

Roskilde University
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Erotic Capital

Flower Boys in South Korea



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Abstract

This project makes a case study on the *kkotminam*, or flower boy, phenomenon in South Korea, which is being regarded as ‘less masculine’. The historical development of the term flower boy is covered from its beginning as *hwarang* warriors to the modern understanding of it; a ‘soft masculinity’ that draws on feminine features. The sociological notion of ‘capital’ is applied to investigate the ways in which flower boys are enhancing their appearance and social performance, specifically in relation to the theory of ‘erotic capital’. From this, a connection is drawn to the term ‘ulzzang’, as a form of erotic capital in South Korean culture. Moreover, a film analysis on the South Korean TV-show ‘Boys Over Flowers’ (2009), which initiated the rise of the *kkotminam* trend, is made to examine how flower boys are represented in the entertainment industry. This analysis shows that within erotic capital, the elements of ‘beauty’ and ‘social presentation’ are most prominent in the flower boy image, and that the elements of ‘sexual attractiveness’, ‘charm’, and ‘liveliness’ also play a role in how it is used.

It is concluded that South Korea is a culture in which spending resources on enhancement of erotic capital - specifically the element of ‘beauty’ - is common, and in many cases expected, where ‘Boys Over Flowers’ shows this in its presentation of the characters.

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1 Introduction

Beauty and fashion are subjects that have been well discussed throughout generations. New trends are created, for both men and women, and sometimes old trends are reenacted. But when these trends collide among genders, and beauty and fashion trends become gender neutral, there is sometimes raised criticism towards what is gender appropriate. Some parts of the world would find it out of the ordinary if women wear jeans, while this is a common thing in Western countries. Men are often expected by society to be less interested in looks and skin care, and when they do care about appearance some of them are labelled as ‘metro sexual’ (a term formed in the West) (Dux, 2017).

A gender norm that is present for women all over the world is to have clean and hairless skin. Swedish artist and model Arvida Byström tried to openly change this norm but was met with a significant backlash. In 2017 when Byström modelled for the Adidas Originals shoes, she confidently exposed her unshaved legs in the commercial video saying; ”I think femininity is usually created from our culture, so I think everybody can do feminine things, can be feminine, and I feel like in today’s society we are very scared of that” (YouTube, 2017). The comments she received were unacceptably negative and far from fitting responses to her otherwise positive and progressive message (Ibid).

Similar to Byström challenging the notion of femininity, a trend of South Korean men challenging masculinity by devoting themselves to their appearance has started. These ‘flower boys’, as they are called, are slowly changing the gender norms that have been prevalent in South Korean culture (BBC News, 2018). In this project, flower boys are the focus as they are purposefully enhancing their erotic capital in order to gain or maintain a high social standing. With this, an empirical analysis of the TV series ‘Boys Over Flowers’ is made in order to examine how the flower boy phenomenon is portrayed and thematized by the South Korean entertainment industry.

Erotic Capital, presented by sociologist Catherine Hakim, is a personal asset, which is an important addition to the capitals first presented by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu; social, economic, and cultural capital. Erotic capital should not be confused with being a sexual capital, as

it is far from only being related to sexual elements. Not only is erotic capital an important asset in, for example, mating and marriage, but it can also play a major role in the labour market, advertising, sports, media, and in everyday life and social interaction. In her theory, Hakim states that, generally, women have more erotic capital than men do, as they work harder on it. Despite women owning greater erotic capital, men's erotic capital tends to have higher payoff even with their minor efforts. In contrast, men have a greater sexual libido and demand more sex than women. This imbalance between men and women's sexual desire gives women a natural advantage and puts them in a position in which they have the opportunity to exploit their erotic capital (Hakim, 2011).

Working with the case of flower boys, erotic capital will be applied to investigate the ways in which physical appearance and social skills play a role in an individual's chance to gain or lose success and popularity in South Korean culture. Furthermore, as flower boys apply elements of beauty from both men and women, they are a significant case in that they enhance their erotic capital in ways that are not considered within the norms of South Korea.

1.1 Flower Boys in modern time

In modern South Korean culture, the term 'flower boy' is used to refer to slightly feminine-looking, delicate young boys, and is the English equivalent of the combination of the South Korean words 꽃 (kkot) meaning 'flower' and 미남 (minam) meaning 'handsome man'. Flower boys are often given the description of having features mostly associated with women; soft and fair skin, neat hair and with a delicate body and gentle personality, but it is not meant to actually be feminine. Even though the images of a flower boy differ, the aforementioned image is one of the most commonly seen on screen. Another type of flower boys, which is presented as often as the other, is the more tough-looking boy, though still portrayed with soft skin, neat hair and the likes (Beyond Hallyu, 2015). These images will hereafter be referred to as 'soft masculinity'; meaning masculine, but with gentle features. A typical portrayal in TV series of this form of flower boys, is the *tsundere*. Tsundere is a Japanese term, which is commonly used in South Korea, and combines the words 'tsun', which refers to someone who acts blunt, and 'dere', which is someone affectionate. Therefore, the term tsundere describes a person, who acts cold at first, but then slowly starts warming up to others (Suk, 2016).

The trend of flower boys today is often portrayed in K-dramas (Korean TV dramas) and in the K-pop (Korean popular music) industry. These K-dramas are often targeting a younger audience (approx. teenagers and early twenties), as they portray a theme of the new generation of fashion and beauty trends. Most notably, a trend that is seen today in modern South Korea, is one in which young men use cosmetics and are extraordinarily attentive to their appearance. It has become a common practice for South Korean men to wear makeup at their wedding, but this does not mean that every man in South Korea wear makeup. Rather, in a fashionable neighbourhood like Myeongdong in Seoul, it is common to see men using foundation and moisturizing cream, which has allowed a looser judgement of what is acceptable for males in terms of beauty. As a result of this, nowhere in the world do men use cosmetic products more than they do in South Korea (BBC News, 2018).

1.2 History and development of Flower Boys

Even though the flower boy trend is widely known in modern South Korea, it has not always been like this. Trends have changed through time, and in South Korea where trends in society develop and change quickly, the flower boys started trending simultaneously with the development of the entertainment industry. When the entertainment industry, specifically the K-pop culture, developed, it impacted the notions of beauty and fashion (BBC News, 2018). Hence, the question is, from where this trend of pretty-looking males originates, and how these men became a trend today.

1.2.1 *Hwarang*: The ancient 'Flower Boys'

During 57 BC to 668 AD, the entire land of the Korean Peninsula was occupied by three kingdoms named Baekje, Goguryeo and Silla. Although the kingdom of Silla was the smallest and weakest among the three kingdom, it started flourishing the most during the reign of King Jinheung (540-576), who formed a warrior group named 'Hwarang' (Kim, 2012).

Hwarang, which literally means 'flower boy' or 'flowering knight', was a military organization consisting of male youths in the kingdom. They are referred to as being chosen based on their physical beauty, and widely known for using cosmetic decorations (such as makeup) and accessories. The Chinese 'Account of the Country of Silla' recorded; "they [Silla] choose pretty

sons from noble families and deck them out with cosmetics and fine clothes and call them Flower Boys (花郎). The people all revere and serve them” (Rutt, 1961, p. 17). A lot of sources also indicate that the Hwarang was the young sons of the nobility in Silla who were chosen through a popular election (Ibid).

The members of Hwarang had access to educational institutions and social clubs, where they gathered for different aspects of study, such as arts and culture, and religious teachings mainly based on Korean Buddhism (Ibid). Often, the Buddhist monks worked as mentors for the Hwarang both in terms of physical and spiritual training. The reason to why the Hwarang sought the teachings of these Buddhist monks was because the Hwarang knew the monks were a source through which they could improve themselves to attain great success in the future and to be beneficial to the Silla Kingdom. They would enhance themselves in physical fitness training via techniques in self-defence, controlling their weaknesses with long-term meditation, and learning to protect themselves from robbers and bandits who would intrude the kingdom (McBride, 2010).

