

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF FATHERS NEW MASCULINITY IN SOUTH KOREA VARIETY SHOW *SUPERMAN IS BACK*

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## ABSTRACT

*This research focused on the construction of new masculinity in South Korea parenting and fatherhood at the variety shown titled “Superman is Back”. This variety show itself was a part of the existence of Korean popular culture that was also called Hallyu. Hallyu became the phenomenon that swept other popular culture which previously developed in some countries. Hallyu could shift the previous pop culture with the good strategy. The selection of this television show was intended to see how a television program constructed the kind of new masculinity of men, in this case, celebrity fathers that join the show. The qualitative method was employed in this research to find the gender issue and new masculinity discourse which was portrayed by the fathers. The result shows that “Superman is Back” tries to display the different masculinity that is constructed by the show and this is different from the traditional one. This is the alliance of men with new masculinity that is less oppressed women as embedded in the context of patriarchal culture. The portrayals of new masculinity can be seen in the way fathers do nurture, cook, change the baby’s diaper, dance practice, and play with their children. “Superman is Back” is an attempt to show father as nurturer and has the role in domestic tasks too.*

**Keywords:** *hallyu, new masculinity, father masculinity*

## INTRODUCTION

Korean popular culture is able to dominate and shift the position of other pop cultures, such as Hollywood, Bollywood, Japan, and Taiwan that previously developed in some countries. It happens because Korea has a sophisticated strategy to maintain its existence in this global competition. Korea has succeeded to pack their culture in unique marketing strategy and good content package that makes their pop culture different from other countries. This Korean popular culture wave or it is also called *Hallyu* starts within the rising popularity of Korean pop stars all over the world. This phenomenon is sweeping through Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and also Europe. The spread of Korean culture is due to the rapid flow of technology that makes it easier for people to get information about what is happening around the world. Jung (2011) has explained that these pop consumers are increasingly accessing popular products such as music, film, television, and other audiovisual media contents through online social media. From these consumers, these channels now play a central role in global cultural circulation. With youth consumer groups as central figures, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have recently become the fastest-growing media platforms to circulate global cultural products. Jin and Yoon (2017) have supported the idea by explaining that *Hallyu*’s worldwide deployment is heavily influenced by the development of digital technology as well as social media, such as YouTube; the social network sites that make it easy for people to access the latest information.

One of *Hallyu* products that becomes a big thing and loved by pop consumers is variety show on television. There are some variety shows that are known by the consumers whether from Korea itself or overseas consumers, such as *Running Man*, *Infinite Challenge*, *2 days 1 night*, *Superman is*

*Back* and other shows. *Superman is Back* which also known as *The Return of Superman* is a reality-variety show that has the concept to show how the celebrity fathers are obligated to taking care of their kids for 48 hours per a week while the wives ‘left’ the house to work, enjoy their relaxing time, or even going on vacation somewhere. The various characterizations of those fathers in each family are interesting to be researched.

The term of celebrity gives a larger scale which includes recognized or famous people in several occupations or fields (Priyatna, 2013). This explanation is relevant to the reality that the fathers who join this show are famous in any occupation; they are Lee Hyun Woo (singer), Kim Jung Tae (actor), Jang Hyun Sung (actor), Do Kyung Wan (news anchor), Uhm Tae Woong (actor), Tablo (rapper), Lee Hwi Jae (television host and comedian), Choo Sung Hoon (MMA Fighter/athlete), Song Il Gook (actor), and Lee Dong Gook (soccer player).

Korean family has the main characteristic, and it is patriarchy. In this system, the rights and benefits of the family members are subordinate to those of patriarch. Patriarchal production relations in the household are the first one that could indicate. The female or wife performs her duties as a subordinate one. She engages in domestic tasks under this system for the benefit of the family. Fatherhood in South Korea has been defined by Confucian beliefs, which lead men, and fathers, in particular, have complete power and authority over their wives and families. Confucianism has heavily influenced interrelated cultural beliefs about ideal workers and gender roles and in turn, public and private policies, and norms in South Korea (Moon and Shin, 2015).

