THE MEANING OF CAREGIVING IN KOREAN TELEVISION DRAMAS WITH PROTAGONISTS WITH MENTAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT
This article examines underlying themes in popular Korean television dramas' depictions of mental and developmental disorders. I specifically focus on three television dramas whose plots center around various mental and developmental disorders: *It's Okay, That's Love* (2014), *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* (2020), and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (2022). I utilize disability studies and feminist theoretical framework of caregiving to examine how these dramas concurrently move beyond and perpetuate the stereotypes surrounding various types of mental and developmental disorders. I argue that the above three dramas diverge from the trend of problematic depictions of disorders in Korean documentaries, films, and novels that other disability scholars and activists have analyzed and critiqued in depth. The three dramas successfully contest the false and homogenizing equivalence between caregivers always being the non-disordered and the cared always being the disordered, which perpetuates social discrimination and stigma against people with mental and developmental disorders. Instead, the dramas complicate the binary of the caregiver versus the cared and that between the disordered and the non-disordered through camera techniques and plot devices and thereby effectively contests some of the premises for Korean societal prejudice against those with mental or developmental disorders.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Antisocial personality disorder, Schizophrenia, and Autism are categorically different types of disorders in that the first two are mental disorders, and the last one is a developmental disorder. However, they are treated similarly in Korean popular discourse for two reasons. First, they are all deemed to be in a state of mental non-normativity, and second, they are considered to be a danger or detriment to society due to their non-normativity. While this is the case in different cultures, as many scholars have observed, the stigma and the resultant discrimination against individuals with mental disorders are more severe in Asia than elsewhere in the world (Krendl and Pescosolido 2020, Ran et al. 2021). While these research findings are important, scholars also acknowledge that these findings lack nuance due to the breadth of their research which disregards racial and ethnic minority status and financial and social circumstances that distinguish the mental well-being of individuals within a country (Badran et al. 2023). They contend that more nuanced research on individual cultures is also necessary (Badran et al. 2023). Following their suggestion, this article specifically focuses on one country- South Korea- and the intersection of media and social perception of mental disorders.

I focus on South Korea because it is a country that many scholars and policymakers around the world have pointed to as a country with alarming statistics of mental disorder crisis (Lee et al. 2017). Out of the population of 51 million, roughly 4.1 million Koreans visited a doctor's office in 2021 due to a variation of mental disorders, with the number of people not seeking medical care presumably larger due to stigma about mental disorders (Kim 2023). 26.5 per 100,000 persons commit suicide in the country, which is a higher percentage of people than any other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country (Kim 2020). However, the nation only spends a third of the financial expenditure allocated for the care for mental disorders compared to the average expenditure in other OECD countries (Oh 2023). What is driving the negative feedback loop between mental disorders, social stigma, and the dearth of care options in Korea?

It would be presumptuous to pinpoint one specific cause of the negative feedback loop. Thus, scholars point to multiple factors, including financial factors and a culture of comparison and competitiveness against each other, as possible causative factors (Pak and Choung 2020). Many Korean scholars point to media as one of the key factors in influencing social perceptions about mental disorders (Hyun, Cho Chung, and Kim 2017, Lee 2019, Yang et al. 2022). News media sensationalize stories of incidents involving individuals with mental or developmental disorders.[1] The same applies to a majority of documentaries and fictional films that vilify mental disorders (Kim 2017a). The underlying tone in many of these sensationalist stories poses those with disorders as a danger to society and blames their caregivers for not being able to control them.

In such an environment that perpetuates the negative feedback loop that exacerbates the stigma surrounding mental disorders, Korean television dramas are perhaps exceptional in that they are popular media that often portray mental disorders in a multitude of ways. While some dramas (mainly crime genre dramas) perpetuate existing stereotypes of mental disorders, others (melodramatic genres) provide surprisingly nuanced portraits of the disorders. The three dramas selected for this article are the types of dramas that provide nuanced and empathetic portrayals of mental disorders. Through critical analyses, this article contends that *It's Okay That's Love* (2014), *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* (2020), and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (2022) use plot devices and filming techniques to successfully portray nuanced stories of the relationships between the caregivers and the cared and contest the false and homogenizing equivalence made between caregivers always being the non-disordered and the cared always being the disordered. Such disruptions of the binary between the caregiver and the cared directly address the ongoing debate in feminist and disability studies regarding the politics surrounding the discourse of caregiving (Molyneaux et al. 2011, Oksala 2016), which I examine in further detail in the next section.