In late 6th and 7th century, the Hwarang was trained in several sports activities like horsemanship, swordsmanship, archery, javelin and stone throwing, polo, and ladder-climbing. Some of them were involved in entertainment as well, where they would do sword dancing and perform in front of the citizens of Silla. The organization of the Hwarang had grown greatly in prestige, and they had numbered a hundred bands by the seventh century (Ibid).

Some historians, such as American Professor Edwin O. Reischauer, view the Hwarang as fighting bands, who “lost their fighting prowess and degenerated into effeminate dilettantes” (Rutt, 1961, p. 53), meaning that they changed from being exemplary warriors to woman-like amateurs. Other historians, on the other hand, consider the Hwarang as a religious cult that later became ‘dance boys’. These historians claim that the title was then inherited by lower class wandering *mujari*, so-called ‘Korean gypsies’. These low class people were known for male prostitution or homosexuality, and that their role was a replacement of one that was previously taken by females. However, the history of the elite warrior group of Silla was not widely known until after the National Liberation Day of Korea in 1945, where the Hwarang members were promoted to become a symbolic importance in South Korea (Ibid).

1.2.2 Development and origin of the modern Flower Boys

In the 1980s and 90s, the prevailing aesthetics for men was the salaryman image with suits, luxurious watches, and the traditional strong man. As military service is mandatory in South Korea, this became one of the aspects that shaped the interpretation of what would look appealing in men. “In the 80s and 90s, men in Korean pop content were largely portrayed as tough guys in gangster and detective films, and rebellious young men in some TV dramas” Sun Jung (2010) says. In mid-1990s, this changed with the three-member rock and hip hop music group Seo Taeji and Boys. The group kick-started fan culture in South Korea, which now has become a major force in the music industry. Following this, the big entertainment companies started forming girl groups and boy groups, and the influence of these are unlike anything seen before (BBC News, 2018).

As the craze of K-pop groups began after Seo Taeji and Boys introduced the American music genres and new attributes of looks to South Korea, trends related to appearance developed alongside the beginning of fan culture. The entertainment industry of South Korea becoming a phenomenon that not only include music, but also physical attractiveness and style of clothing, impacted more and more people who started to follow this, and as a result a new trend emerged which was much different from the traditional perception of appearance (Ibid).

“Compared to the 80s and 90s, now there are a lot more soft masculinities - pretty boy images and gentle male images - represented in media, and consumers welcome and widely consume them,” (Jung, 2010), who are now known as *kkotminam*. As mentioned previously, this is a combination of the South Korean words for ‘flower’ and ‘beautiful man’, and this is inspired by the similar Japanese *bishonen*, meaning beautiful boys, which is often seen in shojo manga (girls’ comics) (Ibid).

The notion of flower boys first appeared in the South Korean entertainment industry in late 1990s with TV commercials, dramas, and billboard advertisements featuring pretty looking boys with smooth skin, neat hair, and a slightly feminine demeanour. This new image of masculinity slowly started replacing the hegemonic notion of tough masculinity with a more soft masculinity with the flower boy image (Miyose, 2015). In 2008, web users on many online user-generated content websites (like YouTube) and K-pop fan sites often recognized and praised the appealing

aesthetic features of South Korean stars. This began, when the group TVXQ released the music video of their song 'Mirotic' the same year, which rose in popularity because of the sexually attractive physical attributes of the group members. On the other hand, the flower boy phenomenon had its first actual peak, when the K-drama 'Boys Over Flowers', the South Korean version of Japanese TV series 'Hana Yori Dango' (originally a manga), started airing in 2009. Already within the first couple of weeks of airing, 'Boys Over Flowers' captured 25 percent of the audience share, and the four main male characters, F4 (Flower 4), became iconic *kkotminam* symbols in South Korea (Jung, 2010).

1.3 *Ulzzang*: Erotic Capital in a South Korean context

Taking into consideration that the notion of erotic capital is developed in a Western context, we believe it makes sense to make use of terms that are used in a South Korean context. Similar, but not equal to the idea of erotic capital, the term *얼짱* read 'ulzzang', or 'eoljjang' as a more precise Romanization, is used to refer to attractive looking people. It is an abridgement of the South Korean words for 'face' (*얼굴*: 'eolgul') and 'best' (*짱*: 'jjang'), and is translated as 'best face' or 'good-looking face' (Ulza, 2014).

'Ulzzang' first appeared among high school students in the late 1990s, where it referred to students popular for their good looks. In 2000, the term became widespread among teenagers using the term as an internet slang, mainly in relation to internet celebrities who were exposed to popularity through modelling contests with pictures of themselves online. Today, on the other hand, 'ulzzang' refers to a wider range of people enhancing their image, and is no longer limited to the internet nor one specific group only. Instead, people considered 'ulzzang' vary from both flower boys, girls, and muscle builders. It is not limited to one gender only, as both males and females practice this enhancement, but the majority of popular ulzzang enhancements are, in fact, done by girls (조선일보/Chosun Media, 2017).

In the early 2000s, talent agencies started scouting for potential 'ulzzang' celebrities. As a result, there are a number of examples of ulzzang being successful with their looks in the entertainment industry as both actors, models, and K-pop singers (Ulza, 2014). Ulzzang becoming

successful in the K-pop industry are the most notable ones, as Korean popular music is a global phenomenon by its own. In terms of male singers, many of them are being categorised as flower boys, and as many of the popular ulzzangs are either girls or males with soft features, ulzzang is often confused to be similar to the definition of flower boys. An example of an ulzzang who is not referred to as a flower boy, is the hip hop and EDM group Monsta X's Wonho (previously called Shin Hoseok during the days he was known as ulzzang). Wonho having a muscular body and sharp features does not meet the 'requirements' of a typical flower boy, and he is therefore a great example of the different notions of ulzzang.

2 Problem formulation

South Korea as the leader of cosmetic enhancements in the world's latest generation is changing its ways of displaying the norms for gender and appearance (The Economist, 2013). We are looking particularly at the image of 'flower boys' among the young and youthful South Koreans, and questions of appearance are the highlight of the project, since we are working with a phenomenon in the entertainment industry.

Research questions:

1. Why do many young South Koreans, men and women, spend resources on enhancing their erotic capital?
2. What elements do the flower boys, specifically, focus on when enhancing their erotic capital?
3. How does the TV-show 'Boys Over Flowers' present flower boys, and what role does erotic capital play in this?

2.1 Dimension

This project is anchored in the dimension of Culture & History. Through exploring the cultural phenomenon 'flower boys' and its current position in - and influence on - South Korean society, it is necessary to look at when and how the term was first coined. Indeed, flower boys have been present in South Korea and its surrounding cultures for centuries, and thus has a prominent history leading up to the present day's notion of flower boys. With this history as a background for our

understanding of the phenomenon, the project has a clear point of departure upon which the analysis is built.

Furthermore, when investigating and researching flower boys in South Korea, it naturally follows that an understanding of the culture in which they most prominently act must first be established. To analyse the phenomenon is to also analyse the circumstances and the contexts in which it acts. Specifically, the aspects that are examined in this project are the following; what constitutes high erotic capital in South Korea and how it is used in relation to the other capitals and to South Korean culture in general. With the inclusion of the Culture & History dimension, the project gains a contextual understanding of the topic and a foundation on which deeper analysis can be made.

