THE PORTRAYAL OF QUEERNESS IN LEE-SONG HEE-IL'S FILMS THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL LENS

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ABSTRACT
This research investigates the representation of queerness and how individuals' different social identities produce different kinds of tensions among queer people through the concept of intersectionality. The research analyzes the film *Night Flight*. The analysis includes two themes: 1) The Violence and Harassment against Queer and 2) The Representation of Gender and Sexuality. The study seeks to understand how intersecting components are represented along with the two themes. The result of the study reveals that queers who have a good academic performance seem to bear much pressure and high expectation to maintain their status or achieve upward social mobility, so it is difficult for them to express their identities freely, because queerness is in conflict with Korea's traditional gender norms. Besides, queers who are considered as less masculine are targeted to be sexual assault victim. This leads to the difficulty of identity expression among queers and some of them have to act differently from who they are, to avoid being victims of dehumanization. In conclusion, this study argues that social status and hegemonic masculinity lead to different levels of intolerance of queerness in the context of Korean society.
Keywords: Intersectionality, Queerness, Lee-Song Hee-Il, Korea

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INTRODUCTION

South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea) is an Asian country, which has successfully transformed itself to a high-income economy since it had shown a promising performance on the world's economy. In common, most of the countries that succeed in economic development place a strong emphasis on self-expression values; meaning that there is a high level of awareness about social issues, including gender issues, among the citizens. According to the article *Value Change and the Persistence of Cultural Traditions*, Korea had experienced the postindustrial phase of modernization with higher incomes, higher education, and higher ratio of jobs in the service sector, which can imply that Korea might demonstrate a high level of self-expression values, but Korea fails in this point. In other words, Korean society is still less aware of some social issues at both the national level and the individual level. From outsiders' perspectives, one of the most obvious problems underlying in Korea is the harassment and discrimination against sexual minorities.

To solve this problem, there are groups of people who actively proceed with various campaigns to raise awareness about the existence of sexual minorities and call for the laws to protect them from discrimination and harassment in Korea. Moreover, there are some people who use another tool to inform the public that there is gender inequality that negatively affects a particular group of people in the society as well.

Among various methods of representing the problem, utilizing film as the tool for illustrating keeps increasing and it gains a lot of attention from the public. Lee-Song Hee-il is a Korean film director who is openly gay, and he was praised as the person who makes queer issues become more mainstream in Korea where the existence of non-heterosexual identities is quite unclear and it is somewhat not able to be discussed openly in the society. For this reason, he is considered as the Korea's most prominent queer filmmaker. Most of his works were produced during 2000-2020 and the backgrounds on each film were set around 2010s, thus the messages he had embedded in his works can be interpreted as the reflection of the reality of queer living in Korean society and the hardship that many Korean queers have been facing at the specific time.

No Regret, White Night and *Night Flight* are the movies written and directed by Lee-Song Hee-Il, which portray the reality and queer-related issues in the particular time depending on each film. *No Regret* (2006) is the story of obsessive love and desire between two queers who are at opposite ends of the economic and social scale, which gets hatred from society. *White Night* (2012) is the story that occurs in one night, but that occurrence leaves a deep impression and affection in each other's heart, however, the protagonist does not want to go back and stay in Korea because he was a victim of homophobia, publicly humiliated and outed, and disowned by his father. *Night Flight* (2014) is the story of love between two queers. Both of protagonists have to cope with social class oppression, school pressures and politics, homophobia, and extreme bullying in Korean society.

Therefore, this research aims to explore and analyze how queerness is being expressed in these films, which is linked to the concept of intersectionality that can be implied from the movies, since discussion on queer-related topic cannot be conducted by solely considering one component, so at the same time, we can notice and deeply understand the struggles (harassment, violence and discrimination) that the queer characters experience in each film. In addition, it is necessary to understand what is the motivation behind Lee-Song Hee-Il's work; if each film aims to satirize Korean society for raising awareness from the publics, or illustrate the reality of queer in Korean society in the specific time, or deliver the hardship from his direct experience, so that it can be claimed that Lee-Song Hee-Il's selected works have a potential to be perceived as another tool for doing a study on queer topic in the context of Korean society.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The Definition of Queerness in Korean Society Context

Before giving the definition of queerness in the context of Korean society, it would be better to look through "Queer Theory" to understand the common concept about queerness that many scholars widely accept, so that we can find the commonality and the difference between queerness in common scholars' concept and queerness in Korean society's context in order.