2. MEDIA'S ROLE IN NORMALIZING CURATIVE VIOLENCE

Mothers as reproductive subjects are especially focal in the societal conception of the boundaries between disordered

1 For instance, see articles such as: Kang, Sung-Gil. "Defendant for the "Kicking Incident" Diagnosed with 'Antisocial Personality Disorder'... Same as Kang Ho-Soon ['돌려차기' 피고인 '반사회성 인격장애' 판정...강호순과 동급]." KBS News (Seoul), 6/15/2023 2023. https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/pc/view/view.do?ncd=7700250. Or Donga Ilbo. "The Schizophrenic Patient Who Attempted to Murder the Senior Citizen Association President Due to "Ill Feelings" Received a Suspended Sentence ["악감정 때문" 노인회장 살해하려 한 조현병 환자 '집유']." Donga Ilbo (Seoul), 1/31/2024 2024. https://www.donga.com/news/Society/article/all/20240131/123320700/1. Or Choi, Seo-In. "14-Year-Old Son with Autism Spectrum Disorder Killed His Mother after Being Berated by Her ["명절이니 시끄럽지" 야단 맞자...엄마 살해한 14살 자폐증 아들] " The JoongAng (Seoul), 10/3/2023 2023. https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/25196879#home.

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and non-disordered. Therefore, if they give birth to a child with a disorder, they are blamed for their child's disorder (You and McGraw 2011). According to Alison Kafer (2021), society demands that disabled folks deserving of care must be innocent of the cause of their disability. Such "innocence" of the disabled mandates the blame for the disorder to be cast elsewhere, which oftentimes means the mother (Kafer 2021, 422). As primary caregivers, they are tasked with the affective labor (the combination of physical and emotional labor) of being good mothers to their disordered children (You and McGraw 2011). As many scholarly researches also indicate, the societal assumption is that the caregiver is the non-disordered individual doing all the labor. At the same time, the cared is conceptualized as someone with a disorder who is the passive recipient who gives nothing back to the caregiver and the rest of society except emotional and financial distress (Dawson et al. 2016, Akbari et al. 2018, Nam and Park 2017).

However, the binary of caregiver and the cared, as well as that between disordered and non-disordered, is a fallacy, as pointed out by many disability studies scholars (Calderbank 2000, Molyneaux et al. 2011). Some scholars go as far as to argue that future scholarship should discard the use of the term carer/caregiver because the term supposedly creates an unnecessary binary between caregiver and the cared that disregards the reality where such binaries do not exist (Molyneaux et al. 2011). Through analyses of cancer patients, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and their relationship with their caregivers, they contend that often, the caregivers become the cared, thereby disrupting a fantastical binary between caregiver-cared and disordered-non-disordered (Molyneaux et al. 2011). However, such fallacies are popular because media often perpetuate the stereotypes of the dynamic between the caregiver and the cared (Chae 2015, Holcomb, Latham, and Fernandez-Baca 2015, Ho 2022).

Furthermore, according to some critics, the discourse of caregiving that focuses on the giver's supposed emotional, psychological, and physical sacrifice doubly marginalizes both the caregiver and the cared by flattening the intersecting and complex identities of the former and relegating the latter to a perpetual state of being a burden to others (Crosby and Jakobsen 2020, Morris 1991). Caregivers are expected to lose their sense of self by sacrificing their entire beings to being caregivers (Nam and Park 2017), and such societal expectations often foster mental disorders in the caregivers, who then become in need of care themselves (Molyneaux et al. 2011). This article agrees with the arguments of disability studies scholars. Nonetheless, this article still uses the terms caregiver and cared not to perpetuate the fantastical binary between the two terms but to demonstrate how such binaries are disrupted in the three Korean television dramas analyzed in this article.

Analyses of the media's depictions of mental disorders and the role of the caregivers are important because the media plays a vital role in shaping societal perceptions of mental disorders (Yang et al. 2022). As Seo et al. point out, "Nevertheless, fear disseminated by media without direct experience tends to aggravate the perception of dangerousness regarding people with mental illness" (2023, 8). This is because discrimination is primarily enacted through social distancing (Seo, Lee, and Lee 2023). Social distancing refers to attempts to institutionalize people who do not abide by social norms (You and Hwang 2018). Nowadays, when overt discrimination against people with disorders is illegal, there are still attempts to alienate people with disorders through microaggressions that make them feel unwelcome in public settings (Park 2017, Lin, Yang, and Zhang 2018). Therefore, many individuals do not have direct experience with people who are open about their mental or developmental disorders. Eunjung Kim (2017a) defines such concerted efforts by society to ostracize individuals with disorders as "curative violence" whereby only those who are "cured" of their disability can belong in society. Kim's critique of Korean cultural conceptions of mental disorders aligns with the debates in disability studies that "has long challenged these narratives for their focus on overcoming, on the good work that good patients do to rehabilitate into good citizens after their tragic injuries or illnesses or catastrophes" (Kafer 2021, 417). Extending from Kim's argument, this article suggests that the media's depictions of individuals with mental disorders as "others" who do not belong in society and have to be under constant surveillance by their caregivers is yet another form of mediated curative violence. Therefore, nuanced depictions of mental disorders, albeit in fictional television dramas, can be an important method of undoing and moving beyond such mediated curative violence.