Patriarchy imposes the certain social standard of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standard for femininity is natural and taken for granted. There is always about binary oppositions like male and female, masculine and feminine, blue and pink, strong and weak. It is all constructed culturally so that society thinks that it is natural. Walby (1990) has said that patriarchy is defined as a social structure and system of customs where a male, superior in the hierarchy, dominate, oppresses, and exploits the female. In this system, the rights and benefits of the family members are subordinate to those of patriarch. The patriarchal system brings that binary thing and the feminine side always seen as a powerless and negative. Whereas men also can be a vulnerable human-being.

In many areas of life, the gender term is always associated and used liberally and often incorrectly as a shorthand reference to women’s lives and issues of equality. But gender is equally about human’s life. In a simple form gender, it refers to what it is to be masculine or feminine at any given time in particular social and cultural contexts. Feasey (2008) has explained about plural masculinity must be understood as a kind of masculinity that it is a fluid concept, time-related, and variable across cultures and eras which could help us to understand how expectation, behaviors, assumptions, and practices are socially and culturally shaped and changed over time. More important thing, it is different to the sex term that refers to biological differences between men and women’s bodies, these aspects are usually being more fixed.

Fathers are expected to provide for their family financially and are encouraged to center their lives around the world while mothers are expected to provide all of the emotional care in raising a family (Guang, 2013). These statements which bring us to the understanding, that South Korea is condensed in patriarchy as in many aspects. Men are placed as superior to women, whether domestically or publically. The men’s upper women hegemony acquires legitimacy and social values, religion, state law, and is isolated hereditary, from generation to generation.

Masculinity is formed culturally with all its diversity either through experience or as it is shown. There is a masculinity concept which related to social conditions and still connected to hierarchy. Therefore, there is a dominant masculinity concept of a society or Beynon (2002) called it as Hegemonic Masculinity. The men’s hegemonic concept is described as a powerful, success,

competent, and authoritative men who gain some reputation from a workplace and pride in the public area. This hegemonic men's concept is "a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power". The dominant masculinity is men who have power and authority. The form of this masculinity could be said as an ideal reference for men when they have been evaluated, or thus this dominant masculinity is considered as standardization for becoming a real man (Feasey, 2008).

The viewpoint about dominant masculinity or hegemonic masculinity is beneficial for men as their dominating power towards women. Men's beneficial are larger than women since men are considered to have more chances in the community or public areas, whereas women's are limited. Kimmel's opinion as cited in Feasey (2008), becoming a man is 'not to be a woman', excluding ages, ethnic, class, race, or man's sexual orientation; thus we know that anti-feminism is a concept which is formed by the history of men.

From those statements, it is found that *Superman is Back* brings the fact in the opposite way. South Korea in is condensed in patriarchy and men are superior but in this show can be seen that the fathers are constructed as the subordinate that unlike the stated premises. The fathers on the show are constructed to be a new men's alliance that is showing several masculinity characters which are not obligated into a normative masculinity's view. A normative masculinity is a kind of masculinity which is attributed to normal characters according to common behavior of people thought; for examples are men should be strong, dominating, and should not be crying. However, in these new men's alliance shows another view of men which is not oppressing women as the patriarchy culture in South Korea. It is shown by how the fathers are babysitting, cooking, bathing, even changing his kids' diapers, and playing with them. This fatherhood form is an attempt on equality of husband and wife's role in a family.

Bauer in Skradol (2009) has noted that nothing gives the better idea of the structure of society than its picture of the man and his position in the universe especially the one man that society considers to be the ideal "New" man. The representation of the new man allows us to explore more thoroughly about new masculinity. Collier (2003) has discussed paternal masculinity, and this is similar kind of new masculinity. Paternal masculinity is related to the men presence in a family. The idea of the functional family as the source of social and individual stability has provided the most powerful basis for the argument that families need father's presence in it. Some families feel that they are lack of father presence in their family just because of they feel that father has authoritative, interfering character, and unaffectionate toward family members, but actually some fathers do not know how to express his affections, he cannot maintain a comfortable relationship with the family. The construction of men with new masculinity in this case to be family men that become ideal men is the way to solve the problem of father figure absence in the family.