Queer Theory was first introduced during the conference hold by Teresa de Lauretis at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990 (Manning & Goldberg, 2016). Her work "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" indicates three main concepts that support her theory. The first is a refusal of using heteronormativity as the tool for establishing the knowledge of sexual formation. The second is an intention to decrease the belief that the gay and lesbian studies is one single entity. The last one is the correlation between race and sexual bias (this point will be mentioned with more details in the next session "Queer and Intersectionality"). In conclusion, queer theory aims to challenge the idea of heteronormativity which perceives heterosexuality as a normal mode of sexual orientation. Moreover, heteronormativity also has an invisible power to influence on many contexts of society, such as marriage, employment, and adoption rights, which not only put pressure on the people with non-heterosexuality, but also the people with heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1998).

While the terminology like homosexuality is commonly used and widely accepted in western academic field, it is quite sensitive in Korea. The Korean word "Dong-Seong-Ae" can be translated to "homosexuality" in English. However, this word was originally derived from Chinese characters, which portrays the notion of sexual and physical affection between same-sex people, which often leads to misunderstandings, prejudice, and wrong images towards homosexual people by their negative meanings (Ryu, 2021).

Thus, with the intention to throw the negative images away, the term "queer" is more utilized even in the political way since the word "Queer" includes all the LGBT-related terms, which expands the meaning beyond identity. "Queer" was used significantly in the Korean pride parade in 2014 since Korean LGBT members insisted "We are queer." in the parade and the word "queer" was officially introduced in many medias to identify LGBT people. Although "queer" is still a very ambiguous definition (Jagose, 1996), at the same time, "queer" in Korea seems to be a universal homosexual concept that includes identity, culture, and politics (Ryu, 2021).

Although many Koreans use other Korean terminologies to identify themselves, but they recognize themselves as "queer" as well, which has the meaning of universal LGBT community.

For this reason, this thesis also aims to use the term "queer" which includes homosexuality and LGBT identity and its definition is beyond the norm of heterosexuality.

Queer and Intersectionality

When talking about queer and social issues such as discrimination and harassment, it is undeniable that addressing the issues while recognizing the concept of intersectionality is very important.

In the academic circles, it is widely accepted that the term "intersectionality" was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. She used it as the concept to explain how Black women were marginalized at the individual level, even in the feminist discourse. At the same time, Black women's rights were not included in the antidiscrimination law (Carbado et al., 2013).

Through the intersectional lens, Kimberlé Crenshaw points out that, in the past, feminist discourse often solely highlighted the story of white women and failed to critique racism, thus causing a gap that pushed Black Women into the margins of many discourses. Moreover, Black Women were also neglected in the antiracist discourse because it only focused on Black Men's

racist experiences. This shows that Black women were blurred in many social discourses and their struggles were unnoticed because of their gender and their skin color at the basis (Harris & Patton, 2019).

This correlates with the concept of intersectionality, believing that people have their own unique features and different social components in everyone such as gender, race, class, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc. These differences consequently affect many minorities to experience discrimination and oppression from a particular society differently.

The core concept of intersectionality is that we must consider everything that can marginalize people, when we aim to study on people- based discourse with the manner of advancing a social justice agenda radically and comprehensively. To be more specific, as we all know that in history, women have experienced the social struggles due to the patriarchal system in almost societies in the world, however, white women and Black women were socially oppressed with different levels. The reason is that white women experience the difficulties due to their gender as woman, whereas Black women experience more serious difficulties since they hold more than one identity of marginalized people, whether it be gender or race. Moreover, what makes Black women's voices more silent is that most movements in the past were led by scholars and activists who are mostly white. For this reason, it left some topics that they did not touch since they only focus and conduct their works from their white-dominant perspectives, accordingly failing to engage Black women in their discourses and causing the knowledges that they built and contributed to, are not empowering (Harris & Patton, 2019) . Therefore, Kimberlé Crenshaw suggests that considering intersectionality is necessary when it comes to discuss on this kind of topic.

