

The Romantic Relationship of Older Women and Younger Men in “I Hear Your Voice,” I Need Romance 3” and “The Woman Who Still Wants to Marry”

Rosalind, M.

English for Creative Industry, Faculty of Letters, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, East Java, INDONESIA
Email: roo.latte@yahoo.com

Abstract: With the ideology of patriarchy that is still rooted in Korean society, this thesis analyzes the phenomenon of older women and younger men from three different Korean dramas whose characterizations are different from the usual patriarchal system. This thesis aims at revealing how the characteristics that the characters possess are able to make them interested in their relevant partners. The thesis finds out that the younger men do possess different traits from their gender stereotypes but at the same time, they also still maintain the masculinity trait—they are supportive, obedient and protective. Meanwhile, the older women’s main attraction is that they still act as the nurturers, regardless of their less submissiveness in the relationship. Thus, these characteristics unite and they are still able to make each of them attracted to their partners. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the differences here are possible because the characters do not particularly believe in and follow the traditional patriarchal system anymore.

Key words:

Femininity, Masculinity, Older Women, Younger Men, Patriarchy, Gender Stereotypes

Over the past fifteen years, and especially in the late 2000s, Korean drama’s (K-drama) popularity has been steadily increasing among foreign fans, like in South East Asia, the U.S, Latin America and recently in Europe community (DaehanDrama, 2014). In Asia, especially in Indonesia, the popularity of K-drama is undeniably mesmerizing. There have been countless popular dramas being aired in Indonesian television stations, such as *Winter Sonata*, *Endless Love* and *Boys Over Flowers*, and even being adopted by the Indonesian producers, like *My Love from the Star*. Using fresh-looking actors and actresses in the drama and having a unique storyline are the main keys of Korean drama’s huge popularity. Moreover, from many stories that have been made into dramas, romance drama is one of the genres that is very popular among the audience. Romance story usually involves a man and a woman having a romantic love story as the main plot. In many cases, lovers in romance drama tend to face obstacles, such as differentiation of status, age, family background, finances, occupation, physical illness, and discrimination, which can endanger their relationship (Filmsite, n.d.). Thus, having the issues within the story will push one of the characters to succeed in pursuing the relationship.

One of the stories that becomes very popular nowadays and has gradually taken the public attention is the story about *noona* (older woman) romance-themed drama. We used to see in many traditional Korean dramas that a couple usually consists of an older man and a younger woman as his partner. However, as the time goes, people try to develop a story which is completely different from the old belief that has always shown and become the dominant issue in most of K-dramas. That matter is due to the fact that patriarchy system has been growing among the society and the people inside it for a very long time, although there have been many groups of people trying to lessen the impacts. Patriarchal society is first developed during Korean Confucianism and it is believed that Confucianism is the source of the existence of patriarchal society in Korea. Some feminists also propose that the Confucian philosophy is the root of the idea of men’s superiority to women and the ideologies thrive against the gender equality (Koh, 2008, p. 345). Therefore, through this theme, the producers and scriptwriters want to break the old beliefs that, to some degree, still remain in the society. They want to try to challenge the

old patriarchal values which unconsciously or not are still rooted in the Korean society, although nowadays Korean women have achieved more power and freedom compared to the old society.

Furthermore, for this analysis, there are three older women-younger men-themed dramas that will be used; *The Woman who still wants to Marry* (2010), *I Hear Your Voice* (2013) and *I Need Romance 3* (2014). Seen from all the female characters, they are all in their 30s and working women with steady jobs, meanwhile the male characters are mostly ten years younger than the women and some of them still do not have steady jobs. How these couples are appealing among fans of K-dramas is very interesting to talk about, because of the fact that traditional mentality of patriarchy is still deeply rooted in Korean society. Moreover, these three dramas also especially focus on the characters' characteristics that reinforce the older women and younger men relationship and make the characters attracted to each other. Looking at the differences in their characteristics which make them interested to each other is particularly interesting since most of them act differently from the traditional patriarchal system. Through the characteristics, it can also be assumed that the male characters are portrayed not having more superior powers than the women and they do not always put themselves in the dominant position. Thus, it shows how this theme is apparently trying to challenge the old patriarchal beliefs in the relationship of men and women. This particular relationship also becomes a desired relationship, especially for the women, because they are finally able to find partners who can understand them thoroughly.