Granted, Korea is not the only place where media significantly shapes social perceptions of mental disorders. Past studies on media depiction of mental disorders around the world assert that those media negatively impacted societal perceptions of mental disorders (Coverdale, Nairn, and Claasen 2002, Stout, Villegas, and Jennings 2004, Riles et al. 2021). Studies focusing on television dramas and soap operas worldwide echo the grim findings in the abovementioned research analyzing other media types; while there are a few

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exceptions, many popular television series still perpetuate stereotypes of mental disorders (Wilson et al. 1999, Tietjen 2020, Lopera-Mármol and Pintor Iranzo 2022).

According to Kimberley McMahon-Coleman and Roslyn Weaver (2020), even though Netflix is slowly changing the overarching trend of negative depictions of mental disorders, there is still a difference in how mental disorders are treated, with violent and problematic characters often being diagnosed with mental disorders that are pointed to as the cause of their violent behaviors. Meanwhile, the main characters, who are endearing and productive members of society, are depicted as having certain traits of disorder, and yet, their disorders are never openly acknowledged and discussed, thereby limiting the chance to educate the public and to empower viewers who have the same disorders (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2020, Stratton 2016, Rajan 2021).

In that regard, Korean television dramas that depict endearing main characters who are upfront about their disorders are rather novel amongst popular media that garner transnational viewership. Furthermore, as with other forms of media, these dramas have the potential to influence viewers' perceptions greatly. Numerous scholarly works on Korean television dramas have established their impact on domestic audiences' conception of their own lives and the society around them (Abelmann 2003, Kim 2009). Furthermore, as an integral part of the global popularity of Korean popular culture – a phenomenon known as Hallyu –Korean television dramas have shaped the world views of fans worldwide (Gammon 2023, Liew et al. 2011). Their verified impact on societal norms and world views of domestic and global viewers makes Korean television dramas an important form of media to explore in terms of their depictions of mental disorders. In the following sections, I analyze three Korean television dramas that offer a relatively more liberating depiction of mental disorders than other forms of Korean media through the complication of various social norms, including the binary between caregiver and the cared and between the disordered and non-disordered.

3. *IT'S OKAY THAT'S LOVE* AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

In the drama *It's Okay That's Love*, male lead Jae-Yul is a famous fiction writer and radio deejay in Korea. However, unbeknownst to him, he has schizophrenia. When he was young, he grew up with an abusive stepfather who beat Jae-Yul as well as his older brother Jae-Bum, and their mother. One day, while his stepfather was beating him, Jae-Yul stabbed his stepfather with a knife. Although the stepfather survived the stab wound, in a panicked moment of a dissociative psychotic episode, the mother sets the house and the stepfather on fire, thus killing him. Because the mother suffered a dissociative episode, she does not remember the incident. Jae-Yul, who did not want to incriminate his mother, falsely testified that his older brother was the perpetrator responsible for the stepfather's death, which resulted in the older brother's decade-long prison sentence. Jae-Yul's schizophrenic episodes become worse when he interacts with his brother or mother because of his guilt. He sees hallucinations and shows increasingly self-injurious behavior as the drama progresses due to his subliminal desire to die. While suffering from schizophrenia, he meets the female lead, a psychiatrist named Hae-Su, who, albeit not diagnosed with a disorder, has an aversion to sex because of her trauma of witnessing her mother's infidelity when she was young. The television drama starts when these two people—Hae-Su and Jae-Yul— serendipitously end up living together in the same house as roommates.

The drama's plot complicates the false equivalence between the caregiver being the person without a disorder and the cared being the person with the disorder. Jae-Yul, the protagonist with schizophrenia, often serves as the caregiver to his mother and to his girlfriend, Hae-Su, neither of whom are diagnosed with mental disorders. He financially provides for his mother and protects her from going to prison for murdering her husband. In his relationship with Hae-Su, he is the one who helps her overcome her aversion to sex and hatred of her mother through in-depth conversations and love. The drama dedicates a significant portion of an episode to emphasize Jae-Yul listening intently to Hae-Su's traumas while sitting at a beach and telling her that none of what happened was her fault so that she could overcome her aversion to sex. The scene makes Jae-Yul appear to be Hae-Su's caregiver. The caregiver-cared relationship is only reversed near the end of the drama when Jae-Yul's schizophrenia worsens, and he becomes suicidal. While Jae-Yul was always the one making decisions for his family, this time, his mother, as his caregiver, decides to take him out of the hospital so he could recover in a rural village.

