasising women's happiness through relationships with men. Limitation of this study is the limited number of informants involved, causing the results of the interpretation to be less diverse. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to broaden the scope by increasing the number of informants, to provide a broader and deeper perspective.

**Keywords:** Korean Romance Drama, Teenage Girls, Patriarchy, Ethnography, Psychoanalysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, currently the fourth most populous country in the world, is home to millions of Korean drama lovers. According to a survey carried out in 2019 by the Statista Research Department in Indonesia, this research used a questionnaire from October 4 to October 20 involving 500 respondents aged 15-59 years. Data from Figure 1 shows that Korean dramas have high popularity in Indonesia, reaching a significant figure of 49.2% (Putri et al., 2019).

Igak Satrya Wibawa an expert in cinema studies from Universitas Airlangga (Unair) (in Ihsan, 2021), mentioned that young Indonesian girls are the biggest fanbase of Korean dramas because they have an emotional attachment to the characters and storylines, not only about romance but also about the skills of a profession, family warmth, and criminal mystery events. Followed by research results from Tirto.id which said that most of the respondents to Indonesian people's favourite Korean dramas were girls. The most significant percentage is aged 21-26 (54.37%), and the rest are aged 15-17 (4.18%) (Dhani, 2017). In the scientific journal entitled *The Urgency of Revision of the Law on the Welfare of the Elderly* by Hakim (2020), the age classification for late teenagers is 17-25 years. Korean drama fans in Indonesia are known for their deep and excessive viewing habits (Jeong et al., 2017). As stated by Fortunata & Utami (2021), Indonesian girls who love Korean dramas spend a lot of time watching them, and some of them are light viewers in the sense of

watching an average of two hours per day, while others are heavy viewers who spend an average of four hours per day or more.

There are critics from haters of *drakor* lovers or Korean drama lovers who claim that Korean dramas always have a negative impact on the younger generation. Most people consider watching Korean dramas wrong because it becomes a habit that causes a person to become addicted, lazy to move, and anti-social in addition to them already dealing with their gadgets (Nawawi et al., 2021). However, everything will undoubtedly have a bad or good impact depending on how we react to it, and girl teenagers who watch Korean dramas must have reasons as to why they are willing to spend a lot of time watching Korean dramas.

Some studies show how audiences interpret Korean dramas. Islamiyati (2017), found how Indonesian female audiences accept the culture and male figures displayed in Korean dramas. Rianto (2019) explains the audience's reading of romance in Korean dramas using Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory which can be divided into three forms, namely dominant-hegemonic, negotiation, and opposition. Ningsih (2021) showed various interpretations of the Korean drama "Crash Landing on You" in the encoding-decoding process of girl audiences using Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory. Based on previous research on audience interpretations of Korean dramas, the three studies have similarities in the theory used: Stuart Hall's reception analysis theory. However, the three studies only focus on audience positioning. A similar study conducted by Janice Radway (1984) explains why girls read romantic fiction, as well as how they interpret romance.

Janice Radway's research on romance stories inspired this research. Unlike the previous research mentioned, this research is not focused specifically on certain episodes or series of Korean dramas. The researcher will discuss about Korean drama in general, just like Radway did. The researcher attempts to understand how girl teenagers interpret Korean

drama: what Korean dramas mean to them, why they like Korean dramas, and why they are willing to spend so much time watching Korean dramas. Therefore, the researcher will complete what was missing in the previous research: a critical analysis of audiences. According to this perspective, the researcher argues that teenage girl viewers are positioned as subversive audiences in interpreting Korean dramas.

## METHODS

This research uses qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. In an ethnographic context, the main source of information is observation, where the researcher can observe the subjects and their behaviour in a natural setting. This research focuses on five teenage girl Korean drama viewers aged 21-26 years. They are part of the Korean drama fan community in Yogyakarta, which is the object of research. By using the observation method, the researcher was able to gain a deep insight into how these teenage girls interact with and react to Korean dramas in the context of their daily lives. In addition, observation was complemented by in-depth interviews by conducting informal conversations with the informants. From these conversations, we tried to get information about their life experiences, activities, and behaviours in the real world.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Act of Reading Korean Romantic Dramas

From the act of reading, there are underlying reasons for the meaning of the act. Respondents used Korean romantic dramas to release tension. The informants stated that watching these dramas helped them relieve stress from their daily routines, especially in dealing with social demands as females, such as attractive appearance, domestic work, and expectations of career and marriage. By watching these dramas, they found pleasure and relaxation that helped them temporarily forget these pressures. While there has been much criticism of Korean romantic dramas,

especially since most of the audience is female and is perceived as passive viewers trapped in patriarchal structures, the research findings suggest otherwise. Viewers use these dramas to fight against patriarchal structures that do not favor them, gathering information and values that help them grow and improve themselves. This suggests that female viewers have agency and use this medium actively to fight for their interests in the face of daily patriarchal challenges.