For its importance, intersectionality is considered as the useful tool for scholars in mainly three ways. The concept has inspired scholar-activists to realize the identities of people and the forms of subordination, which it was made socially invisible by heteronormativity, and then encourages scholar-activists to contribute and develop clear and critical understandings of social formations (Harris & Leonardo, 2018).

In the circle of legal scholarship, there are many cases of applying concept of intersectionality to other fields of knowledge in order to build more sophisticated knowledge. For example, it was utilized in the field of public health. According to *The Problem with the Phrase Women and Minorities: Intersectionality— an Important Theoretical Framework for Public Health* written by Lisa Bowleg in 2012, Bowleg (2012) points out that acknowledging the existence of multiple identities which intersect in each individual is the first step for understanding the complexities of health disparities that some people with multiple historically marginalized components had experienced. Intersectionality provides a critical framework for solving the problem of disparities and social inequality in public health. Bowleg (2012) provides more concrete example by talking about the case of infant mortality through the intersectional lens. The intersectionality shows the result of unfavorable health outcomes at the intersection of a high-status identity (middle-class socioeconomic status) with the race and the gender. In common, infant mortality is widely recognized as an indicator of a population's health. What surprises us is that Non-Latino Black people in the United States had an infant mortality rate 2.4 times that of non-Latino White people in 2006. This is related to the history that the infant mortality rate of highly educated Black women has exceeded that of non-Latino White women with less education. This highlights the paradox of the intersection of SES (Socioeconomic Status), race, and gender for Black women in the United States (Bowleg, 2012).

Queer identity can be discussed with the intersectional lens as well because many queers face various aspects of discrimination whether they are judged by gender, race or social class (Rosenblum, 1994) . For this reason, the topic of discrimination and harassment that many queers face must be discussed with the lens beyond just anti-lesbian or anti-gay discrimination.

From *"I Think It's Very Much Placed on Us": Black Queer Men Laboring to Forge Community at a Predominantly White and (Hetero) Cisnormative Research Institution*, Blockett (2017) used both intersectional and queer theoretical frameworks to analyze the experiences of Black queer men (BQM). The study reveals that BQM must endure in order to build network with one another, and the findings suggest a separated formation from the network of the larger and predominantly White queer community. Participants mentioned that they have to rely on each other, not just to survive homophobia and heterosexism, but they also have to endure racism, cisnormativity, and homonormativity in the queer community (Blockett, 2017). This shows the potential of intersectionality to contribute to an understanding of how intersecting social components shape the experiences of queer individuals differently (Duran et al., 2020).

Applying the intersectionality of queer identity allows us to discover and address the queer-related issues without neglecting the unique way in which women, people of color, poor people, sexually subversive people, cross-gendered people, etc (Rosenblum, 1994).

Moreover, studying the issues with realizing the concept of intersectionality might be useful in encouraging already established privileged-queer community to be aware of other aspects of queer-related issues and extend the scope of interest in this topic.

The Depiction of Queerness in Film

In western, "Queerness" was presented with undesirable images, such as being humorous, pitiful, and scary. The situation was worse when the Catholic Church established "The National Legion of Decency" in 1993 with the aim to against a representation of same-sex affection on film. Moreover, this encourages the creation of "the Production Code Administration (PCA)" in 1934 which decides what could be appeared and removed from Hollywood movies (Hagstedt, 2020).

However, queerness still appeared in many films, but the depiction was far worse than in the past, since in the 1960s, it reflects self-hating from queer characters, which means that being queer was unpleasant and everyone must avoid it (Hagstedt, 2020).

Fortunately, the depiction of queerness on films became more positive when some low-budget independent film production houses presented a new Queer identity, which lead to what the academic B. Ruby Rich referred to as "New Queer Cinema" in 1992 (Hagstedt, 2020).

"New Queer Cinema" is often related to the modern works which aimed to challenge and push further debates about gender and sexuality, while exposing the limitations of non-New Queer Cinema, presenting human identity and sexuality as socially constructed, fluid and changeable, rather than fixed (Hagstedt, 2020).