The binary of caregiver and the cared shifts throughout the drama as the plot develops, rather than those without disorders being permanently situated in the caregiver position and the protagonist with schizophrenia being stuck in the position of the cared. The exchange of the role of caregiver

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and the cared throughout the drama addresses and problematizes the social assumption that creates a binary between the two concepts when, in reality, many caregivers also need care, often provided by the family members to whom they provide care (Molyneaux et al. 2011). The plot devices depict the protagonist as a filial son and a caring love interest to endear him to the viewers. Instead of a drain on society, he is portrayed as an upstanding son, boyfriend, and citizen capable of financial and emotional caregiving.

Relatedly, the drama uses camera techniques that foster empathy for the protagonist rather than fear and aversion to him due to his disorder. *It's Okay, That's Love* uses a lot of extreme close-ups of the characters' faces. Close-ups are frequently used in television dramas to capture the characters' emotions. In the scene I analyze below, this camera technique is incredibly potent because viewers are led to empathize with mentally ill characters who would stereotypically be considered impossible to empathize with based on the Korean social practice of "curative violence" and institutionalization. In a scene where the audience finds out that Jae-Yul is schizophrenic and that Kang-Woo, a student who constantly keeps him company, is his hallucination, the camera captures a scene of Jae-Yul and Kang-Woo running alongside each other. They laugh and high-five each other because they ran into a girl that Kang-Woo loves. The camera takes a full-bodied two-shot of them having a good time, then takes a close-up of Kang-Woo running and laughing; the camera then pans to the left to capture Jae-Yul laughing and running; finally, the camera pulls out again to reveal a full-bodied two-shot but this time, the viewers do not see two men running, but only see Jae-Yul gesticulating to someone invisible at his side. Before that scene, the viewers are unaware that Kang-Woo is a hallucination and that Jae-Yul has a mental disorder.

The way the scene builds up to the revelation of Jae-Yul's mental disorder makes it so that the viewers do not see his illness through the portrayal of him as a stereotypically dangerous schizophrenic who needs to be institutionalized and ostracized, as many schizophrenic patients have been throughout Korean history (Park et al. 2012, Seo, Lee, and Lee 2023). Instead, the viewers are nudged into seeing the world from Jae-Yul's perspective. Scholars have contended that when those identified as having mental disorders speak directly to the viewers, the latter garner more positive images of mental disorders than when they were told about such disorders in disembodied and abstract manners (Coverdale, Nairn, and Claasen 2002, Parrott et al. 2021). In this context, the realistic aspect of television dramas combined with the point of view that we are getting of a person with a mental disorder synergistically creates a moment in which the drama disrupts the negative feedback loop that imagines those with mental disorders as complete "other" who are incapable of taking care of themselves let alone others. The drama twists Kim's (2017a) concept of curative violence to demonstrate how Jae-Yul, who had uncured schizophrenia for most of his adult life, is a widely accepted member of society due to his socioeconomic success. While he is exempted from the curative violence and marginalization that other schizophrenic patients experience in their lives, his exemption is based on his ability to appear as if he is abiding by social norms, such as being a caring provider, boyfriend, and son. *It's Okay That's Love* disrupts the stigma of the supposedly dangerous schizophrenic and the binary between caregiver and the cared, as well as that between disordered and non-disordered. Similar themes can be found in other Korean television dramas, including *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*, which I will analyze in the following section.

4. *IT'S OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY* AND PERSONALITY DISORDER

The drama focuses on the relationship between Moon-Young, a successful picture book writer with a personality disorder, and Kang-Tae, an employee at a psychiatric hospital whose life seems to revolve around taking care of his autistic older brother Sang-Tae. Moon-Young's psychopathic behaviors unnerve Kang-Tae who wants to live a peaceful life with his autistic brother. Furthermore, the big mystery that both of them have to resolve throughout the drama is the question of who murdered Kang-Tae's mother. The drama implies that it is Moon-Young's psychopathic mother and that she is lurking in the protagonists' vicinity, trying to jeopardize their romantic relationship.