To discuss this assumption, the theory of Gender Stereotypes will be used. "A gender stereotype consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics as well as the activities appropriate to men or women" (Brannon, 1996, p. 168). Thus, gender stereotypes are also related to the beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. Femininity and masculinity are set of attributes, behaviors, and roles that generally associated with women and men. In the old patriarchal system itself, there are some characteristics or traits that describe personal self-concepts of women and men and reflect stereotypical gender differences. There are some traditional traits which are associated with the traditional patriarchal system, where a man and a woman are expected to possess those traits. Thomas (2001, p. 248), from his book *Recent Theories of Human Development*, lists some traditional traits that are commonly associated with men and women. This includes how a man is essentially **independent** and a woman is **supportive**. Another theory cited from the book *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* from Brannon (1996) is a theory conducted by Paul Rosenkrantz and his colleagues where they study the stereotypes of gender roles by investigating the beliefs held by college students in 1968 and found strong evidence for acceptance of gender stereotypes by both college men and women (p. 176). The stereotypic traits of men and women, according to both theorists, are summarized and listed as follows:

Masculine traits	Feminine traits
Courageous	Gentle
Aggressive	Humble
Ambitious/strong willed	Talkative
Assertive	Sacrificing
Independent	Supportive
Having initiative/active	Compassionate
Rational	Nurturing
Emotionally controlled	Intuitive
Dominant	Sensitive
Acts as a leader	Aware of feelings of others
Self-confident	Strong need for security

SOURCE: From Recent theories of human development, part II: products of social movements (p. 248), by R. Murray Thomas, 2001, *Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications*.

From Sex-role stereotypes and self-concepts in college students (p. 291) by P. Rosenkrantz, S. Vogel, H. Bee, I. Broverman, and D.M. Broverman, 1968, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 32.

The table shows some similarities with the stereotypical traits of men and women from *The Cult of True Womanhood* (Brannon, 1996, p. 175). “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues- piety, purity, **submissiveness**, and domesticity” (Welter, 1966, p. 152). Submissiveness is implicitly associated with the traits of aware of feelings of others, gentle, and sacrificing. Thus, from all the traits above, some of them will be utilized to relate and represent the masculine and feminine characteristics of the older women and younger men which make them attracted to each other.

PATRIARCHY

Concept of Patriarchy

The word patriarchy, according to *Oxford Dictionary*, literally means a system or country that is ruled or controlled by men. The term also characterized by Bhasin as a system where men are able to dominate women and women are kept subordinate, as indicated in *Patriarchy and Women’s Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis* (Sultana, 2012, p. 02). Cited from the same paper, Walby also defines patriarchy as “a social structure and system of customs where a male, superior in hierarchy, dominates, oppresses and exploits the female” (p. 02). Patriarchy also defines men’s power in all the important institutions and society in general, thus, women are limited to access such power (p. 03). Therefore, patriarchal system is very identical with women subordination because it is the place where male is very dominant with such power and superiority, giving an opportunity to oppress the women.