The Purpose of Queer Filmmaking in Korea

Korean society often judges queer people with the distorted image of sexual perversion because of lack of understanding about queerness, leading to the absence of queer-related law.

Queer film was first initiated and depicted in Korea with this reason. The representation of queer in movies aims to deliver the message that queers are like other people in society. Due to the lack of discussion about queerness in public and the term 'queer' is unknown in Korean society, thus, depicting the existence of queer is a political challenge to confront many prejudices (Ryu, 2021).

Queer filmmaking involves politics and points out the problem of gendered power by hyper-masculinity. In the same way that feminists utilized the hostess genre to make films for criticizing hyper-masculinity in Korea, queer filmmaking also uses politics to reveal a power relation between heteronormativity and hyper-masculinity for criticizing queer ignorance. With the political manner, queer filmmaking might aim to provide knowledge about queer to Korean society through queer representation in the films (Ryu, 2021).

Furthermore, queer films also have an impact on Korean society, since they encourage the emergence of many queer-related events in Korea, such as queer film festivals, pride parades and queer academic studies. With increasing interest in queer through queer filmmaking, queer

people in Korea can gradually reveal their existence and start to speak out about discrimination and prejudice that they had experienced (Ryu, 2021).

Lee-Song Hee-Il (Korean Queer Film Director)

Lee-Song Hee-Il is a Korean queer filmmaker who openly revealed his identity as a gay since his debut period.

Lee-Song Hee-Il was born in 1971. When he was a high school student, he used to skip classes to go to movie theaters with the passion for the cinema. In 1990, he entered Chonbuk National University and majored in sociology. During his university life, there was a moment that he decided to not pay attention to cinema since among the activists, it was recognized as the medium for people in the middle class. However, he changed his thoughts, realizing it as the method for studying cultural theory, instead of viewing it as just a self-contained artistic form (Chung & Diffrient, 2021). After his graduation, due to difficulties in his life, it forced him to go back to his hometown. Nonetheless, two years later, he turned back to Seoul and assumed leadership in Chingusai which is the first Korean gay male organization and this organization contributed to "the normalization of queerness", stated by Phil Ho Kim and C. Collin Singer (Chung & Diffrient, 2021). In 1998, Lee-Song Hee-Il debuted as a director with the film titled *Everyday Like Sunday*, illustrating the dysfunctional intimate relationship between two gay men, this film was shown at the Seoul Queer Film Festival. In 2000, he also released another work titled *Sugar Hill*, which is based on the reality of a closeted gay man who has to marry his lover's sister due to family pressure, and this film won a top award from Busan International Film Festival (Chung & Diffrient, 2021).

These examples of his works show that Lee-Song Hee-Il keeps bringing his brutally honest, critical interrogation of homophobic culture and queer discrimination to the big screen.

From his interview in 2000, he expressed his attitude towards Korean independent cinema, believing that indie films can deal with a variety of matters in Korea, securing diversity and exposing the violence perpetuated by dominant powers. Thus, he considers the future of the Korean independent film industry and eager to define a relationship between the Korean mainstream film industry and the indie one. His thoughts towards Korean indie films can explain how he deals with queer matters in the country through queer film making. Moreover, before he debuted in the Korean film market, there barely had any Korean films that straightforwardly depicted gay sex in that country. His film, thus, was very welcomed in terms of looking at marginalized people in Korea.

The Notion of Coming-out in Korea

Kim (2012) states that most Koreans were indoctrinated into thinking that the queer is a legacy from the West, which Korea got after the Korean War, as well as the concept of "coming-out". For this reason, the Park and Chun administrations who solidified Confucian socio- political ideologies spread the thoughts of perceiving queerness as non- Korean value to the publics.

Kim (2012) also points out why "coming-out" can be more harmful to queers in Korean society, rather than pleasant when compared to the West. It is because coming-out is an individually based experience and there is a high rate of rejection from the family or society due to the perception of queer and coming-out as the non-Korean value. Consequently, this rejection spreads more ignorance and intolerance toward queer people.