2.2 Methodology

This project targets flower boys as depicted in ‘Boys Over Flowers’, and using Catherine Hakim’s erotic capital as a standpoint examines this South Korean subculture of appearance enhancements among men. For a long time in the history of film production, film has effectively been a tool for thematizing, among others, societal and cultural aspects, either in factual or fictional ways (History Matters, n.d.). With the help of film analysis, we get a broader understanding of how a film actually portrays a subject, and how it presents the different aspects of it. In relation to the flower boy trend that we are investigating, we make a film analysis of the K-drama ‘Boys Over Flowers’ because our focus lies in the enhancements of erotic capital and some of its elements can not be observed in photography. In this, we look at a number of scenes from the series, as well as examine how the plot thematizes the flower boy phenomenon based on its definition as presented previously. We use terms like genre, mise-en-scene, diegesis and examine sound/music, and lighting in our analysis of said series. A description of some of the terms we use is as follows (Yale Film Analysis Website, 2018);

Genre: Different types of genres are distinguished by the form of narrative or the techniques used as a stylistic marker. By examining the genre, we will present how the subject of the film is being shown. Whether the subject is portrayed in a comical way, or if the film has an actual serious moral to it.

Mise-en-scene: Literally means "put in the scene", which refers to the setting, decor, the lighting, the costumes etc., which are seen in the scene. Looking into this element, we will be examining the setting of the film. How the environment is set up, in what way the clothes of the characters are different between the flower boys and the rest of the students, and how lighting has been used in the different scenes.

Diegesis: Literally means "to narrate", where a narrator presents an interior point of view of the world inside the movie or TV series. By looking into a narration, we are presenting how the plot is being introduced to the viewer. We will be analysing whether it is jumping straight into the story or if there is a form of narrator that gives an inner view of the world inside the film in some way.

Sound/music: Whether the sound is continuous or discontinuous. The purpose of background music and sound effects. Sound effects and music often have a major role in films, and as 'Boys Over Flowers' are including a lot of background music and sound, we will investigate if this plays a significant role.

Acting/typage: Behavioral aspects of the characters, and the type of actors casted for the portrayal of the characters e.g. facial and bodily features. By observing the actors chosen for the characters, we will analyse how they fit into the role. We will analyse whether their behaviour and their appearance match the characters in the story.

4 Theory

This chapter presents the concept of capital, as first introduced by Karl Marx. The Marxist notion of the term, which is based on economic capital, served as a basis for French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capitals. In this project we are theoretically interested in the notion of capital, particularly the concept of erotic capital coined by British social scientist and author Catherine Hakim. Her theory presents "...the social and economic value of erotic capital (physical and social attractiveness) for men and women of all ages" (catherinehakim.org, 2018). She arises from Pierre Bourdieu and builds her theory as a supplement to his three principal forms of capital (Hakim, 2011).

4.1 Karl Marx: Capital

Karl Marx (1818–1883), born in Trier, Germany, is well known as a philosopher and an economist, but most importantly a socialist revolutionary. He has been characterized as “the greatest thinker of the millennium” (BBC News, 1999), whose works laid foundations of many communist regimes and influenced the creation of contemporary society. His most famous and well-read titles are *The Communist Manifesto*, co-written with Friedrich Engels, and the three-volume economic work *Capital* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017).

For the purpose of this project, the focus on Marx’s theory is only on the concept of capital and its understanding based on Marx’s economic analysis of capitalism. The analysis is built on Marx’s interpretation of the labour theory of value, and contains the study of capitalist profit (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017). The notion of capital, as Bottomore writes, is a complex category that exists without any simple definition and Marx was dedicated to examine its consequences. Capital, as presented by Marx, is value in motion; acquiring, exchanging and increasing the amount of capital, or currency, one possesses (Bottomore, 1991). The first appearance of capital was provoked by the distribution of commodities which brought the increase of money into circulation (Marxists.org, 2018). Capital is a value subjected to various conversions corresponding to a particular role within the valorization process. It represents a coercive social connection between things, such as money or commodities (Bottomore, 1991).

4.2 Pierre Bourdieu: Theory of Capitals

This section presents the theory of a French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) (Grenfell, 2014). Since Hakim’s standpoint to erotic capital is based on Bourdieu’s forms of capitals, it is important to lay the fundamentals of his theory as well. According to Bourdieu, Marx’s theory lacks the aspects of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu criticised economic theory for the approach on capital only through the viewpoint of maximization of profit. Nevertheless, he similarly uses the notion of capital as a ‘currency’ in motion, that can be owned and negotiated, but rather than focusing on economic value, he presents other aspect with which an individual may gain success (Bourdieu, 1997).

Bourdieu's concepts of capital were formed in 1983 and proved to be very useful in social sciences as well as everyday language (Grenfell, 2014). His theory is built on the understanding of capital as an "accumulated labour," (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46) which is privately appropriated by persons in business and thus allows them to "...appropriate social energy in the form of...living labor," (Ibid, p.46). The theory consists of three distinct assets - economic, cultural and social (Hakim, 2011):

'Economic capital' represents the total amount of resources and means of production of finance, for example money and property.

'Cultural capital' encompasses educational qualifications, work experience, and skills which prove beneficial within the labour market and contribute to produce financial gains. The concept of cultural capital includes cultural knowledge in form of information resources that are considered to be socially treasured, like: literature, music and knowledge of art. Moreover, Bourdieu presents three forms of cultural capital: The form of embodied state presumes representation of the link between the body and mind. In order to acquire this form of cultural capital, one must delve into study of themselves and self-improvement, which presupposes an investment of time. Secondly, cultural capital exists in the objectified state which is presented materially through cultural goods, such as paintings, books and machines. The third form of cultural capital is institutionalized state. As Bourdieu explains, this is "... a form of objectification," (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47) in shape of academic qualifications which grants its owner a confirmation of cultural competence.

'Social capital' is defined by Bourdieu as the sum of resources that person accumulates through network of connections or group membership that generates valuable relationships - "...who you know, as distinct from what you know" (Hakim, 2011, p. 16).

4.3 Catherine Hakim: Theory of Erotic Capital

According to Catherine Hakim, an important aspect overlooked by Bourdieu in his theory of capitals is what she calls 'erotic capital'. Erotic capital, unlike Bourdieu's other capitals, is "distinctive in not being controlled by social class and status" (Hakim, 2010, p. 510) but does in a similar fashion change from culture to culture. Indeed, certain cultures have a close connection between erotic and cultural capital as presented by Japanese geishas or the courtesans during the Italian renaissance (Hakim, 2011). Erotic capital is introduced by Hakim as consisting of six (sometimes seven) elements:

‘Beauty’ focuses mainly on facial attributes and “tends to be static, hence easily captured in a photo” (Ibid, p. 500), while how the person acts is of less importance.

‘Sexual attractiveness/sex appeal’ is about the body and how the person acts and presents him- or herself in the world. This element, Hakim argues, must be captured on film rather than photo as it is about movement, how a person talks, and how they behave.

‘Charm’ encompasses features such as grace, social skills, flirtatious skills, and charisma. ‘Liveliness’ is “a mixture of physical fitness, social energy, and good humor” (Ibid, p. 500) and frequently shows itself in the form of excellence in sports or dancing.

‘Social presentation’ refers to clothing and accessories that people adorn themselves with, that show off their social status and lifestyle. Depending on the event, the consensus on what a proper attire is may change.

‘Sexuality’, in contrast to the other elements that apply in social contexts as well as private, applies only in private and is “everything that makes for a sexually satisfying partner” (Ibid, p. 501). The seventh element ‘fertility’ is one that is very highly valued in some cultures while not having that same value in others. The ability to produce offspring is in some cultures regarded as an additional aspect of attraction. Hakim uses two examples to explain this; in India, she argues, children are very essential to a marriage, and childless couples are seen as “unfortunate victims of infertility, rather than voluntarily childfree” (Ibid, p. 501). In Italy, people will admire a woman for producing beautiful offspring in the form of an attractive son or daughter, while in the USA she will be admired for her own physical attributes, such as long legs and luscious hair. Furthermore, this element has been highly valued in certain time periods as an infertile person would be more of an obstacle than a help in the community’s or family’s continued survival. As Hakim puts it: “one reason for stigmatizing homosexuality in some cultures is that it cannot produce offspring” (Ibid, p. 501).