## METHODS

The method that is used in this research is qualitative research. Sugiyono (2008) has explained that qualitative method is an effort of collecting data that is form the result of interpretation of data and it could be subjective according to the knowledge gained by researchers. Although this method seems subjective, it is able to determine the result of the continuous review. Rahi (2017) has said that the qualitative method is also used to collect the in-depth details on a particular topic. This approach assumes a single person represents the group feelings and emotions of a person that is equally important to interpret it which are ignored by the quantitative method. This approach is usually used but the interpretive.

The data of this research is South Korea variety show called *Superman is Back* that has been airing in September 2013 by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). It is not only airing on television but also uploaded on official KBS' YouTube channel named KBS World TV which is English subtitled so it could be seen by worldwide audiences. Another website like Kshowonline.com is also contributed in spreading this show to audiences. The source that is used by the researchers is from YouTube and Kshowonline.com.

The data collection has several stages. First, the researchers watch *Superman is Back* and then categorizes some episodes that have the connection with this research. This process is based on purposive sampling technique. This is a technique with the particular data source that is considered to be most knowledgeable about what to expect, thus simplifying the researchers to explore the object (Sugiyono, 2008). By using this technique, there are some episodes that compatible with the issue; they are the episodes of 38, 58, 98, and 103. According to Teddlie & Yu (2007), this technique primarily is used in qualitative studies and may be defined as selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's question. After that, the researchers analyze the data that has categorized with some theories that qualified for this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results and discussions show that *Superman is Back* is a media to build or reconstruct about family's ideal father; the fathers are shown on this variety show. This media tries to include a new 'humane' men discourse. According to those discourses, the mass media is not only describing what happening in the society is, but also forming a willing world. The representation of discourse in news media can be seen as an ideological process of considerable social importance, and it is important for the linguist to be sensitive to how discourse is shaped by and helps to shape social structures and relationships.

One way of forming the world through a discourse is by leading the readers' thought as their viewpoint. In that way, the readers would read in the same way. Besides, a discourse in media could also form the readers' consciousness, so thus consciously or not, the readers would do the same as what the mass media want. In further that mass media have control, at the minimum, its readers.

Beynon (2002) has said that the roles and values for men and women are becoming more similar, so both of them could choose anything as they like. The result of those changes brings us to the hybrid masculinity, which is when a woman has masculine character, and a man has feminine character. For example is the male nurse who should be nurturing and caring, then those attributes are associated with the feminine character. It also could be seen in episode 38 that shows the picture of a father who is nurturing and caring towards his children. It is Song Il Kook, an actor who has triplet sons named Song Daehan, Song Minguk, and Song Mansae. On that episode, he is nurturing and guarding his sons as his wife is working as a prosecutor. He feeds his sons with love, and he is not awkward to show it. It can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Song Il Kok with his Triplet Sons  
(Source: *Superman is Back*, 2013)

Masculinity form that exists in that time by mentioning men in that era is identical with sports, such as rugby, and if there is a man who loves to dance is considered as invalid expressions from the masculinity form (Beynon, 2002). On the other hands, it could be said that it is far from the masculinity form and inappropriate as valid norms. However, there is a scene where those opinions are invalid because of a man, in this case, is a father that encouraged himself and dance with his daughter happily on a dance lesson. There are several children who are accompanied by their parents to attend the class. Uhm Tae Woong is even not embarrassed to use a hot-pinked outfit to be matching to his daughter and continuing their dance together. It is actually considered as an odd thing by the parents in that place. It can be found in episode 98 that shows in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Uhm Tae Woong Learns Dancing with his Daughter  
(Source: *Superman is Back*, 2015)

The image of fathers on *Superman is Back* is not the image of common fathers in South Korea, but an ideal and dreams of many children and family so that fathers could show their affection without any hesitations. Many elements that are suggested by the alliance of this new-man which brings new man-ism concept which is more caring, sensitive, domesticated, and expressive. The fathers also demand to not reluctant in doing households' chores. This is why the fathers on *Superman is Back* are reconstructed to be an ideal father or dream father. See how the fathers' figure is built to be an ideal father who could show his affection towards his children that shows in Figure 3.