In other words, queerness was perceived as a taboo subject because it disrupts social harmony by breaking the family continuum, which is the value derived from Confucianism. In the past, military governments have exploited and reproduced Korean values to mobilize the Korean populace. For this reason, when coming out as queer is less aware, queerness is rejected by the society. Moreover, some myths about queer are the factors that harm queer people trying to come out as well. One of the first myths that emerged in the early 1990s among Koreans regarding queer people was that AIDS is the plague of queers (Kim, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will be conducted by qualitative approach, using *No Regret, White Night* and *Night Flight* as the main materials (In this paper, *Night Flight* is selected for discussion since this was drawn from the full academic thesis) for analyzing how Lee-Song Hee-Il represented queerness in each film. It starts with depicting the phenomenon of queers' struggles from the films based on two themes: 1) The Violence and Harassment against Queer and 2) The Representation of Gender and Sexuality. After that, the concept of intersectionality will be applied for explaining how each character had experienced social struggles with the different levels and then the results will be compared to the real situation in Korean society to strengthen that intersectional lens allow us to gain a better understanding on queer-related issues that still appear in Korea without leaving marginalized people and some overlooked issues by forcing us to be aware of every aspect of individuals' backgrounds and social components. For the information that will be drawn to make a comparison with the film, it will be collected from existing theory, published documentaries or queer-related news.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Night Flight

The Plot of *Night Flight*

During high school, a trio of teenage boys who used to be close friends begin to separate their ways. Yong-Ju keeps his true gender identity hidden, Gi-Woong becomes the leader of a gang at school and begins to hang out with Seong-Jin, whose parents are influential, and Gi-Taek becomes obsessed with manga.

Gi-Taek was bullied by Seong-Jin because he finds that Gi-Taek is an eccentric manhwa fan. While Yong-Ju tries to help Gi-Taek by reporting this to teachers, the teachers merely ignore and tell him to focus on his own business such as university entrance, and Gi-Woong who is in the same gang with Seong-Jin does not give Gi-Taek any help. However, Yong-Ju and Gi-Woong begin to have an affectionate relationship with each other.

After enduring constant bullying from Gi-Woong's gang, to ostracizing Gi-Woong from the gang, Gi-Taek eventually gets revenge on Gi-Woong by revealing that Gi-Woong and Yong-Ju have been secretly in love with each other. Yong-Ju faces sexual harassment from male colleagues, following by other catastrophic situations. At the end, Yong-Ju tells Gi-Woong that he will move to a school located in the mountains. After hearing this news, Gi-Woong holds Yong-Ju's hand and pleads with Yong-Ju not to leave him, then two of them weep together on a hospital bed.

The Violence and Harassment against Queer

For the movie *Night Flight*, it can be said that the depiction of violence is what the director Lee-Song Hee-Il primarily wanted to deliver to the audience. Throughout the film, we see that the victims of violence tend to be people who are viewed as "weak" or "marginalized" by society, such as queer. This violence reflects the problem of homophobia that appears in Korean society as well.

Bullying and harassment are the pervasive forms of violence. These kinds of violence encompass a range of aggressive behaviors involving both those who bully and those who are victimized. Many scholars give the definition of bullying in the same direction. According to Farrington (1993), bullying is the chronic oppression of a less powerful individual, whether it be physical or psychological, by someone who holds more power, and Smith and Sharp (1994) describe bullying as the exploitation of authority to harm or dominate others (Koo et al., 2008). Typically, school violence is carried out by students who attempt to assert their power and control over others, with the aim of causing emotional and/or physical harm to the victim. The result of the survey conducted by the Foundation of Preventing Youth Violence (FPYV) about school violence found that Korean students experience verbal and physical bullying, and the

number of those facing sexual harassment is gradually rising (Kwak & Lee, 2016). Unfortunately, there is a prevalent belief that school bullying is a harmless and customary aspect of growing up and going through adolescence. However, contrary to popular belief, scientific studies suggest that being a victim or perpetrator of school bullying is linked to various issues in behavior, emotions, and social problems. Additionally, bullying can have severe mental and physical consequences (Kim et al., 2004).