The characteristics of the younger men that make the older women attracted to them

Firstly, the younger men are shown as the **supportive men**. The act of being supportive is commonly associated with the women’s traits within the context of gender stereotypes (Thomas, 2001, p. 248). The feminine values construct the women to always appear based on the femininity traits; women have to be attractive, gentle, caring and supportive. Moreover, women are also expected to depend on men—as in *The Cult of True Womanhood*, true women are categorized as submissive (Welter, 1966, p. 152); thus, they have to play some roles in order to be a good-devoted woman. However, in a relationship of younger men-older women, supportiveness has no longer become the only predominant task for the women in which the younger men also possess it. Park Soo-ha in *I Hear Your Voice* can be considered as a supportive man to Jang Hye-sung when he tries to calm Jang Hye-sung down who is very upset after telling her that she has done some mistakes for defending the real criminals. This action, moreover, is highly attributed to women’s basic role within their domestic duties in a relationship of a man and a woman. Providing emotional help and being aware of what they need are some of the actions the women can do to support their partners. Soo-ha, moreover, is also aware of Hye-sung’s feeling after she has found out about the truth. In the gender stereotypic traits, aware of feeling of others is believed to be one of femininity traits (Brannon, 1996, p. 176). Most of the time, women are known with their gentleness, thus, it makes them become more sensitive with other people’s feelings. Furthermore, a good response is also given by Hye-sung after the man initiated to give support. She receives the emotional support Soo-ha has given to her with a good response by saying that they are already good and asking him to accompany her to go to grocery. From her fast reconciliation too it can be concluded that Soo-ha’s words give an impact to Hye-sung’s emotion, in a way that she has started to assess his effort for her by accepting the fact and forgiving him.

Similar to Park Soo-ha, Joo-wan in *I Need Romance 3* can also be considered as a supportive partner because he always offers his support to Shin Joo-yeon in making a decision for her love relationship. Although he knows the consequence of letting his beloved one to another arm, his sincerity is still poured in his words because he realizes that the woman needs a real support to make her understand her own feeling. This action indicates how supportive he is toward the woman because we can see that Joo-wan does not suppress one’s feeling with his own feeling. In the traditional traits, men are usually described having a strong will to pursue what he wants (Thomas, 2001, p. 248). Thus, from the way Joo-wan treats Joo-yeon by being a supportive man and not forcing his will, it has drawn a

significant impact to her. She eventually always comes to Joo-wan whenever she feels down or needs a support, although she does not actually realize it, because she knows for real that he will be supporting her. Besides giving support for her psychological matters, Joo-wan has also been consistently taking care of Joo-yeon as a form of his supportiveness toward the woman too. Accompanying her when she is under heavy stress, ensuring that she already sleeps well in her room, and helping her with the housework are some actions Joo-wan has always done for Joo-yeon. As a result, Joo-wan's supportiveness has slowly given an influence to her life in which it causes her to realize how influential he is in her life and eventually it makes her become more attracted to him.

Furthermore, Ha Min-jae in *The Woman who still wants to Marry* shows his support by telling Shin-young to pursue her career first after knowing that she rejects the promotional offer her company has given to her. Min-jae provides his full support to Shin-young to accept the offer and pursue her work and he promises that he will be waiting for her even when she does not want to. Nevertheless, this situation is relatively different from the old tradition of masculinity. Men are undoubtedly always in the dominant position compared to women, according to Paul Rosenkrantz (Brannon, 1996, p. 176). Eventually, his supportiveness has actually moved Shin-young's heart toward him in the span of three years in which it makes her become fond of him and more attracted to him in the end.

Secondly, the male characters are also portrayed as **obedient men**. Obedience, in human behavior, is a form of "social influence in which a person yields to explicit instructions or orders from an authority figure" (Colman, 2009, p. 518). People with more power are those who are most likely to be the authority figures where they have the right to give orders and to be obeyed. Moreover, from gender studies, as what the patriarchal system explains, the system is about male domination, where they are put in dominant position and the women are kept subordinate (Sultana, 2012, p. 02). This, nevertheless, forces the women to obey people who are more superior to them, particularly the men. The men are always depicted as that authority figure in the patriarchal system. However, in a relationship of younger men-older women, the obedience has affected the men as well by which it makes the older women attracted to them.

