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<u>I, Aaryn L Green, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.</u>

It is entitled:

Calling Out Culture Vultures: Nonwhite Interpretations of Cultural Appropriation in the Era of Colorblindness

Student's name: <u>**Aaryn L Green**</u>

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Erynn Casanova, Ph.D.

Committee member: Annulla Linders, Ph.D.

Committee member: Jennifer Malat, Ph.D.

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Calling Out Culture Vultures: Nonwhite Interpretations of Cultural Appropriation in the Era of Colorblindness

A Dissertation Submitted to the
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

Aaryn L. Green

B.A., University of Cincinnati, 2009
M.A. University of Cincinnati, 2012

Dissertation Chair: Erynn Casanova
Committee Members: Jennifer Malat
                                   Annulla Linders

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Abstract

Colorblind theory argues that racism has not subsided but has taken on a new form which appears nonracial and is hard to detect. Music videos are one form of popular culture that utilizes cross-racial or cultural images which appear to be racially inclusive, but when closely analyzed are firmly rooted in traditional stereotypes and take cultural expressions out of their proper sociohistorical contexts. This process is called cultural appropriation. Too often, researchers have determined what modes of appropriation are or are not harmful to various groups without any input from those groups. In this study I provide a space for racial groups whose creations or expressions are habitually appropriated to tell us which modes of appropriation they consider to be harmful. I use a dual qualitative method—music video content analysis and focus group interviews with 61 participants—to investigate representations of nonwhite cultures and how audiences of color interpret the use of their cultures within popular music videos. Most generally, I ask: how do audiences interpret and discuss cultural representations within popular culture media? More specifically I ask: how do audiences of color come to understand and discuss the cultural appropriation of their own culture and other nonwhite cultures within popular culture? Ultimately I apply critical race and colorblind theories to theories of cultural appropriation to nuance the concept of cultural appropriation, give credence to using pop culture as a site for racial research, and highlight the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalized groups in order to unpack concepts of group identity, power, exploitation, and white domination.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated, fist, to Jennie Davis Porter, who in 1928 became the first Black woman to receive a Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Cincinnati. Second, it is dedicated to those Black women, known and unknown, who have sacrificed life, love, sanity, finances and more, so that I and others may more easily accomplish all that we ever dream. Last, this dissertation is dedicated to Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Alton Sterling, Samuel DuBose, Philando Castile, Keisha Wells and so many other people of color whose lives were stunted due to the workings of intertwined systems of oppression.

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My mother always told me that I was a village-raised child. She raised me to believe that both my accomplishments are due in part to those who came before me and my failures will affect those who come after. She taught me that EVERYONE in my community deserved the same respect. Be it the mayor, the librarian, the mail carrier, the dope boy, the mean elderly neighbor, or the trash collector—they were all a part of shaping my perspective of the world and shaping who I become. Therefore, it was/is my job to be my best self, not only for myself, but for those in my community. The belief in the importance of community is something that I have carried with me everywhere I have gone in life, and I find that I have always (consciously or subconsciously) found a village of supporters who would go to the end of the Earth for me, and I for them. That is all due to early lessons from my mother, Linda D. L. Green.

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My village now spans multiple states, countries, generations, and identities. To those mentioned above and for anyone who has had me in your thoughts, prayers, and hearts—Thank you.

Amen and Ashé.

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2016, artist Solange Knowles, sister to pop icon Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, released her now platinum album "*A Seat at the Table.*" This album was quickly and widely acclaimed by the Black community, particularly Black women, as a piece of art that accurately highlighted the microaggressions, stressors, anger, resilience, joy, and pride that constitute the Black American experience, particularly following the high profile killings of Michael Brown, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Samuel DuBose, Philando Castile, and so many others. For much of the Black audience, Solange had successfully illustrated the feeling of being both hyper-visible but also invisible—a concept explored in depth by scholars and authors such as Ralph Ellison, W. E. B. DuBois, and Patricia Hill Collins. Throughout the album, the details of the hardships of Black American life are balanced with declarations of cultural pride and testaments of overcoming wrapped up in soft and sweet melodies. One track, titled F.U.B.U. (borrowed from the Black owned '90s clothing line of the same name; an acronym for For Us By Us) particularly grabbed my attention. Throughout the song Solange gives examples of common microaggressions people of color experience, such as being questioned when boarding first class on an airplane or being pulled over while driving in one's own neighborhood. In the closing of the song, Solange sings to white America:

> Get so much from us
> Then forget us
> Don't feel bad if you can't sing along
> Just be glad you got the whole wide world
> This us
> This shit is for us
> Some shit you can't touch

Interestingly, I happened to hear the song as I was collecting data for this study. The parallels between Solange's lyrics and the conversations of my participants (and even my own personal conversations with friends and family) were apparent. Solange was speaking to white America on behalf of Black and other racial minorities and staking claim and ownership of nonwhite cultural expressions, particularly within a societal context that supports white domination and suggests Black and brown people do not belong.

Just three months prior, in June 2016, biracial actor and activist Jesse Williams delivered an eloquent acceptance speech after receiving the BET Humanitarian Award. During his speech, Jesse spoke on behalf of Black communities saying,

> …we're done watching and waiting while this invention called whiteness uses and abuses us, burying black people out of sight and out of mind while extracting our culture, our dollars, our entertainment like oil - black gold, ghettoizing and demeaning our creations then stealing them, gentrifying our genius and then trying us on like costumes before discarding our bodies like rinds of strange fruit.

Both Solange and Jesse's words spoke to the simultaneous adoption *and* dismissal of nonwhite, namely Black, cultural expressions. In other words, how is it that America can love Black culture but not Black people? They were speaking to the paradoxical concept of cultural appropriation, the act of a dominant group extracting, borrowing, repurposing, misrepresenting the culture of nondominant groups, usually for the benefit of the dominant group (Ziff and Rao 1997). Solange and Jesse's words stimulated conversations on appropriation, boundary making, cultural exchange, and the thin line between cultural *appreciation* and cultural *appropriation* within popular culture.

Meanwhile, famed country-turned-pop star Miley Cyrus generated conversations regarding the rebranding of her image and music, which began to lean heavily on hip hop aesthetics, Black music producers, rappers, and Black woman background dancers. While some regarded Miley's new fascination with gold grills, flashy jewelry, and twerking[1] as simply a young girl having fun, others saw her as using (a very limited form of) hip hop as a marketing tool to distance herself from her days as a Disney child star and make herself more interesting and edgy, without having any true appreciation for the culture. A year later, the criticisms of Miley resurfaced during a promotion tour for her new album—which had a sound that more closely aligned with her roots in mainstream country music. During a 2017 interview with *Billboard*, Miley discussed that she was distancing herself from hip hop because it was too misogynistic and flashy saying, "'come sit on my dick, suck on my cock.' I can't listen to that anymore. That's what pushed me out of the hip-hop scene a little. It was too much, 'Lamborghini, got my Rolex, got a girl on my cock'—I am so not that." Conversations in the public discourse questioned the timing of this split from hip hop as it coincided with Miley's new album and new softened image. Black cultural critics critiqued Miley for doing exactly what Jesse Williams referenced in his speech—wearing culture as a costume for the sake of entertainment and profit and then distancing oneself from it when it is convenient. They also noted that Miley almost seamlessly floated between American pop music and taking a dive into salacious forms of hip hop without being permanently stigmatized—a privilege which is rarely afforded to Black artists, especially Black female artists. For many Black hip hop fans Miley had

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[1] Twerking is often displayed in hip hop dance routines and is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a "sexually suggestive dancing characterized by rapid, repeated hip thrusts and shaking of the buttocks especially while squatting." However, the dance style is not solely intended to be sexually suggestive and is rooted in various forms of African dance. Within recent years, it was thrust into the mainstream by Miley Cyrus and other white pop stars who "discovered" the dance, but it has been a part of Black dance styles in all regions (albeit under different names) for generations.

only proven that her interest in hip hop culture and its originators (Black people) was fleeting and profitable and she displayed a one-dimensional understanding of what hip hop had to offer.