Gi-Taek, a male student and anime/manhwa fan, is bullied by a group of influential students with a form of physical violence. This phenomenon correlates with the result of the survey on the relation between anime/manhwa fan and bullying. Reysen et al. (2021) prove that the average of people who enjoy this Japan's subculture has experienced bullying, such as verbal bullying. Besides, The main targets to be victims of bullying are usually people who tend to do activities that they are embarrassed to do in front of the general public, such as consuming anime/manhwa with an eager manner, because these behaviors are classified as stigma and atypical. Gi-Taek portrays what society perceives as atypical as he sneaks out to read manhwa outside the classroom. This implies that even people with particular marginalized component also perceive their behaviors as the weakness that can allow others to harm them, so they must get their identities or preferences hidden. However, once Gi-Taek's identity of anime/manhwa fan is exposed, he is violently bullied by a group of influential classmates, who viewed his behavior as abnormal, undesirable and weak, moreover, he is threatened to do what his friends asked him to do, and if he refuses to obey or resist, he will be physically abused again. This repeated violence Gi-Taek experiences causes him severe physical and mental trauma that leads him to get revenge and convert his position from being bullied to doing bully instead. To get the revenge, he even betrays his friendship with Yong-Ju, because he reveals the affectionate relationship between Yong-Ju and Gi-Woong, the leader of a powerful gang at the school, disclosing that Gi-Woong is queer. This shows that Korean society views queerness as a weak, undesirable, marginalized component, therefore, it can be used as a tool for oppressing and dominating others. However, through this exposition of identity, the person who received the most severe bullying does not seem to be Gi-Woong, but it's Yong-Ju instead.

In Korea, although the societal attitudes toward queer are more positive since 1994, Korea still has the lowest level of tolerance of queer, compared to all other high-income countries (Lee et al., 2019). The cause of hatred against queer in Korea is inevitable due to the influence of Confucianism that has been deeply rooted in the society for a long time, which has an effect on the formation of patriarchy. In addition, Korea has also been influenced by traditional beliefs from China in explaining everything with a characteristic of Yin-Yang. Yin-Yang is the nature of the opposite relation. This causes the notion that perceives gender in a cisgender binary opposition (male-female), and considers other forms of sexuality as strange and abnormal. Therefore, this becomes reasonable enough for some people to exploit this idea for dehumanizing others who are queers.

Yi et al. (2022) draw a survey, published in 2014, to highlight the violence that Korean queers have been experiencing at their school. The result shows that some students drop their studies and even had suicide attempts. Besides, 92% of Korean students with queerness conceal their actual sexual orientations or gender identities because they are afraid of being subjected to harassment or assault by their peers.

Yong-Ju is a good representative of closeted queers who are afraid his queerness to be caught. Yong-Ju can express his real identity with his queer friend at the rooftop of an abandoned bar only, and they even check if there are other queers around them through a queer-specific application. Although in the application, it only shows that there is no queer besides them, in reality, there might be more than two or a large number of queer people, but it is possible that those queer people hesitate to express themselves even in the queer-specific space, because they are afraid of being caught and facing various forms of violence based on homophobia.

The fear of queerness being revealed is once again illustrated and this time it shows a severe reaction. Once there is a rumor that there is a queer in the school, Yong-Ju was so depressed that he rushed out to vomit outside the school building and try to not be seen by others, because he is afraid of being dehumanized by other male colleagues who laughed and insulted when they were informed that there is a queer in the school. Nevertheless, an unexpected event happens. Yong-Ju begins to face harassment after his queer identity is leaked by Gi-Taek. Some male colleagues start to tease Young-Ju by calling him “Hey, homo!”, while he is about to leave the classroom. Then, other male students aggressively make verbal sexual harassment to him by telling him to use his mouth to please them and ending the sentence with the term “homo”. This reflects the cultural myth that non-heterosexual affection merely fills with sexual desire and the prevalent myth misunderstood among people until nowadays that AIDs is originated from people with queerness through their unnaturally sexual desires. This produces the perception of queer identity and relationship between queer people as undesirable and illegitimate, leading to justify the behavior of dehumanizing queers in preserving a peaceful society based on the traditional norm. Yong-Ju’s case is not different from what Kim et al. (2004) state about the severe consequence of being bullied. At the end of the film, we can observe the scene where Yong-Ju attempts to commit suicide at the abandoned bar after he was sexually abused by male colleagues and got blackmailed by them. In reality, we can also observe from the news that people who suffer from bullying have a high possibility of making suicide decision. In the end, Yong-Ju does not commit suicide, but he has to endure life in a society that perceives queerness as unnatural and ostracizes people with queerness to the margin like many Korean queers in reality.