Prior to Hakim, erotic capital was overlooked by social scientists. She points to this fact as being a result of male perspectives dominating sociology and economics, and therefore not including erotic capital since women usually have more of it than men. She goes on to argue how

women who exploit their erotic capital as a means of earning money are looked down upon - being a stripper or a sex worker is seen as dirty and lewd occupations, and a woman wanting to marry a wealthy man is an immoral “gold-digger”. Contrasting this, the look on male sex workers is more conflicted and ambivalent (Ibid).

Additionally, Hakim points out that feminist theorists have bought into this ideology rather than to challenge it for the benefit of women. In Hakim’s words, “[f]eminist theory erects a false dichotomy: *either* a woman is valued for her human capital (her brains, education, work experience, and dedication to her career) *or* she is valued for her erotic capital” (Ibid, p. 510). Thus, feminist theory reinforces dominant male perspective instead of overturning it. What Hakim would rather want women to do is to exploit this natural advantage they have when it comes to erotic capital; instead of playing into the patriarchal moralizing idea that it is ‘indecent’ for women to wear revealing clothes they should take a stand against it and use it for their benefit. She uses the notion of ‘the male sex-deficit’ as a way of explaining why erotic capital can and should be exploited by women. The male sex-deficit is the name she has given to the apparent fact that men have greater sexual desire than women and that they never get enough sex. In other words, sex is a question of supply and demand. The demand is certainly very high in that men have high sexual desire, and women should therefore use this to their advantage since they do not demand sexual activity to the same extent. If women’s erotic capital is indeed a way for them to get benefits and success, Hakim finds it counterproductive to play into the ideology that it is ‘indecent’ to do so (Ibid).

Moreover, high erotic capital can be a valuable asset in success in the labour market and internal relations in the workplace. Hakim argues “attractive people find it easier to interact socially, are more persuasive, and are thus more successful in a variety of jobs” (Ibid, p. 509), and even having a spouse with high erotic capital can be beneficial for some jobs where public display is in focus and social networking is a priority. Therefore, erotic capital can be linked to social stratification.

As gender equality in the labour market has improved in the past decades, women's economic capital have generally increased on the basis of their work experience and qualifications. According to Hakim, what this means is that women now have both economic capital and erotic capital as valuable assets in finding a partner, whereas in the past they had, generally speaking, only erotic capital as their key capital in the mating market. Simultaneously, men have started to enhance their erotic capital in an effort to be more attractive to potential partners instead of relying mainly

on economic capital as they could in the past. Thus, as Hakim points out, “sex differences can shrink in certain conditions” (Ibid, p. 504).

Hakim's theory has been called controversial among various social scientists. Green (2012), for instance, argues that erotic capital as defined by Hakim is an overstretched concept. "Collapsing sexual attractiveness, personality characteristics, social skills and style into a single resource, Hakim overstretches the concept of erotic capital and undermines its analytic utility," (Ibid, p. 145). The central problem of Hakim's construction of erotic capital is, according to Green, in the reduction of Hakim's argument of the comprehensive concept to only beauty and sex appeal. Her analysis is built on a narrow definition bound only to aesthetic and sexual aspects and Green objects this as a contradictory and incomprehensive (Ibid).

5 Analysis

The analysis of this project draws a connection between the notion of erotic capital and the phenomenon of flower boys. This is done by investigating what elements the flower boys are mostly attentive to when enhancing their erotic capital. Flower boys, although presumably for the most part unfamiliar with the idea of erotic capital, are conscious about the workings of it and how to utilize it. Secondly, we examine how the entertainment industry of South Korea presents the flower boys, specifically in film production. When analyzing this, the focus is on the K-drama 'Boys Over Flowers' and in what ways cultural, symbolic, and erotic capital plays a role. This is supported by doing a film analysis, in which sections from seven different episodes are examined from the perspective of how the flower boys are portrayed and presented, and how erotic capital becomes visible and tangible.

5.1 The benefits of high erotic capital

One of Catherine Hakim's main arguments is that erotic capital can be used to gain success in addition to the other capitals. This seems to be widely recognized as the reality in the case of South Korea as well, as the country has been shown to be among the highest users of aesthetic/cosmetic surgeries per capita (The Economist, 2013).

Why is this the case? Why has it become recognized to the extent that it is not a rare occurrence for high school graduates to get cosmetic surgery as a graduation gift from their family? There are many different aspects to this question. First, it must be said that cosmetic surgery in itself is not the focus of this project - erotic capital enhancement is - but it is connected to increasing an individual's attractiveness, and especially to how erotic capital circulates in the entertainment industry. Furthermore, several YouTubers, such as Seoul-based Edward Avila, have become famous, and subsequently started making money, solely because of their erotic capital – specifically the elements of beauty and social presentation, which has given rise to terms such as *ulzzang* (BBC News, 2018; South China Morning Post, 2017; Loo, 2014).

In the case of K-pop and K-dramas, the performers and actors are idolized and admired for their beauty, which is also emphasized as a significant part of their image. Additionally, both male and female K-pop groups use makeup as a way of enhancing and highlighting their beauty, and feminine features are often sought-for attributes among men as well (Newell-Hanson, 2018).

By using feminine features, flower boys have gained significantly high erotic capital in South Korea. This has therefore become their most valuable capital in gaining popularity and even in some cases economic wealth. Their economic wealth - or economic capital - which is in turn used to enhance erotic capital, then becomes a means as much as an end to having high erotic capital. While flower boys is a significant case in how they use these elements of beauty from both genders, they are not exclusive in using physical attractiveness and beauty as a valuable and exploitable personal asset. Indeed, being defined as *ulzzang* brings high erotic capital as well. Even though *ulzzang* is often applicable to flower boys, it does not necessarily challenge gender norms in itself in the same way that flower boys does, as exemplified in the introduction section with Monsta X's Wonho. It is, however, evidently a notion that people invest in as a type of capital that compliments economic, social, and cultural capital in a similar fashion to how erotic capital does it (Newell-Hanson, 2018).

The vast popularity and attention surrounding *ulzzang*, with websites and contests in which people vote for the prettiest face, is a testimony to the significant role of erotic capital in South Korean culture. However, as with any contest there are winners and losers, and the term *ulzzang*, or 'best face', in itself conveys a sense of an agreed-upon hierarchy in facial attractiveness. As the

‘winners’ are being presented on a wide array of media - social media, tv-series and movies, websites, and advertisements for market products - they set the standard and the expectation for what kind of physical beauty an individual must strive for. In other words, ulzzang and flower boys embody what is regarded by a significant part of the population in South Korea as high erotic capital, and meeting the standards these trends set for beauty is a way of using one’s erotic capital in relation to social stratification (Loo, 2014).

On the other hand, this immense social power that can come from being ulzzang and a flower boy arguably puts a lot of pressure on the South Korean youth - especially on those who do not possess the physical beauty traits naturally. When erotic capital is used to such a large extent as a tool for obtaining success and popularity, having low erotic capital becomes a factor that diminishes the individual's chance of social climbing. This is evident to such an extent that enhancing one’s erotic capital is not only done to have an extra advantage or an addition to the other capitals. Rather, enhancing erotic capital, especially one’s physical appearance, is done to avoid being negatively affected by the lack of it. As a result, the norm has become for people to strive for high erotic capital - sometimes before striving for high cultural, social, or economic capital - which in turn solidifies the influence of subcultures such as ulzzangs and flower boys (Newell-Hanson, 2018).