Pop culture incidents like Miley's and the interpretations of them like Solange's and Jesse's motivated me to conduct this study. I center the concept of cultural appropriation, namely the use of aspects of minority cultures by the white dominant culture, to advance intellectual conversations about commodification, power, essentialism and stereotypes, and white domination and hegemony. In order to highlight how problematic racial images are apparent yet ignored, I investigate the concept of cultural appropriation as demonstrated in pop culture music videos and demonstrate how appropriation helps to maintain the racial hierarchy which empowers whites over people of color.

Many, mostly white, American's self-proclaim to be colorblind and often claim to enjoy and encourage the exchange of cultural artifacts and customs (Bonilla Silva 2010). Scholars find that the popularity of Black American hip-hop music and dress among young suburban white youth (as evidenced by music and concert sales) is often interpreted by consumers as evidence that diversity is on the rise, race is not significant, and that whites' negative racial attitudes have tempered (e.g. Miley Cyrus adopting hip hop influences in her music garnered her great success and the support of white and Black audiences) (Ghandnoosh 2010; Rodriguez 2014). Moreover, there is evidence within social science literature which suggests minorities, who are traditionally underrepresented in televised media, are now overrepresented in certain genres, such as situational comedies (Guild 2000; Nama 2003; Conners 2004; Kidd 2014). Some audience members view these changes in media representation of people of color as a positive and desirable shift in the racial atmosphere—as evidence of America's racial progress (SAG 2000; Kidd 2014). This optimistic perspective aligns with America's colorblind racial ideology (which

peaked after the election of Barack Obama), whose adherents see racial discrimination as fleeting and insignificant (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Still, one of the curious characteristics about a presumed colorblind society is that while media producers portray the media as racially diverse in the public, sociologists find there are still grave racial misrepresentations and injustices in society (Feagin 1991; Massey and Denton 1999; Bobo 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2010; Alexander 2012). As stated by Ashley Doane (2014), "diverse casts and commercials, successful athletes and entertainers can all coexist along with racial disparities in income, wealth, poverty, education and incarceration (19)." This paradox leads to the question of what happens when culture and media intersect and how this intersection is framed and interpreted by audiences.

Media scholars, linguists, rhetorical theorists, cultural theorists, and philosophers have provided a breadth of theories and definitions of cultural appropriation. While it is not foreign to the field, sociologists of race have underutilized the concept when it comes to its utility for analyzing contemporary racial ideology. In an era when the dominant racial ideology implies that racial lines have blurred and that all racial groups have equal footing, respect, and access, it is curious that race scholars have not thoroughly investigated the complexities of racial and ethnic groups using each other's symbols, artifacts, rituals, etc.—namely the impact of the white majority utilizing nonwhite culture. While on the surface, appropriation deals with cultural expressions such as hairstyles, food, language, and dance, it also provides a space to deeply investigate power and racial ideology.

In this study, I use content analysis of music videos and focus group data collected from 61 participants, with a special focus on the interpretations of people of color, to investigate how nonwhite cultures are represented and how audiences of color interpret the portrayal of their own

culture within pop culture. I provide evidence that nuances the concept of cultural appropriation, gives credence to using pop culture as a site for racial research, and highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalized groups in order to unpack concepts of power, exploitation, and domination. Most generally, this study asks: *how do audiences interpret and discuss cultural representations within popular culture media?* More specifically it asks: *how do audiences of color come to understand and discuss the cultural appropriation of their own culture and other nonwhite cultures within popular culture?*

CHAPTER I: UNDERSTANDING RACE, POP CULTURE, AND APPROPRIAITON

The idea of race rests on the socially constructed assumption that human beings belong to distinct and exclusive groups based on their phenotypes and cultural attributes. Scholarly attempts to understand how race impacts society have spanned generations, from the work of W.E.B. DuBois focusing on the hardships of the early 20th century Negro, to the emergence of 1920s urban metropolises closely studied by the Chicago School, to current neighborhood and residential trends studied by notable researchers such as William Julius Wilson (1978, 1996, 2009), Douglass Massey (1993), and Nancy Denton (1993). Sociological explanations of race and racial disparities range from biological arguments to claims that race is less significant in life outcomes than class or gender.