However, it seems that not every queer is subject to or suffers the same form of violence. Gi-Woong’s queer identity is simultaneously revealed with Yong-Ju after Gi-Taek leaked this rumor for getting revenge on him, but besides the sarcasm, Gi-Woong does not face any physical violence as Gi-Taek, or face sexual abuse as Yong-Ju from other male classmates.

This interesting phenomenon can be understood through the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell points out there is the phenomenon which power differentials even exists among cisgender male, based on manhood characteristics in each individual. It, therefore, creates the relation between males with superior position and males with subordinate position (Buschmeyer & Lengersdorf, 2016). In common, the characteristics of manhood include strength, competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence and independence. From the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, other characteristics are perceived as weak, powerless, and can be dominated by more masculine male implicitly.

Gi-Woong is the leader of influential gang in school. Throughout the film, we can realize that he portrays the image which is highly labelled as hegemonic masculinity in heteronormative society by considering his untalkative character, scruffy appearance and his powerful strength and aggressiveness that even other cisgender males in the group were afraid of and couldn't compare to him. These factors put him in higher position in the hierarchical structure, and protect him from being sexually abused.

Nonetheless, it does not mean that he does not face any form of violence just because he possesses the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. After queerness had been exposed, Gi-Woong was teased by Seong-Jin, a member of the influential gang who has less power than Gi-Woong and formerly respected Giwoong’s leader position. This implies that being queer is not appropriate for being a leader who holds the superior position, correlated with the practice of hegemonic masculinity that perceives female and other gender identities are subordinate to male with manhood. Unlike Yong-Ju, Gi-Woong, therefore, is merely subjected to sarcasm in his identity.

This is why many queers hide their identities and decide not to come out otherwise they might face and suffer from dehumanization. It is related to the result of the study, stating that queers

might conceal their sexual orientation and, moreover, in some cases, they even contribute to the mistreatment of other queers to maintain their perceived masculinity when surrounded by heterosexual men (Reed, 2018). This reinforces the power of manhood that can prevent or, at least, lessen the severe level of violence against queers. The phenomenon of concealing one's identity or creating a new identity among queers will be further discussed next.

The Representation of Gender and Sexuality

As mentioned before, in Korea, the Confucian legacy that remains today continues to hold heteronormativity as the central idea in its way of understanding the world, reinforcing cisgender binary opposition and marginalizing other forms of identity as a stigma. The practice of hegemonic masculinity makes it even worsen because people often exploit it for justifying the behavior of dehumanization against those who have weak characteristics, mostly feminine and queerness. To avoid being subjected to any form of violence, it is inevitable for queer people to hide their queerness and represent the identity that "society expects" instead.

The same phenomenon goes for Yong-Ju. Yong-Ju has a character that we might be able to call him as a typical student at school; having a promising performance on study and behave in polite manner, and he was admired among teachers as well. However, under his perfection that society expects and admires, he has one thing that cannot be expressed or revealed, which is his queer identity. Obviously, queerness is the identity that many people in society are against and they do not want to see. In fact, the ability or inability to express queerness is much more deliberated than we thought.

Students are expected to meet the values set by the society. Peña-López (2017) shows the result of the survey on student's expectation of further education, one of the values that most societies emphasize. According to the survey, it states that in Korea, students who are expected to complete higher education are over 75% and top-performing students have a greater expectation of higher education, compared to low-performing student. Accessing and completing higher education is a pathway for gaining more various opportunities in the society. This can imply that students who performed well academically are more inclined to face the pressure to follow the values set by society strictly. For this reason, it is also hard for top-performing students to express queerness, in case they have, which is perceived as undesirable in Korea.