With the high value of good looks in South Korea, lookism is arguably an inevitable result of the culture. Lookism, as defined by Merriam-Webster is “prejudice or discrimination based on physical appearance and especially physical appearance believed to fall short of societal notions of beauty” (Merriam-webster.com, 2018). With physical aesthetics being highly valued in South Korea, it follows that discrimination based on looks is prevalent in such a society. If one has the opportunity to change their appearance, and thereby furthering their opportunities in professional, as well as in private life, then the arguments against the enhancement of one’s looks by cosmetic articles or even surgery are few and far apart.

5.2 Analysis of K-drama: 'Boys Over Flowers'

'Boys Over Flowers' started the rise of the flower boy phenomenon. Therefore, we are doing an empirical research on this K-drama, from which we have picked out a number of segments from seven episodes (see appendix).

At the opening of the first episode, the genre is established as being a drama, as we get an overview of the plot by a narrator; the diegesis. From the narrator, we know that the school we are focusing on, the Shinhwa High School, is established by the leading company of Korea, Shinhwa Group. The company has established an institution for students from families with the highest social and economic status, to enroll and study within the same community all the way from kindergarten to elementary school, high school and college. When the protagonist of the drama, Geum Jan Di, first appears, she is presented as a working class girl with several part-time jobs, one of which is being a delivery-girl for a dry cleaning business run by her family. In her introduction, she is on her way to deliver to a customer - a student at the high school - his clothes. When she arrives at the school, she sees him standing on a ledge. The student is about to commit suicide due to intense bullying at the school, which came as a result of him receiving the infamous red card with the 'F4' mark. With a crowd of spectators, she saves the student from committing suicide. The bullying going on in the school gets exposed nationwide, and to save the school's reputation of being an exemplary school, they enroll Jan Di as a student at the high school. Their purpose of doing so, is to persuade the public into thinking that they do not enroll students based on economic status, which people started criticizing them for.

Already in this initial part of the story, we see the different ideas of capitals, introduced in the theory section, playing a major role. In order to be enrolled at the school, the students must have a certain amount of social capital, such as being descendants of families of higher status, as well as having high economic capital. In addition to this, these students are claimed, by the narrator of the story, to be educated as the top tier students of the country, which by extension acquires them a high cultural capital.

In scene starting from 23'30'' to 24'20'' in the same episode, the use of lighting makes a significant effect. When the F4 group, consisting of the four main male characters, Goo Joon Pyo,

Yoon Ji Hoo, Seo Yi Jung, and Song Woo Bin, appear for the first time in the K-drama, the lighting thrown upon them gives an effect of brightness or sparkles coming from the boys. They enter the school together through the main entrance, as if walking on a red carpet with the rest of the school's students crowding around them. The students' fascination for the F4, and the group's good looks, and relatively high status and wealth have made them the idols of the school, where Joon Pyo is the leader of the four.

Here, the notion of social and symbolic capital foreground the notion of erotic capital as well. With this scene, a clear connection to the theory of erotic capital can be made, as the theory describes beauty as an element of erotic capital. Supplemented by the lighting and the camera's focus on the flower boys, their beauty is emphasized and clearly shown as a defining characteristic of the F4. Similarly, the scene highlights the boys' movements, their way of talking, and their behavior; in other words what Hakim would call the element of sexual attractiveness (Hakim, 2011). Moreover, the reactions of the students crowding around them is a testimony to this form of eroticising being deliberately used as a factor in attaining and maintaining high social status.

In the *mise-en-scene* of episode 1 scene 2'37'' to 2'47'', the decor of the private classroom of the flower boys is presented. The F4 does not have classes with the other students, rather they have a study room for themselves. The room is located upstairs, and the environment looks a lot more luxurious than the rest of the school. Large bookshelves, mahogany desks and much more comfortable chairs. It is as if it is a classroom of the royals.

This segment is one out of a number of scenes, where the economic capital of the main characters is clearly presented. While we already know that the classrooms of the rest of the students are structured like every other classroom, we see that the classroom of F4 is as high class as how they, themselves, seem to be. Some would say that erotic capital often does not go alone. Rather, in order to enhance your erotic capital, you need to have fairly high economic capital, and F4 is evident of this. By comparing F4 with the other students, we see clearly that the wealth of the aforementioned group of students are higher than the latter, hence the potentials of increasing their erotic capital is better than the rest of the school's students.

In the second half of episode 5, scene 46'14'' - 49'47'', the F4 takes Jan Di and her closest friend on a spontaneously planned vacation to Shinhwa Group's private resort on the islands of New Caledonia. In this scene, music starts playing, when the island is being presented from a bird's eye view. The music is discontinuous in the episode, but continuous throughout this whole segment, where the characters inspect the resort amazed, as the place seems out of the ordinary. The theme of the song playing here, called 'Stand By Me' by SHINee, could be interpreted as: 'staying together with love and happiness completing each other'. The effect the song implies by being played in this scene, is the island becoming a heaven-like place with good-looking people - the F4 and the pretty girls of Western appearance, whom they encounter at the island, and whom they seem to know already. This is also implied in Jan Di and Joon Pyo's conversation after the music stops, where Jan Di says ''If there is a heaven, I always thought it would be like this'' (Episode 5, 49'44'').

In episode 6, scene 29'32'', the background music is playing a significant role again. Sad music starts playing, when Ji Hoo gives Joon Pyo the ankle bracelet that Jan Di lost the previous night. The bracelet was given to her by Joon Pyo, which makes him realise that Jan Di did not tell him the truth about who she spend the night with when he was clearly worried about her whereabouts. At the time, F4 and the two native New Caledonian girls are playing beach volley, but when this realisation hits Joon Pyo, he loses the grip of himself. The music creates a sad atmosphere, as Joon Pyo zones out, and is hit in the face by a volleyball. He struggles with holding up himself, telling the others that he is alright. Here, we clearly see his caring side despite the tough image he has put up on the outside.

5.2.1 F4 as flower boys

In 'Boys Over Flowers', we do not only see a portrayal of the image of kkotminam, but the characteristics of Hwarang are being portrayed as well. Additionally, it is both the tough and cold, and the sweet and caring image of kkotminam that are being thematized in this K-drama.

Joon Pyo, Ji Hoo, Yi Jung, and Woo Bin are first introduced in episode 1, scene 18'46'' to 24'51''. In this segment, we see a clear image of kkotminam, which we previously defined as a young man with soft facial features, decent hair, flawless skin, and fashionable style of clothing. When F4 enter the school, with light thrown upon them, Joon Pyo stops in front of the crowd of

students, facing a specific student. A male student is wearing the exact same special edition shirt as he is wearing. Previously in the same segment, the student he is about to confront, tells his friends that only two of this shirt exist in the world, where one is owned by him, the other by Joon Pyo. When Joon Pyo notices him in the crowd, he pours Woo Bin's orange juice over the student, telling him to never wear it again.

Seeing as they are wearing luxurious, fashionable clothes of the latest trends, we can make a connection to the *kkotminam* image with this aspect of appearance as well. The features of their facial appearance and the style of clothing are completing the portrayal of the modern time flower boy image in terms of looks. The *kkotminam* phenomenon is, on the other hand, thematized in 'Boys Over Flowers' in their behaviour as well, which most clearly is seen in the main and second male lead characters, Joon Pyo and Ji Hoo.

In the very beginning of the K-drama, Joon Pyo is introduced as a cold and tough person, or *tsundere*; this being one of the types of *kkotminam* we have introduced previously. Joon Pyo is, at first, entertained at school by the students, who are bullied by the rest of the school after he puts the F4-marked red card in their possession. When Jan Di enrolls at the school, and stops him from picking on a girl, who drops her ice cream on his shoes, he puts the infamous red card in her locker as well. However, Jan Di as the first one in the school confronts him personally, standing up for herself. This leads to Joon Pyo starting to be interested in her. The way Joon Pyo starts treating her after he becomes interested in her, implies that he is a *tsundere*.