Figure 3 The Image Fathers that Show at *Superman is Back*  
(Source: *Superman is Back*, 2013)

Based on Bezharie and Hujatnika (2013) in the article of Fine Arts which talks about fatherhood in his installation artwork entitled *Homage to a Fatherhood*, have stated that a father figure is an understanding source of masculinity, a figure who taught about procedural rules and laws as taught about freedom and dreams. A boy usually aspires to be like his father so that the father's figure is a first role model to be proud of and for boys, a father is an understanding of maturity which they will achieve. The loss of a father makes the children see to another place searching some forms that should be a father's figure. They often lost their way as the society forces them to understand some forms that they do not achieve from a father's figure. This problem, which is then emerged negative characters or disorientation and the psychological disorder for the children at their teenage and adults phase. That statement shows the importance of the father's figure in a family. If the pillar of the family is gone, it will get a defective in family structure.

Public area is not controlled by physically power, but controlled, regulated, and disciplined by a discourse. Through this variety show, the society is controlled by the father image is no longer normative. Uhm Tae Woo does the domestic duties and positioning himself as a superior which showed in episode 103 at Figure 4.



Figure 4 Uhm Tae Woong as a New Father  
(Source: *Superman is Back*, 2015)

This phenomenon is happening rampantly and it could be seen by men's depiction in some movies which was showing a man who nurtured his child, as in "Daddy Day Care" movie. Furthermore, nowadays, a crying man is a 'real' man and it is a reasonable thing. There is also a show that brought this new man-ism concept as an education for boys entitled "Man Up" and one of episode was Tom Harkin runs masculinity workshop all around Australia and here he talks about bow

importance of boys not bottling up their emotions. This episode could be access through Youtube which titled “Real Boys Cry”, it uploaded in 2016. In that video, the boys could cry freely and show their emotion. So, the effort to introduce the new kind of men that are more caring, sensitive, and nurturing is not only showed in a country like Korea, but also other countries tries to educate the society that gender is fluid. In reality, either femininity or masculinity is a reconstructed identity by the society.

From time to time, the masculinity concept has been improved. Masculinity concept as four periods, which are masculinity before 1980’s, masculinity in 1980’s, masculinity in 1990’s and masculinity in 2000’s (Gieseler, 2012). From those four categories, it could be concluded the masculinity’s characters are; (1) *No Sissy Stuff* means that a real man should avoid girly behavior or characteristics like the girl. (2) *Be a Big Wheel* when the masculinity could be measured by success, power, and exalted by others. A man should be possessed wealth, fame, and status which are so manly. (3) *Be a Sturdy Oak* means the masculinity needs rationality, power, and independency. A man should stay calm in every situation, does not show the emotional feeling and his weaknesses. (4) *Give ‘em Hell* means that a man should have bravery aura and aggression, so be able to take a risk even though there is an excuse and fears want it oppositely. (5) *New Man as Nurturer* means that a man should have a gentle side as a father, for example, is nurturing, that gives full character to men in the domestic area. (6) *New Man as Narcissist* means that a man should show his masculinity with flamboyant and elegant yuppies lifestyle. Men are increasingly pampering themselves with commercial properties products, cars, clothes, or personal artifact that makes them look successful. (7) *The macho, violence, and hooliganism* mean that a man who is building his life around football and drinking world, so thus free sex with women, emphasizing leisure time, having fun, enjoying free life with his friends, swearing, watching football games, drinking beer and making jokes that considered as demeaning women. (8) *A metrosexual man who glorify fashion* means that a metrosexual man is a man who cares about measured lifestyle; love details and tend to be a perfectionist.