Yong-Ju does not reveal his true identity in school at all. On the other hand, he only expresses his queerness, chatting with queer slang with his queer friend from the other school on the rooftop of an abandoned bar. This is associated with the pressure that dedicated students bear the greater pressure and expectation from others to behave well, and should not do anything that is opposed to the beliefs or the way of life that society considers to be good. For this reason, Yong-Ju's character is not different from people with high position in the society who refuse to express their real identities; reluctant to come out, or even forge their identities in order to avoid dehumanization. In 2000, Hong Seok-chon, a Korean celebrity, publicly come out and he was censored by the media as a result. He was also boycotted by the public for being the first Korean celebrity to come out, and faced significant discrimination from Korean society. This made it difficult for other closeted queer actors and actresses to follow his footsteps (Kim, 2012). This affirms that it might be better for people in high position who are more prone to be a target of social impact to forge their identities and do not express their real identities. For this reason, throughout the film *Night Flight*, we do not find Gi-Woong struggling to represent his identity.

The representation of Gi-Woong's aggressive personality is not associated with avoiding homophobia. Throughout the film, we can see from the scene that Gi-Woong was bullied in the middle school because he is weak and his father is arrested to the jail. This is why he changed his personality to be more aggressive when he entered high school and joined the school gang, to ensure that he will not be a victim of bullying again, at the same time, he does

not stop gang members bully Gi-Taek, his old friend. A study of school bullying in South Korea also found that teenagers who were bullied and have conflicts with their parents often tend to engage in bullying behavior, especially, when they have the opportunity to get involved with a group of friends who are notorious. Students who were bullied before often show bullying behavior to others to protect themselves and to release the pressure that has accumulated from being a victim (Moon et al., 2012).

However, it is not totally correct that Yong-Ju and Gi-Woong decide to represent their characters based on their inherent consciousness, but both of them seem to conform to the pressure and the norms that society expects as good. Thus, they have to act or behave in the way that the film portrays, in order to avoid being victims of violence.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This research decides to analyze how the representations of queerness were portrayed in Lee-Song Hee-Il's films *No Regret, White Night* and *Night Flight* (*Night Flight* is selected to present in this paper), applying the concept of intersectionality. I aimed to uncover how sexuality, hegemonic masculinity and social status were perpetuated in these films and compared the observation from the films with the real phenomenon in Korean society to strengthen that different social components able to lead queer individuals to face tensions with different levels. Through my analysis, I found that all those dimensions intersected in the films.

Although the films portray the characters with the same race, sexuality, hegemonic masculinity and social status are the three components worth further studying how these components still play significant roles in shaping different struggles on each queer individual in 1) the violence and harassment against queer and 2) the representation of gender and sexuality. From the film *Night Flight*, it displays the superior power of people with hegemonic masculinity as opposed to queer who are perceived as deviant and undesirable in Korean society. Although queers are always stigmatized and belittled by society, queers who are able to show or exercise masculinity intensely are less inclined to face violence in a form of sexual abuse. For this reason, queers who are not associated with the characteristics of manhood cannot express their queerness and consequently forge their identities instead. Creating a new identity that is not real or changing oneself to have a personality that meets what society expects corresponds to the phenomenon that occurs in Korean society. As we can see from many Koreans, it is difficult to come out in society and there is a high risk of being banned or being insulted by their acquaintances and society, which correlates with a survey, published in 2014 (the same year as *Night Flight*), revealing that 92% of Korean students who identify as queer hide their true sexual orientations and gender identities due to the fear of facing harassment or physical violence from their peers (Yi et al, 2022). This also shows how the value or norm that society has created hurts the marginalized group, especially queer.

Although I have accomplished my aim at analyzing and identifying intersectional lens that play different roles in shaping each queer's tensions differently in three films, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, since I am an outsider to Korean society, my evaluations may be affected by a lack of understanding of social relations and perceptions in the context of Korean society. However, analyzing the films as an outsider has its advantages since an outsider's perspective can shed light on aspects that may not be visible to an insider. The methodology applied to this research is also useful for getting new perspectives and knowledge on Korean queers' struggle which is rarely found in other studies. However, it would be better if there is a work that can further explore the significant relation between social status and queers' struggle, and apply this methodology to analyze other Korean queer films from different filmmakers as well. I hope that this research can contribute to queer media activism, critical film studies, and academic discussions surrounding film and the queer community in Korea.

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