In episode 4 from scene 9'48'', his *tsundere* behaviour is evident. While Jan Di is eating lunch with a classmate in the cafeteria, Joon Pyo approaches her, and indirectly asks her on a date. In an aggressive way, he says ''Saturday at 4 o'clock. In front of Nam San Tower'' (9'48''), and as he is about to leave, he turns around to face her again, saying ''if you're late by even one minute, you're dead'', and then finally leaves without giving her a chance to respond. Even though he is asking her out aggressively, which could be interpreted as him not actually being interested, Joon Pyo is in actuality expecting her to go out with him. We get to know this in a following scene.

Jan Di does not go to the date, and she does not think further about it either, until she remembers what he said. In 12'22'' in the same episode, she asks her mother ''one wouldn't wait

outside for four hours in this snow on a promise that wasn't really made, would he?''', which her mother answers with: ''No way, unless that person is crazy,''' (12'29''). Jan Di deciding to check whether he actually did wait for her to show up, implies that he is the type, who tends to act blunt. When she arrives in front of Nam San Tower, he is in fact waiting for her. Jan Di approaches him, and he questions her about why she did not show up on time, to which she responds with ''did I promise that I'd come?'' (13'51''). Joon Pyo receiving this answer, looks down sheepishly, and silently says ''you came''. Joon Pyo as a tsundere is by this point slowly warming up to Jan Di, whom he is falling in love with. His affection towards her is especially evident in scene 29'32'' of episode 6, where we examined the sad background music previously. However, he does not know how to show his affection in the beginning. Instead, he acts blunt and cold towards her, which is opposite the actions of Ji Hoo's.

Ji Hoo, on the other hand, treats Jan Di in a more caring way. At the time, Jan Di becomes the next victim of the bullying that Joon Pyo initiates, Ji Hoo reaches out to her with a helping hand. Even though, Ji Hoo helping her is unintentional and passive in the beginning, Jan Di gets a liking in him, as he does not act aggressive nor take part in F4's bullying.

In the second episode, Jan Di is being attacked by a group of boys in the changing room. Here, we clearly see the passively given help she initially receives from Ji Hoo in the beginning of the K-drama. When she thanks him for saving her several times, Ji Hoo only responds with ''I wasn't helping you, this kind of stuff just annoys me'' (Episode 2, 0'40''- 2'40''). In the same episode from 38'30'', we get to know from Woo Bin and Yi Jung that Ji Hoo went through a traffic accident, where only he survived. As he lost his parents, he developed symptoms of autism, and did not get along with anyone. We can therefore assume that the way he helps Jan Di, is just his way of showing people that he cares.

In addition to the modern kkotminam phenomenon that is practiced today, 'Boys Over Flowers' portrays the F4 group with characteristics of the ancient Hwarang as well. Previously, we described Hwarang as an elite group, where the members were specially trained in different kinds of sports activities, self-defence, as well as educated in religion, culture, literature etc. Some were involved in entertainment as well, and 'Boys Over Flowers' thematizes this also. As the Hwarang members were the good-looking sons of noble families of Silla, F4 are similarly

the sons of the leading families of the country, which is introduced in the first episode (27'15''-30'15'').

Starting from episode 4, we are introduced to their sports activities which are similar to the ones the Hwarang practiced. From 50'16'' to 56'18'', we briefly see them practicing rifle shooting, which could be a modern equivalent of archery. Later in the same segment, two of the F4 members are at a club as entertainers, where one is playing music, and the other is dancing. Additionally, where this starts from episode 7 and continues in episode 8, the F4 members are battling each other in different sports activities. Ji Hoo and Joon Pyo initiate the battle with horsemanship, which is followed by a car race. Continued in episode 8, they battle in swimming. However, because Joon Pyo cannot swim due to a childhood trauma, Yi Jung replaces him. Jan Di, who is a swimmer, offers to replace Ji Hoo in an attempt to make it more fair. This is the last activity of the battle, which ends in a draw.

5.3 Connecting flower boys to specific elements of erotic capital

When applying the theory of erotic capital to the flower boys of South Korea, an analysis on which of the seven elements that are most prominent is necessary to fully understand the case. Moreover, examining potential differences between which elements are used by flower boys and which are applicable to ulzzang will make the two terms comparable in relation to Hakim's theory.

Firstly and most importantly, both flower boy and ulzzang trend is characterized by the element of 'beauty'. As individuals often use blogs, social media, and other websites to promote their good looks, the importance of capturing physical attractiveness and style in photos is arguably more valuable than having a likeable personality. As a result, this becomes the element that has the greatest payoff from investing time and money into perfecting it - that is, perfecting in the sense that it is a culturally constructed notion of beauty that in other cultures might be regarded differently. Thus, it would be self-contradictory to be considered a flower boy or ulzzang without having this beauty. For this reason, many people who are not naturally gifted with facial attractiveness use tools such as makeup to achieve the desired somewhat pale skin tone, and to cover up 'imperfections' like skin irregularities, wrinkles, or pimples (BBC News, 2018; Loo, 2014). Additionally, what cannot be concealed with makeup is often permanently adjusted with cosmetic surgeries. According

to a 2015 statistics made by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, the most common ones among South Koreans, by a significant margin, is eyelid surgery, followed by rhinoplasty (ISAPS, 2018). What is noteworthy about the substantial popularity of eyelid surgeries is that they are turning their ‘monolids’, which is often regarded as a defining feature for the Asian stereotype, into ‘double-eyelids’; a westernized look. In other words, the single most popular aesthetic surgical procedure in South Korea is to change an ethnically specific physical trait to look more like another ethnic group. By these standards it becomes nearly impossible for some South Korean born people to naturally fit into the socially constructed definitions of beauty, as many of them are born with monolids. Essentially, beauty means being flawless in South Korea, and the standards that need to be met are so high that these tools for beauty enhancement become not only common, but necessary in order to be recognized as a member of these subcultures.

Closely linked to the element of beauty is that of social presentation. While physical attractiveness is in focus on photos of flower boys and ulzzang, their clothing, makeup, hairstyle, and other accessories are central features as well. Again, it is the complete and flawless look that is the aim, and physical attractiveness is highlighted and accompanied by these accessories. Arguably, when a person masters the element of beauty, and by extension social presentation, he or she is automatically in possession of high erotic capital, as this is the core element of erotic capital in a South Korean context. It is also at this point that it can be used to gain popularity and success, which then brings into play the other elements of erotic capital.

When a person is sufficiently ‘beautiful’ and perhaps starts getting opportunities and success based on that, many of the other elements of erotic capital become increasingly important. While a person might be considered a flower boy or ulzzang based on their appearance and attractiveness in photos, it is sexual attractiveness, liveliness and charm that is used as a way of maintaining the status and popularity gained thereof.

In relation to these aspects of high erotic capital and social presentation, we have examined the typage of the actors starring in ‘Boys Over Flowers’. We have discovered that all five main characters, both male and female, have not undergone any form of cosmetic surgery. Instead, they are chosen based on their natural features, which match the ideal of beauty in South Korea (Pinoy TV Critic, 2009; SCMP, 2017; Seoulfull, 2009). Lee Min Ho, who plays as Goo Joon Pyo, matches

the image of the tough-looking kkotminam with his high bridge nose, double eyelids, and defined jawline, which have been, and still are, long-term ideal for South Korean men. Kim Hyun Joong, who plays as Yoon Ji Hoo, on the other hand, matches the image of a soft-looking kkotminam with his round face, soft facial features, round nose, double eyelids and delicate shoulder-length hair. These features are recently the most popular type of flower boys for both ordinary males, and K-pop flower boys. Before her acting career, Goo Hye Sun, who is acting as Geum Jan Di, was a well-known ulzzang (Ulzza, 2014). In order to fit the portrayal of the female character of 'Boys Over Flowers', her ulzzang characteristics have been twisted in the beginning, but in later episodes they are highlighted.