It's Okay That's Love, and *It's Okay Not to be Okay* share similar themes in that both dramas' plots disrupt the assumption that people without disorders are the ideal caregivers and that those with disorders need to be cared for. Societal assumptions expect the family members of the person with disorders to be selfless caregivers who not only provide affective labor for the person with disorders but also guard them against freely roaming in society (Yoon 2003). The caregivers are forced into paradoxical positions where, on the one hand, they are expected to give unconditional love and labor to the person they are caring for. On the other hand, they are

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expected to perpetuate "curative violence" against the cared individuals by preventing them from becoming a part of society unless they are "cured" (Kim 2017a).

The drama highlights the conflict between the two positions that the caregivers are expected to embody to complicate the binary of the non-disordered caregiver versus the disordered cared. For example, in one of the episodes, a young man named Ki-Do with a manic disorder is admitted to the psychiatric hospital. As he talks about how he ended up at the hospital, the scene changes to Ki-Do staring straight at the camera/audience while the background changes to show him at a club with dizzying light and constantly moving people. His card is declined at the club, and the club bouncers chase after him. He starts running in the street, and the mis-en-scene makes him look like he is the main character of an action movie. He starts stripping naked as he runs on the street. Cars collide and burst into flames as he finishes his story. The scene establishes that he is a danger to society, so he has to be confined to the hospital. Up to that point, Ki-Do's family appears to have been the perfect caregivers, doing everything they can to protect him and society from each other.

However, Moon-Young, the protagonist with a personality disorder, sees the situation differently. When she runs into him on a highway as he is trying to run away from the hospital, without question, she lets him escape by having him get in her car. Without asking him, she knows where he wants to go: his father's political campaign event. When Kang-Tae, who is Moon-Young's love interest and an employee at the psychiatric hospital, attempts to stop their escape, he echoes the sentiment that the mainstream society, including the viewers, presumably had at the time: Ki-Do and Moon-Young's escapade is a danger to society and themselves and they need to be stopped. However, Moon-Young ignores him and speeds off, forcing him to follow Ki-Do and Moon-Young after failing to stop them. The three of them arrive at Ki-Do's father's political rally, where the rest of his family is campaigning alongside the father. Ki-Do runs up to the podium, and the camera takes a close-up of his face as he confesses his status as the "ugly duckling" in the politician's family. He talks about how he did not meet his parents' expectations and was beaten, ignored, and neglected throughout his childhood. Then, the camera takes a long shot of him in slow motion as he tries to escape the grasp of the bodyguards. Because the scene is in slow motion, it appears as if they are all dancing together. Suddenly, after a close shot of Kang-Tae's face, the person dancing changes to that of Kang-Tae, who is wearing the outfit that Ki-Do was wearing in the previous shot and dancing freely. In the next shot, the dancing person reverses to Ki-Do and shows Kang-Tae staring at him from off-stage to show that the last scene was Kang-Tae's imagination of himself dancing so freely and envious of Ki-Do's freedom.

The scene is significant for how it complicates the depiction of relationships between the caregiver and the cared as well as that between the disordered and non-disordered. Through Ki-Do's story, the drama subverts the assumption that caregivers can be both caring providers and stern guards that protect the person with the disorder and society from each other. In Ki-Do's case, the family focused on their latter duty and ended up triggering and exacerbating his psychosis. They strictly abided by the concept of "curative violence" (Kim 2017a) and attempted to segregate Ki-Do from society under the assumption that it would be in everyone's best interest. The false equivalence between the non-disordered and the ideal caregiver is shattered through this scene.

The episode complicates the assumptions that divide the caregiver and the cared into two separate categories. It shows Kang-Tae – the traditional caregiver – imagining himself as Ki-Do. Before the scene mentioned in the previous paragraph, he abides by a strictly binary understanding of the non-disordered caregiver versus the disordered care recipient. In some ways, he adhered to what Kafer calls the "innocence of the disabled" (2021, 422), whereby he carried unwarranted guilt for his brother's disorder and mandated himself to take care of his innocent brother who, due to his innocence, is deemed a worthy care recipient. Kang-Tae, much like other caregivers of disordered people in real life, deprived himself of joy under the assumption that it is his duty to his autistic brother and that isolating and depriving himself of the joys of life is the only way he could be a dedicated caregiver (Kim and Bae 2021). However, in the scene mentioned above, Kang-Tae fantasizes about becoming Ki-Do, a person with a mental disorder, because he envies the latter's ability to act freely against social norms. After using his imagination to put himself into Ki-Do's shoes, Kang-Tae changes and discards his assumption that there must always be a strict binary between the caregiver and the cared and between the disordered and the non-disordered. A few days after the incident, Kang-Tae uncharacteristically gets into an altercation with a guy who punches Moon-Young on hospital grounds and gets fired from his job as a caregiver at a psychiatric hospital that was closely tied to his identity as a caregiver.