## **2. Korean Romantic Dramas as Narrative Fantasy of The Texts**

The informants found pleasure in watching Korean romantic dramas as a way to release stress from the social demands of being a female. They find joy in imagining themselves through the characters and storylines in the dramas they watch and have a desire to mirror characters who are independent and not dependent on a male. Apart from enjoying the characters in their favorite dramas, the informants appreciated the narratives that featured the struggles of female and male characters to reach a happy ending. They recognized that the story added tension and excitement to their viewing experience. The impact of the enthusiasm they felt got them carried away, so they began to imagine that the stories in Korean dramas were as if they were happening in their own lives.

As Lacan said, when we talk about culture, it indicates desire, which is often rooted in a strong drive to achieve something desirable, but that desire is also always tied to demands (The Big O) (Mansfield, 2000). When someone has a desire to resemble an actress in a Korean drama, it means that they are also involved in a set of demands that come with it. For example, they must follow the same beauty standards, for which they must adopt a similar style of dressing and even use the same cosmetics and skincare products. On the other hand, there are also individuals who want a mate who looks like the actors in Korean dramas. This implies that they also must adhere to the standard of a

partner who looks like the Korean actor they like. So how informants want to be their perfect selves cannot be separated from what others think of them.

It becomes clear why these girls are obsessed with Korean dramas. Watching Korean romantic dramas gives them happiness, which seems to be a substitute for lack. They express their pleasure by imagining themselves as the characters in Korean dramas. Sometimes after watching a desire being fulfilled, humans will feel another desire again. This is what Lacan (in Murti, 2016) calls *Jouissance* or temporary pleasure, which makes these girls continue to watch Korean romantic dramas for a long time. The fear of lack makes people try hard to fulfill their desires. However, the happiness they experience is created to fulfill the happiness of "the other". The term "the other" here refers to the Korean drama film industry, including production companies, producers, directors, as well as various collaborating platforms such as Netflix, Viu, Disney Hotstar, and so on, which will benefit from the happiness felt by the audience. The more intensely these informants watch Korean romantic dramas, the more profitable it is for the film industry to get ratings from viewers who like the dramas they make.

## **3. The Ambivalence of Korean Romantic Drama Viewers**

The researcher sees a contradiction between the activity of watching Korean romantic dramas and their understanding of the narrative in the Korean drama itself. The contradiction can be seen from two different perspectives. Firstly, the audience watches Korean dramas to challenge or even fight the patriarchy that still plagues their culture. However, on the other hand, the romance narratives that are often the focus in Korean dramas can be seen as a form of approval of patriarchy. However, the audience is not just a passive recipient, but an active agency, engaged in the process of finding spaces to negotiate and define new meanings within existing narratives.

This illustrates that audiences have the ability to transcend the power structures that may dominate them, emphasizing their position as subjects who are not only shaped by narratives but also shape and influence them. Thus, ambivalence becomes a kind of tool to open the door for reflection, change, and resistance to norms that may limit or direct their experience.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research that has been conducted, the researcher concludes:

1. Teenage girls love Korean romantic dramas because they are a means of escaping patriarchal demands and catharsis. In line with Radway's understanding, although *The Act of Reading* is different, it has similar contradictions. Where romance novels become an escape channel for housewives from the demands of the role of mother and wife. Today's teenage girls, however, turn to Korean romantic dramas to escape the demands of being a girl.
2. Teenage girls watch Korean romantic dramas to escape patriarchal demands and gain pleasure. According to Lacan, watching the drama provides pleasure through imagining themselves as the characters in the story, but their desire to resemble the characters raises patriarchal demands such as beauty standards and expectations of an ideal mate. This creates a temporary pleasure that encourages them to continue watching, showing that their aspirations are not detached from existing norms and culture.
3. The researcher found an ambivalence between the act of watching Korean romantic dramas with the narratives in Korean romantic dramas. Teenage girls watch Korean romantic dramas as a form of resistance to the patriarchy that influences their culture. They use the dramas to reinforce girls' values and

develop strategies to deal with everyday challenges. However, romance narratives in Korean dramas often emphasize female's dependence on males, indicating consent to patriarchal structures. Although narratives of strong girls are emerging in popular culture, male influence remains significant, suggesting that patriarchal culture has not disappeared completely.

4. Limitation of this study is the limited number of informants involved, causing the results of the interpretation to be less diverse. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to broaden the scope by increasing the number of informants, to provide a broader and deeper perspective.

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