The obedience has been experienced by Park Soo-ha when he promises Jang Hye-sung to never be a killer. Soo-ha is told to have a big grudge toward a killer who killed his father when he was still a child. He seeks for revenge because he knows the killer is still aiming for his life and, especially, the life of Hye-sung, the woman he loves. Thus, Hye-sung asks Soo-ha to make a promise to never kill the killer with his own hands. The order she has given to him greatly affects the boy's mind due to the fact that Soo-ha has been put under Hye-sung's power. The deep affection he has toward her becomes the main power that Hye-sung uses to 'control' Soo-ha in which Park Soo-ha has a gut to always obey the order. Therefore, when she finds out that Soo-ha has never killed the man, she feels genuinely happy and grateful toward him. In some occasions, Soo-ha also shows his obedience by voluntarily helping Hye-sung in solving her problem. From the meaning of obedience according to the Oxford Dictionary, obedience also relates to the word unquestioning. They follow the orders without asking question because the orders come from those with more power. Soo-ha's helps, eventually, create such a great satisfaction for her and make her feels overwhelmed because of the fact that the man keeps staying with her whenever she needs him.

Similar to the previous couple, being an obedient man is also attained by Joo-wan who is willing to obey Shin Joo-yeon by doing what she wants. His obedience is merely because Joo-yeon has such an influence that will always affect his action. He is willing to do everything she asks, for example making foods for breakfast or dinner, which is usually done by the women. Joo-yeon frequently asks him to make foods because she is very busy or because she is just too tired after coming home from work. His action, moreover, represents the role of women in a family where a good wife and mother shall nurture her family with affection and devotion. Joo-wan always helps her to prepare all the ingredients for the dinner and cooks them for her. Moreover, Joo-yeon also never forgets to compliment his homemade food which shows how thankful she is towards Joo-wan for making the dinner and granting her request. This small yet impactful action has presented a good impression about Joo-wan only by looking at her response.

Moreover, Ha Min-jae also shows his obedience to Lee Shin-young by helping her when Shin-young asks him to help her to go undercover for covering news in a Kissing Room (a type of prostitution that exists in Korea). Min-jae has no other choice for not helping her, even though he feels reluctant by her request, because he knows by doing so, he is able to get closer to her, although he actually has the right to refuse the request. It is simply because of Shin-young’s influence that has affected Min-jae and put the boy under her ‘power,’ making him willing to do anything. As for Shin-young, Min-jae’s action to obey her request has also given a good impression towards her. It builds confidence on her to finally able to accept Min-jae’s affection because she can see him as someone who always obeys her and is willing to do everything for her. As the result, when Min-jae asks her again to date him after he has followed her requests, there is no reason for her to reject his feeling (*The Women who still wants to Marry, episode 07*).

The third characteristic is the younger men seen as **protective men**. Despite of their supportive and obedient characteristics, the nature of being men as protectors also surrounds the younger men characteristics. Looking at the thoughts and beliefs of some feminist theory, the idea of protection in masculinity is apparently not far from the image of being dominative, selfish and aggressive, where they usually only take it for granted to find sexual pleasures from the women. However, there is more than just this traditional belief or idea of protection in masculinity as what it is seen from the ideas of chivalry (Young, 2003).

“Real men are neither selfish nor do they seek to enslave or overpower others for the sake of enhancing themselves. Instead, the gallantly masculine man is loving and self-sacrificing, especially in relation to women. He faces the world’s difficulties and dangers in order to shield women from harm. The role of this courageous, responsible, and virtuous man is that of a protector” (Young, 2003, p. 04).

The three male characters have constantly shown their characteristics as the women’s protectors in some occasions where the women apparently need to be protected, thus, it also makes the women begin to be attracted to them.