Superficially, Kang-Tae seems to harm his career. However, in the process, he also regains the freedom and a sense of self he lost while acting as a caregiver both in his workplace and

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private life. For instance, after Kang-Tae leaves his job, he smiles the brightest and the most genuine smile the viewers have seen since the drama began. At that moment, he quits being the caregiver employed by the psychiatric hospital. He stops acting responsible and sacrificing his desires all the time to be a devoted caregiver to his autistic brother. He learns that he needs to lead his own life and give his brother independence instead of assuming he cannot care for himself (Kim and Bae 2021).

The drama ends with Kang-Tae completely dissolving the binary of caregiver and the cared that existed between him and his brother. Kang-Tae's brother is commissioned to use his excellent drawing skills to publish books. This is the second attempt that Kang-Tae's brother makes to live an independent life apart from his brother. During the first attempt, earlier in the drama, Kang-Tae prevents him from doing so because he cannot imagine his life away from his role as a caregiver for his brother. However, in the finale, Kang-Tae waves goodbye to his brother with a smile, and the camera zooms out to show the two cars, one with Kang-Tae's brother and the other with Moon-Young and Kang-Tae going in opposite directions. The drama does not portray a one-sided cure from the caregiver to the cared; it shows both individuals being "cured" by being freed from various social burdens. While the two dramas I discussed thus far primarily examine the relationship between the caregiver and the cared through the platonic lens, the last drama I analyze in this article introduces the issue of romance and sexuality to complicate the binary of the caregiver and the cared even further.

5. *EXTRAORDINARY ATTORNEY WOO* AND AUTISM

Extraordinary Attorney Woo is about an attorney named Woo Young-Woo, who has autism. She has a photographic memory of Korean laws and graduated at the top of her class at Korea's most prestigious law school. Her mother, who discarded Young-Woo, is the CEO of one of the largest law firms in Korea. Young-Woo is employed at a rival law firm from her mother's, and the drama narrates the story of Young-Woo's trials and tribulations as she navigates the various cases she has to defend while dealing with interpersonal drama with her colleagues, her mother, and her love interest. Her love interest, Joon-Ho, is a paralegal at the law firm where Young-Woo works. He is depicted in the drama as a kind-hearted and handsome man who is one of the most popular bachelors in the law firm. While his interactions with Young-Woo initially start as him helping her when she is in difficult situations, his feelings for her grow to that of love, and they form a romantic and sexual relationship with each other despite concerns from everyone around them.

The drama depicts the nuances of the conceptions of the caregiver and the cared in romantic relationships. Social perception and the perception of even some non-autistic individuals in romantic relations with autistic partners is that the non-autistic partners either have suspicious intentions or that they are somehow sacrificing themselves by resorting to a caregiving role for their lovers (Sala et al. 2023). The latter assumption paints the romantic relations between autistic and non-autistic partners as equivalent to the dynamic between the caregiver and the cared. However, the drama complicates such a narrative that falsely creates a strict and unidirectional flow of emotion and labor between the two romantic partners.

In one of the episodes, Young-Woo defends a man named Jung-Il, who is accused of sexually violating a woman named Hae-Young with autism. During their initial interview, Jung-Il tells Young-Woo, "Why doesn't anyone believe [that we were in love]? Is it because she [Hae-Young] has a disability? Is it that impossible to believe that a non-disabled person can love a disabled one?" The scene immediately following his exclamation is of Young-Woo in a restaurant, telling her friend that Jun-Ho confessed his feelings to her. The juxtaposition of the case with Young-Woo's personal life continues throughout the episode to draw parallels between Hae-Young, the "victim" and Young-Woo. For instance, in one scene, the camera takes a close-up of Hae-Young's hands as she nervously taps her one hand with her fingers, and then the camera cuts to Young-Woo's hands to show that she is doing the same thing. Such camera work and plot device indicate that while Hae-Young and Young-Woo are different in their autism spectrum and aptitude to express themselves to others, they are similar in that they are women with autism who have non-autistic boyfriends in a society that looks at such relationships warily.