The ideal images of flower boys and ulzzang, which the actors in the drama represents, have become the core reason for cosmetic surgery. Specifically double eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty in South Korean society has become a common procedure, and even one of the F4 actors, Kim Hyun Joong has undergone rhinoplasty years after filming 'Boys Over Flowers' (Celebrity Plastic Surgery, 2016), getting the ideal high bridge nose. As the trend of kkotminam really took off with these actors, even after the K-drama had ended, they are assumed to have become a social representation of the phenomenon. A lot of young South Koreans have taken inspiration from them, and many of them are either turning to cosmetic products or permanent adjustment with aesthetic surgery (Pinoy TV Critic, 2009).

6 Discussion

Erotic capital plays a significant role in the flower boy and ulzzang cultures - more so than any of the other forms of capital. So, what happens when erotic capital goes from being an additional asset complementing economic, social, and cultural capital, to being the main focus of a certain subculture? What are the pros and cons of being part of a subculture based on physical appearance and style?

Ulzzang is a subculture of this kind and can be said to be a specific kind of 'South Korean erotic capital'. When making this claim and connecting ulzzang to erotic capital in this way, we are bound to state the differences and similarities between the two. As explained in the theory chapter, Hakim presents six elements of erotic capital - ulzzang evidently carries elements similar to these.

Ulzzang, having its starting point in high school settings, was first introduced to the broader public as a slang for online celebrities and modelling contestants. Thus, beauty plays a prominent role in ulzzang, as the majority of the celebrities and models carry the ideal features of South Korean beauty standards (light skin, V-shaped chin, round face etc.). Beauty here is not only a central element because of their appearance, but because of the fact that they present themselves through photography, which is how beauty is most notably captured. For Hakim too, ‘beauty’ is the central element of the complex whole of erotic capital (Hakim, 2010). Along with the development of ulzzang, the term picked up a number of other elements. Ulzzang became multi-faceted like erotic capital in the early 2000’s with its rise in popularity, and further connections can from this point be drawn to erotic capital. In addition to beauty, other elements of erotic capital started playing a major role in ulzzang.

Elaborating on this topic, the hip hop group Monsta X can be used as an illustration. Monsta X puts weight on choreography, story-telling, and electrifying appearance in their music videos. Here the element of sexual attractiveness plays a prominent role as their charms, movements, and performances are caught on film instead of photography. In addition to highlighting their physical appearance in the videos, they also show off personal traits in terms of acting, voices, talent, and style. Moreover, the elements of charm and liveliness come into play in their reality shows, which are operated by Monsta X themselves. They show the viewers their ability to interact socially, their personality, and their charisma. Their liveliness is shown in the way they present their own energy and humour through the different missions and games their reality shows are based on (Glasby, 2017; Hakim, 2010; Herman, 2018; Loo, 2014). Thus, Monsta X, being ulzzang, is a great example of the similarities that can be drawn between that and erotic capital. A notable difference in the uses of the two terms, however, is that erotic capital is an asset while ulzzang is a title - you have erotic capital but you are or become ulzzang. In other words, erotic capital explains the complexities tied to the notion of enhancing certain personal attributes, while ulzzang refers to the practice of enhancing these personal attributes and the status that is achieved by doing so. That said, these terms can be used more or less interchangeably, at least in the context of South Korea, as the elements they draw on are largely the same and the social benefits that come with being ulzzang are comparable to the benefits that come with having high erotic capital.

Certain elements of both erotic capital and ulzzang are about performing a certain role - consciously or not. As Hakim says, “[...]sexuality is a performance, one that is learnt well enough to become second nature, and includes emotional management” (Hakim, 2010, p. 503). The same can be said for some aspects of being ulzzang, as performing a certain role is essential to having that status. One might draw a connection between this and Judith Butler’s theory of the heterosexual matrix and performed gender roles.

Gender, according to Judith Butler, rather than being something one *is*, is something one *does*. Making this distinction and recognizing it as a verb instead of a noun gives some insight as to how to understand the notion of genderization in Butler’s terms. Gender is constituted by language and discourse and thus becomes the identity that it, within the culture, is expected to be. Butler presents the idea of a grid in which sex, sexuality, and gender are closely linked and interrelated, and wherein these are constructed and categorized, referring to it as ‘the heterosexual matrix’. She argues that the continuity and coherence of the “biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” or “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice” (Butler, 2002, p. 23) is maintained and constructed within the matrix. Certain norms, styles, and behaviours are attributed to the ‘male’ and ‘female’ in that they must act respectively ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in order to fit into the hegemonic heterosexual social contract. Failure to conform to the socially constructed and culturally established norms, will therefore result in the person standing outside of the matrix. Thus, Butler argues, metrosexual and homosexual gender identities open up the “highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, 2002, p. 43) of the matrix and exposes the limits of it. The heterosexual matrix, however, is ever changing and changeable. Attributes and characteristics defining what is regarded as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, and what one must do to fit in or fall out of this social contract, does not remain stagnant as the rest of society progresses. While a man in a dress would still fail to conform to the matrix, a woman in jeans will not, even though she would have some decades ago (Butler, 2002).

In South Korea, flower boys seem to be challenging the heterosexual matrix. They step outside of the established gender norms that define masculinity as the tough, strong man, and instead use features associated with femininity; using makeup, having fair skin, etc. In this way, one might argue that the increasing popularity of flower boys are changing the matrix. As a result, it is not only more acceptable for a man to be highlighting what may be defined as feminine features, it

also allows the expenditure of resources on enhancement of said features to be more common and rewarding. Additionally, while being gendered at birth - or even before that - as 'male' based on physical traits, and by extension learns to perform 'masculinity', flower boys seem to perform it in a way that does not fit into the established matrix. Their metrosexuality thus often gets confused with homosexuality in an attempt to have them fit into a familiar category (BBC News, 2018). However, this arguably becomes less of an issue as flower boys become increasingly popular and more widely recognized. Already, this phenomenon has followers outside of its initial area of influence, and the West have started to take in this trend as well with K-pop groups becoming more well known.

It can be argued, that the flower boy trend was actually a result of a Japanization process happening to the popular culture of South Korea, as the phenomenon of modern time flower boys had its first peak with a South Korean film adaptation of a Japanese manga. Japanization in this sense should be understood as being an influence of Japanese popular culture in our time. The term could have a negative meaning in South Korea because of the imperial period of Japanese military conquest over South Korea during World War II (E-ir.info, 2011).

The flower boys trend is in some ways similar to the Japanese bishonen concept, which is often thematized in shojo manga. However, as opposed to the Japanese concept of bishonen and shojo manga, the flower boy trend is not feminine in the same way. As Jung (2010) argues; "I think the phenomenon should rather be explained through the notion of hybrid or versatile masculinity - soft yet manly at the same time - which is different from effeminised". Additionally, looking into the history of bishonen, the aesthetic of this concept started as an ideal of young homosexual lovers. This was originally embodied in the wakashu (literally meaning 'young person', though this only referred to boys), or adolescent boys. It was influenced by effeminate male actors, who were acting as female characters (Pflugfelder, 1999). Flower boys in South Korea, on the other hand, stretches far back in the country's own history to where King Jinheung of Silla Kingdom formed an elite warrior group of young males with the core purpose of protecting the kingdom.