Park Soo-ha acts as a protector of Jang Hye-sung when he decides to risk his life in order to protect Hye-sung from the killer who has threaten her life. The man that is always ready to risk and sacrifice himself and to “take all precautions against these threats for the sake of his loved ones” is referred to the ‘good’ man in the idea of protection from masculinity (Young, 2003, p. 04). The role as a protector has brought himself to instantly sacrifice his life without thinking further of what the consequences that may happen. Furthermore, with Soo-ha assigning himself as a protector of her life, this action has been relevantly influencing and impressing Hye-sung as how she starts to realize his sincere efforts toward her. Hye-sung begins to put trust on him and to rely on him a bit more than when she first met him. She also indicates the change of attitude toward him as Hye-sung unconsciously begins to look after him, such as making him dinner and providing necessities Soo-ha might need.

Joo-wan also often acts as a protector for Shin Joo-yeon, especially when she faces difficulties that sometimes are able to show her weakness. Joo-yeon is often described as a hard-hearted woman by her colleagues because she does not like to appear weak and rarely shows her emotion in front of people. Thus, when Joo-yeon starts to feel offended and lose her stance, Joo-wan takes his role as a protector to shield the women he loves. He feels the urge to save her from such situation and to make her feel comfortable. Nevertheless, Joo-yeon realizes the reason why Joo-wan has always protected her is simply for her sake. From the scene when Joo-wan decides to leave her house and give her a bit space, she apparently misses and wants him to come back more that she has ever thought.

Similar to Joo-wan, Ha Min-jae appoints himself as Lee Shin-young’s protector when she gets insulted by his old boyfriend. Min-jae, who accidentally eavesdrops on the conversation, senses the ‘threat’ posed by her old boyfriend. When he feels something will turn out to be very uncomfortable, he naturally takes his role as her protectors. Min-jae takes his natural instinct to protect Shin-young as it is his job to do so. He even emphasizes to her old boyfriend not to come and bother the woman anymore because he *is* her boyfriend now. Thus, it eventually leaves a notable impression about him toward her and it also gives her a feeling of being loved and cherished from a man.

In conclusion, the three younger men are characterized as partners who are supportive, obedient and protective. They act mostly different from the image of traditional patriarchal society that has been constructed for a long time. The men characteristics, moreover, also support the reasons why the older women are finally attracted to them. They get to see the men's sincerity, willingness and responsibility in starting and building a real relationship with the women from the characteristics they have thoroughly shown.

The characteristic of the older women that make the younger men attracted to them

The older women act as **nurturers** for the younger men in many occasions. Nurturance is one of feminine characteristics that is originated to be possessed by most of females as it is also listed in the feminine traits. The meaning of nurturance itself can apparently be defined by actions that are illustrated by a figure of mother, such as understanding the needs of others, gentle, supportive, protecting and compassionate. They take a good care of their beloved ones by providing their needs, both physically and psychologically. Nevertheless, this characteristic has also been naturally possessed by the older women which becomes the reason that makes the younger men attracted to them.

Jang Hye-sung proves herself as a nurturing woman for Park Soo-ha when she courageously still stands for Soo-ha when he involves in some problems. The naturalness for Hye-sung to nurture Soo-ha is proven whenever she feels Soo-ha is not safe, thus, she starts to worry about him. This, nevertheless, becomes a very natural behavior for Hye-sung as it always triggers her to nurture or protect the young boy. One of the examples is when a police told her that he thinks Soo-ha has stolen his gun to kill Min Joon-gok. Thus, she immediately goes home after hearing the report and tries to keep Soo-ha safe first from the police. After the police told her that it is just a misunderstanding, she feels relieved and naturally emphasizes that Soo-ha is different, showing how she thoroughly cares about him. As the result, Soo-ha gets very overwhelmed by her action as she has defended him from the false accusation. He thought that he finally found someone who is concerned about his welfare (*I Hear Your Voice, episode 06*). The fact there is still a person who cares about him after all his family died makes him more grateful toward her and gets him more attracted to the woman.