The show refuses to pass judgment on Jung-Il or Hae-Young. Even after Young-Woo finds out that Jung-Il has manipulated other women with disabilities in the past by being romantically involved with them and swindling them of money, the next scene is not of Young-Woo upset or confronting him, but that of a romantic date between her and her boyfriend, Jun-Ho. They hold hands as they walk on a scenic route when a close-up of their faces is interrupted by an off-

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screen woman's voice calling Jun-Ho. A full shot of three of Jun-Ho's friends from across the street continues as they walk towards the couple. The woman assumes that Jun-Ho is volunteering with a disability assistance organization and that Young-Woo is one of his charity cases. Her assumption reflects the societal belief that disabled women can only experience intimacy through a kind-hearted caregiver (Kim 2017a). Jun-Ho and Young-Woo are relegated to the caregiver-cared status. When Jun-Ho corrects the woman's presumption and tells her that he is on a date and that Young-Woo is his girlfriend, his three friends smile awkwardly and formally greet Young-Woo, which they did not do when they assumed that Young-Woo was someone whom Jun-Ho was caring for due to his kind-heartedness. The significant question becomes whether Young-Woo and Jun-Ho's relationship, as well as that between Hae-Young and Jung-Il, as many people in the drama assume, resemble monodirectional and hierarchical caregiver and cared prototypes or whether the relationships comprise a multidirectional flow of feelings and reciprocal desires.

The episode's most revelatory and didactic scene comes when Young-Woo encounters Hae-Young outside the courtroom. The latter begs the former to help Jung-Il get out of prison because her mother and other volunteers coerced her into saying that Jung-Il raped her. Young-Woo concludes that "Jung-Il is a bad man. [...] Nevertheless, disabled women have the right to fall in love with bad men too." She advises Hae-Young to testify and make her voice heard in the courtroom because neither her mother, the volunteers, nor the prosecutor can dictate what she says and how she feels. After she testifies, the jury finds Jung-Il not guilty of rape, but the judge decides to give him a two-year prison sentence. The proud face of Hae-Young's mother and the volunteer workers around her cheering at the outcome is contrasted with a close-up of Hae-Young's face as she starts crying out loud in the middle of the courtroom. The mother is bewildered, and the scene fades with the mother continually asking her why she is crying. The interaction between the mother and Hae-Young indicates that even though the caregiver – in this case, the mother – thinks that she is operating in the best interest of her daughter, she misjudges her daughter's capability to be sexually autonomous and to form mutual relationships with a lover.

Even when the court case ends, the viewers are left with mixed feelings about how to assess autistic women's sexuality. After all, much research has been conducted regarding people with developmental disorders and their exposure to sexual violence, and it seems to indicate that individuals with disorders, particularly developmental ones, are disproportionately at risk of sexual violence (Meer and Combrinck 2015, Kim and Kim 2017). However, too extreme of an embrace of the idea that those women's sexuality can only be discussed in the context of violence creates unfortunate situations like the one described above, where any form of intimacy between disordered and non-disordered individuals is presumed to emulate the power dynamic akin to a stereotypical caretaker and cared relationship in which the latter is entirely deprived of agency and ability to take care of themselves.

The drama attempts to contest the social assumption about romantic relations between autistic and non-autistic individuals by demonstrating an intimate moment between Young-Woo and Jun-Ho at the end of the episode after the court case ends. The automatic light in Jun-Ho's apartment corridor dims as the medium shot of the couple reveals him leaning forward towards Young-Woo, but a close-up of her feet shows that she backs away when he leans forward. The light turns back on as Jun-Ho backs up. Then, the camera turns from a full shot to a close-up and shows Jun-Ho from an angle that allows the viewers to take on Young-Woo's point of view. The camera takes an extreme close-up of his lips and her hands as she caresses his shoulders. She kisses him, and the camera takes a close-up of her feet approaching him in contrast to how her feet backed away at the beginning of the scene. She is the one in control of her sexuality.

The scene defies the misconception that a romantic relationship between a mentally disordered and non-disordered individual inevitably emulates the dynamics of a caregiver and cared whereby the latter does not have agency and is merely a passive recipient of the other's labor and love. The drama's strengths come from its complex portrayals of sexuality and romance that make the viewers question their assumption that individuals with disorders – particularly women, are asexual or are only sexualized in the context of sexual violence.

6. THINKING BEYOND THE CAREGIVER-CARED DYNAMIC

Thus far, this article has examined how the three dramas have a similar underlying theme that challenges the societal embrace of the problematic binary conceptions of the caregiver versus the cared and its false equivalence to the binary of the disordered versus non-disordered. In these dramas, the

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protagonists with mental disorders are often depicted as the most insightful individuals who can serve as caregivers for others in need. Through such representations of individuals with mental disorders caregiving, the dramas complicate the presumed connection between non-disordered and caregiving. Furthermore, the dramas demonstrate similar traits in questioning the binary of disordered and non-disordered by juxtaposing the main characters with diagnosed mental disorders to other characters who exhibit more problematic behaviors – such as murder, gaslighting, and manipulation – than the former who are categorically non-disordered.