7 Conclusion

Based on our analysis, certain conclusions can be drawn on the problem formulation and research questions posed in this paper. The image of flower boys has changed since the time of the Hwarang warriors, although maintaining certain similarities. With South Korea becoming a prominent country in terms of cosmetic enhancements, flower boys have once again risen in popularity. A significant part of the South Korean youth have started following the flower boy trend, and the entertainment industry is reflecting this with K-dramas and K-pop becoming increasingly popular.

- Why do many young South Koreans, men and women, spend resources on enhancing their erotic capital?

Since erotic capital is not controlled by social class and status, it is a form of capital that anyone can draw benefits from. Erotic capital is a way in which people who lack high economic, cultural, or social capital can climb the social classes, but in South Korea where physical appearance matters so much, it can even be a disadvantage to not focus on this capital. Erotic capital seems to not only be an additional advantage in social climbing, but a necessity - at least within the entertainment industry and subcultures based on this very notion. One cannot be a successful flower boy, or be ulzzang, without high erotic capital. Ulzzang, being made up of many of the same elements of erotic capital, is not just a subculture, but a notion that is comparable with erotic capital. Ulzzang can be practiced, perfected, enhanced, and exploited in a similar fashion to erotic capital. Both men and women of South Korea can make careers out of being ulzzang, which shows a direct effect of spending resources on it; indeed, on enhancing one's erotic capital. With many benefits coming from having high erotic capital and additional disadvantages coming from not actively enhancing it, it has become common for the South Korean youth to do so. Concurrently, taboos such as cosmetic surgery and male makeup has become socially acceptable; the latter as a result of the rise in popularity of flower boys.

- What elements do the flower boys, specifically, focus on when enhancing their erotic capital?

While they are not actually using the notion of erotic capital, flower boys are consciously exploiting it and enhancing it. The most important element in terms of becoming a flower boy is 'beauty';

people showing themselves off in photos and capturing their most attractive physical features that they have spent resources on highlighting is a big part of the culture. This is therefore the element that is the most focus on, and it is through this that flower boys are special in that they often draw on feminine features as a way to enhance it. The element of 'social presentation' comes to show in the style and fashion that a flower boy must have in addition to physical beauty. Makeup is frequently used as a tool for highlighting a person's beauty by making the skin light and fair, and toning the persons most attractive facial features. These two elements seems to be the most significant ones in defining a flower boy. As flower boy culture is arguably in some sense included in ulzzang culture and therefore is acting in online environments, primarily through photos, elements such as charm, liveliness, sexual attractiveness, and sexuality do not come to show to the same extent. In the case of flower boy celebrities however, they show off these other elements as well - with the exception of sexuality that applies only in private - when appearing in shows and performances. Nevertheless, the defining elements of flower boys remains social presentation and, most importantly, beauty, as they are a common denominator of flower boys in the way they use them, and the other elements to a larger extent vary from person to person.

- How does the TV-show 'Boys Over Flowers' present flower boys, and what role does erotic capital play in this?

In 'Boys Over Flowers', the flower boys known as F4 are the center of attention in every environment in which they act. They are presented in different ways; as tsundere - cold on the outside but sensitive behind the facade - and as kkotminam - more feminine features and gentle personality. The arrogant attitude of the tsundere is a deliberate use of their erotic capital, as they in this way often present themselves differently to others than what they actually feel inside. Furthermore, the F4 are in many cases also shown as charming and lively, their clothes are always stylish and fashionable, and their beauty is admired by other students. In this way, the F4 are presented as flower boys who consciously focus on many of the elements of erotic capital. While sexuality and fertility, in Hakim's understanding of the words, are not shown as significant and does not play a role in the show, the five remaining elements of erotic capital characterizes the image of the F4. From the first time they are on screen and throughout the episodes, the show brings attention to the beauty of the flower boys, as well as their sexual attractiveness, and uses effects such as lighting and music as tools to highlight these assets.

8 Perspectives

Initially, the dimension of Science & Philosophy was going to be included in this project. Had this been part of the final product, the way in which it would be used would be to discuss the ethics and morals behind the exploitation of erotic capital. Hakim's theory has been met with some opposition, not least from various supporters of feminist theory. They argue, that when a woman presents herself sexually in the workplace, it only strengthens the sexism and harassment that is already present (Hill, 2018). Hakim addresses this by saying that it is actually the feminists buying into the dominant male perspective that it is indecent for women to dress sexually (Hakim, 2010). While this has been briefly brought up in this project when covering the theory, digging deeper into this discussion and holding up feminist theory against Hakim to a larger extent would have been a good starting point for a discussion on the ethics of this topic. Additionally, this would have required more focus on workplace environments and gender equality by examining this in one or more companies and analysing the role of erotic capital there. This fieldwork would have been conducted in Denmark with Danish or English companies for purposes of accessibility as well as knowledge of language and culture.

Staying with the topic of erotic capital in South Korea, there are still numerous ways in which this could have been approached. Instead of going deep into the ethics of erotic capital in the workplace, a study on the importance of high erotic capital in terms of gaining job opportunities and advancing within a company or a business could have been made. This would have given an understanding of erotic capital in the South Korean business industry and would have covered not only flower boys and their opportunities and influence, but the broader population as well. Furthermore, an analysis on the workings of erotic capital in advertising could have been made to support this. Examining the role of erotic capital in commercials would have given an insight into which elements are used to target different population groups, as well as what constitutes high erotic capital in South Korea.

On the topic of flower boys in South Korea, an obvious case study would be that of one or more K-pop groups. These groups, namely TVXQ, SHINee, BTS, and Monsta X, to name a few, are the main reason why the flower boy culture have spread out of Asia and has become a globalised phenomenon (Beyond Hallyu, 2015; Jung, 2010; Koreaboo, 2018; Romano, 2018; Wang,

2018). The erotic capital is in focus for these groups, as they are all good-looking, charming, and lively people, and this is one of their biggest appeals. Focusing on this would have resulted in an understanding of the global influence of flower boys, and how an appearance-based subculture from one part of the world manifests itself when integrated into another. Indeed, the aspect of ulzzang would have been present in this case study as well, and many of the conclusions would arguably be the same as the ones drawn in this project.

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Appendix

Data: Boys Over Flowers scenes

<https://www.viki.com/tv/50c-boys-over-flowers>

Episode 1

0.00.0 - 0.10.00 - Introduction of the plot

0.02.37 - 0.02.47 - F4's classroom

0.02.50 - 0.16.20 - The bullying going on at the school, Jan Di saving a student from committing suicide, and the principal of the school offering her to be enrolled at their high school.

0.18.46 - 0.24.51 - F4 first appearance

0.27.15 - 0.30.15 - Introduction of F4's history

Episode 2

0..00.40 - 0.02.40 - Jan Di attacked by group of boys

0.21.06 - 0.27.36 and 0.30.10 - 0.34.52 - View of Joon Pyo's house

0.38.30 - 0.38.50 - Yi Jung and Woo Bin talking about Ji Hoo's autism

Episode 4

0.09.48 - 0.14.20 - Joon Pyo waiting for Jan Di at the date.

0.50.16 - 0.51.15 - Sports activity: shooting

0.54.20 - 0.56.18 - Entertainment (music and dance) and Martial Arts

Episode 5

0.46.14 - 0.49.47 - Continuous music in the presentation of the place in which they're on vacation. Heaven-like island - New Caledonia.

Episode 6

0.29.32 - 0.30.18 - Background music creating a sad atmosphere, as Joon Pyo realises Jan Di didn't tell him the truth

0.39.20 - 0.30.50 - Joon Pyo and Jan Di's helicopter tour

Episode 7

0.20.43 - 0.30.45 - Sports activity: horsemanship

0.45.05 - 0.51.04 - Sports activity: car race

Episode 8

0.04.00 - 0.09.00 - Sports activity: swimming race