From that categorized, it could be seen that one of them is a new man as nurturer. It is related to fatherhood. Fatherhood is a part of new men’s masculinity which has a tenderness of a father, or it could be said as a new man as nurturer. This explanation answers the researchers’ question about the reason of representation of father with man’s figure which is positioned as the non-superior subordinate because a man has to have a gentle side so his life would be more humane.

Imagine if men do not engage with nurture character, it would be plenty more of ‘egoistic’ men about their special rights which are connected to power and control. The roles of man are no longer just as a father, but a husband and a worker. They would be glad to switch position to do some domestic chores with their mate. It signifies the change after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the society taunts the masculinity to ‘becoming a man’; both of them are naturally formed.

There is a new point of view which is more permissive for men, for example, it is permissible for men to feel weak and vulnerable at certain times. It shows that there are a masculinity representation changes which are more fluid than what is prevailing in cowboy era. In episode 58, Tablo, a rapper-father, is crying when he touched by her daughter’s lovely word about love for family. Men are allowed to cry because that is a new form of masculinity. It shows in Figure 5.





Figure 5 Tablo Shows his Emotions after Hearing his Daughter's Word  
(Source: allkpop, 2015)

In traditional masculinity or hegemonic masculinity, men are described as the muscular body, could stand tenderness, emotion, and sign of frailty. Beynon (2002) has stated about the 'new men' whose image is reconstructed on billboards, television, magazines, and newspapers. These new men are depicted as more caring, sensitive, expressive, and willing to do domestic jobs. On one of the episodes, Choo Sung Hoon whom a muscular MMA Fighter is willing to make ice cream for his daughter, Choo Sarang, without any electric devices; he mixes all the ingredients for couple minutes. It shows a new men's image that is more caring. It can be seen in Figure 6



Figure 6 Choo Sung Hoon Makes the Ice Cream for his Daughter  
(Source: *Superman is Back*, 2013)

Ideal masculine's character is virtuous, honorable, merciful, strong and brave, and able to control their selves well. Furthermore, the masculinity issue is rarely to be raised because the society considers it as fixed and unchanging (Feasey, 2008).

Based on Darwin (1999), masculinity is not a concept in singular dimension. It means that the concept is varying within the society, social classes, or the level of civilization. In other words, masculinity and femininity is a social construction that could be interpreted differently in each society.



By realizing masculinity as the multi-dimensional concept, it is then opening for us to do that deconstruction and reconstruction, as fatherhood and violence. Fatherhood is one of masculinity stereotype which is important to be constructed. Ralph LaRossa in Wall and Arnold (2007) have found that new western men's tendency is for noticing more about nurturing and consider it as a form of modernization. This tendency is *masculine domesticity* and in other hand called as the process of fatherhood evolution. This process is leading to a more equitable work's dividing in the domestic area within men and women. Once again, *Superman is Back* which is clearly carrying fatherhood is included in his explanation. Traditionally, men's stereotype is including the violence. The word of masculine is close to 'muscle' which could be associated with power, courage, heroism, and violence. It often occurs in the military, gangster's life, and sports which putting forward physically forms, like boxing.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on this research, it can be concluded that the variety show entitled *Superman is Back* shows a figure of father that is unlikely most commonly in South Korea. South Korea is still stronger with its patriarch basic, and the researchers presume that this variety show tries to discipline men, especially for fathers who still have a normative viewpoint about what a father should be. *Superman is Back* is trying to let the society know the kind of paternal masculinity or new masculinity by showing celebrity fathers as men that are constructed to be new men; family men. They have portrayed the ideology of new masculinity which is not all about power or strength but also respects and help women in their gender role. The fathers should not be hard and authoritative towards their children. It actually makes the children feel awkward and afraid just to have a conversation.

Therefore, *Superman is Back* shows men's masculinity form through the fatherhood. Men, in these case fathers, are reconstructed or built to be men, family men, who are attributed to the new masculinity character. Men are no longer feeling embarrassed or reluctant to show their affection and helping household's chores. A man could express his tendency.

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