Besides the two similar tropes, there are other similarities in the three dramas regarding their attempts, or lack thereof, to disrupt the stereotypes surrounding caregiving. First, the dramas, to a varying extent, blame mothers for their children's disability and, therefore, unanimously demonstrate their adherence to the stereotype of mothers as the primary caregivers to their families. Kim (2017a) points out how, throughout Korean history, mothers were thought to be the cause of disability and, therefore, the key components for decreasing the number of disordered children. The dramas echo such sentiments. For instance, *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* describes that Moon-Young's disorder has a cause – her mother's manipulative and amoral lessons during childhood. The other two dramas blame the mother figure more subtly. In *It's Okay, That's Love*, Hae-Su experiences aversion to sex because of witnessing her mother's adultery, and Jae-Yul has schizophrenia because he saw her mother commit murder. While Jae-Yul 's father is primarily to blame, the show argues that the mother's incompetence as a caregiver to take responsibility for her actions and protect her children causes one of her children to go to prison and the other to suffer from schizophrenia. Similarly, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* depicts Young-Woo's mother as someone who discarded her to obtain her own socioeconomic success. The drama portrays the mother as someone who exacerbates the protagonists' difficulties by selfishly not taking on the role of caregiver. While the drama disrupts the socially presumed binary of caregiver and the cared, it does not disrupt the problematic gendered social stereotype that designates mothers as the primary caregivers to their children who are blamed for their children's mental and developmental disorders (Hyun, Cho Chung, and Kim 2017, You and McGraw 2011). Granted, they show mothers who have mental disorders and require care, which aligns with the feminist disability scholars' (Crosby and Jakobsen 2020) calls to complicate the idea that mothers can only be caregivers and not the cared. However, the dramas do not show the mothers through a sympathetic lens. Instead, they are largely blamed for the difficulties faced by their children.

Second, the protagonists in all three dramas are "cured" of their disorders through the power of love that they find in a person other than their mothers, who did not adequately perform their caregiving roles. The implication is that the love they lack in their interactions with their mothers is fulfilled through the love interests who cure the protagonists' disorders with their affective labor of love. For example, in *It's Okay, That's Love*, near the end of the show, Jae-Yul is forcibly institutionalized because his schizophrenic episodes get worse, and he is deemed suicidal. However, he pleads with everyone to let him out of the hospital and finally succeeds in convincingly lying his way out of the hospital. While back home, he makes a miraculous recovery that he was unable to during his weeks in the hospital. This miraculous breakthrough arrives in the form of one phone call from Hae-Su. She calls Jae-Yul to give him an ultimatum and says that he needs to look at his hallucination in the face and discover that it is not real, or they will need to break up. Likewise, in *It's Okay Not to be Okay*, the protagonist with psychopathic tendencies and her lover suffering from the burden of caregiving "cure" each other of their disorders by helping each other address their past trauma. Young-Woo in *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* is also able to be "cured" of specific symptoms of autism by meeting Jun-Ho, her lover. She can hold hands and kiss him in ways that she was opposed to doing with anyone else due to her hypersensitivity to touching. Posing love as the ultimate solution to mental and developmental disorders is questionable because such misinformation blames the caregivers for the people they are caring for being uncured (Kim 2017a). According to this problematic logic, the caregivers with uncured family members or love interests are not loving their cared subjects enough to miraculously cure them. While the dramas engage in thoughtful reflections of the problematic nature of the binary of the caregiver and the cared, they nonetheless still abide by societal expectations for caregivers to carry all the burden of cure and guilt associated with caregiving.

7. CONCLUSION

Media accounts can exert exorbitant power over their audience and, therefore, can be effectively used as a mode of activism (Philo et al. 1994, Kim 2017b). This is especially important in Korea because, as Dong Chul You and Se Kwang

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Hwang argue, disability and disorder activism in Korea is "still yet to instigate sufficient social and cultural impacts on Korean society that change the traditional negative perceptions of disability and disablement" (2018, 1271). Perhaps Korean television dramas could assist in such efforts. After all, as some scholars (Kim, Jang, and Kim 2022) mentioned, Korean television dramas have the potential to become social phenomena that exponentially raise people's awareness about mental and developmental disorders.

More research should be done on this issue to verify the viability of television series in changing stereotypes and misconceptions about mental and developmental disorders. In the meantime, television shows should not be discounted as superficial and meaningless entertainment, primarily because, as Nicholas Mirzoeff mentions, "popular visual culture can also address the most serious topics with results that traditional media have sometimes struggled to achieve" (1999, 21).

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Extraordinary Attorney Woo [이상한 변호사 우영우] (2022)
It's Okay, That's Love (괜찮아 사랑이야) (2014)
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