Moreover, Joo-yeon is considered as a nurturing woman for Joo-wan because she often takes care about his condition. She always offers him attention that he has rarely gotten from his actual mother. This characteristic is naturally seen from the way she takes care of him which is similar to a figure of mother when she takes care of her own child. Asking where he is going to go and when he is coming back to home and checking out whether he is in good condition or not are the things she often asks to Joo-wan. Furthermore, from most of Joo-wan's reactions, they indicate how he feels cherished by a woman who is very meaningful to him. In addition, her nurturing actions are also seen as a sign of affection to him.

Similar to the other two women, Shin-young can be considered as a nurturing partner for Ha Min-jae when she is able to show her protective side regarding her relationship with him. The naturalness for her to protect what she loves is revealed when there is a person trying to offend and humiliate her and her partner, even when the person is in the higher position than her. The way Shin-young 'protects' their relationship gets Min-jae a bit surprised and also at the same time feels satisfied, which is seen from his response after the debate between Shin-young and her boss. "I was going to hit him, but I resisted it when you told him you liked me" (*The Woman who still wants to Marry, episode 10*). From his response, it can be concluded that he actually has the urge to save the woman who has tried to protect both of their relationship and the man, signifying he does really love and cherish the woman.

In conclusion, nurturing is regarded as the older women characteristic that makes the younger men attracted to them. The reason is simply because through this characteristic, the younger men are able to experience and feel the affection from the older women they have been wanting to. Eventually, this acquires them to fall deeper with their feelings toward the women.

Conclusion

First of all, the younger men, Park Soo-ha, Joo-wan and Ha Min-jae, have taken the characteristics of being supportive, obedient and protective. The men supportiveness has helped a lot in bringing their relationship much closer with the older women, Jang Hye-sung, Joo-yeon and Lee Shin-

young. Moreover, it apparently defines when the men become very supportive, it actually allows them to show their sincerity and affection toward the women in which they make the younger men very attractive in the women's eyes. Besides supportiveness, the younger men have also gained more trust from the women because of their obedience by fulfilling the promises that are made with the women or being willing to do things the women ask. At the same time, the women also gain more confidence in continuing the relationship because the men have proven their sincerity by obeying and following the women. Nevertheless, although the two previous characteristics have put them in the less dominant position, the role as protectors for their loved ones is still vividly portrayed in the young male characters as it also becomes the reason that makes the older women attracted to them. Their protectiveness gives the women the feeling of being protected and cherished. The three male characters constantly offer themselves as the women's protectors, especially when they feel or know that the women need to be protected. As a result, the older women are reasonably getting closer to the younger men simply because they finally find someone who will always be there for them, protecting and loving them thoroughly, regardless of their young age.

Furthermore, the older women also act as nurturers by which it still turns out to be the strongest appeal for the men to be attracted to them. Regardless of their less submissiveness, the tendency to always nurture someone is still naturally possessed by the women. Like a figure of mother, the women provide the needs of the younger men that they have never felt or got from anyone else. Hye-sung, Joo-yeon and Shin-young nurture the men in different ways and they keep looking after the men as well as their relationship, as it is indeed their job to do so. The men, moreover, show similar reactions or responses toward the women's actions in which they feel grateful for what they have done to them. They finally find a figure that can provide affection they have rarely gotten before.

Finally, this analysis proves that both older women and younger men do possess some traits which do not belong to the stereotypes of patriarchy in general. At the same time, they also still equalize their characteristics by naturally possessing the old traditional characteristics from the respective gender. The coherence of their characteristics creates a new image of modern couple nowadays, leaving out the old thoughts of patriarchal system. The characteristics are combined to make such harmonization in the relationship because each of individual does not limit themselves within the old thoughts, for instance the role of protector as well as the role of supportive partner can actually be done by both man and woman. Furthermore, this relationship also becomes very desirable, especially for a woman who has always been living under unfavorable position in the traditional patriarchal system. This phenomenon eventually creates a wishful thinking of what a relationship should be in which there is no such superiority or inferiority towards the man or the woman. It can also be concluded that it is important to balance both masculine and femininity characteristics as it actually helps to maintain a harmonious relationship, seen from this relationship of older women and younger men.

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