Following the eradication of Jim Crow laws and a retreat from scientific racism in public discourse, sociological race researchers began to analyze racial disparities by prioritizing cultural explanations, such as the "culture of poverty." This theory (most closely associated with the work of Oscar Lewis and widely adopted by urban researchers thereafter) and others insisted that rather than biological differences, certain economic classes and races have cultural values that differ greatly from the white mainstream and ultimately result in their own social disadvantage (Lewis 1963, 1966). For example, some race researchers claimed that inner city Black Americans ascribe to cultures that place little value on education and create a propensity for criminal behavior and sexual promiscuity (Anderson 2000). Sentiments such as these became a trend within sociology and other social sciences and are evident in popular and highly controversial work such as the Moynihan Report (1969).

The cultural arguments made in the Moynihan Report[2] were widely accepted and had major influences on public policies and government assistance programs that directly impacted marginalized families and individuals in negative ways. After a substantial amount of time, the work of William Julius Wilson and others ushered in a new trend of race research which emphasized the need for scholars to analyze macro-level structures rather than making claims about minority cultures. Research overwhelmingly began to focus on economic disadvantages, housing patterns, deindustrialization, and other structural factors. During this time, race scholars opted to steer clear of culture as an explanation for racialized differences for fear of ignoring the role of structure and placing fault on the underprivileged (Prager 1987).

However, more contemporary work is now beginning to emphasize the importance of bringing culture back into the race research in ways that do not essentialize racial groups or blame them for their marginalization. For instance, Winant (2000) claims that effective sociological race theory must include "at minimum, comparative historical and political components, some sort of sociology of culture, and an adequate microscociological account" (170). Winant is in essence promoting a form of race research that incorporates both structure and culture in its analysis. Similarly, Amanda Lewis (2004) emphasizes the need for race researchers to understand how "racial discourse or 'culture' intersect with material realities" in complex ways (640). Like Winant, Lewis maintains that structure and culture both play vital roles in contemporary race research. Race research is now beginning to reemphasize how the dominant culture favoring whiteness is a reflection of structural racism. In this study, I contribute

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[2] The Moynihan Report, officially titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, was written by sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965 under Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. His research argued that single-mother headed Black families were due to ghetto culture and pathology. The work was highly criticized by scholars and activists for being culturally bias, absolving the government of its responsibility for the effects of poverty, and blaming victims for their own economic circumstances.

to this brand of race research by joining the critical race framework with colorblind theory and theories of appropriation to investigate ideas of power and privilege within popular culture, music specifically.

Framing the Study: Critical Race Theory and Colorblind Ideology

Critical Race Theory (CRT), born out of legal studies and borrowing from fields such as history, political science, philosophy, and sociology, is a framework designed to uncover the ways in which white supremacy is embedded within various structures of society. The framework was created by mostly Black scholars in response to the failure of critical law studies to analyze how imbalances of power in legal policies and law professions are racialized (Delgado 1984). However, the contribution of CRT has extended far beyond studies of law and informs research on intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1996), education (Harris 2004), commodification (Collins 2006), popular culture (Tate 2003), social movements (Watkins Liu 2017), and more. In essence, "CRT tenets come specifically out of racialized experiences of Black Americans and legal analyses, but scholars have elaborated on the tenets and assumptions to expand them to other social categories and disciplines" (Watkins Liu 2017:3). Most generally critical race theory critiques ideologies that deemphasize the effects of race. CRT argues that the best way to avoid the myth of colorblindness is to construct counternarratives and stories which center the experiences of the marginalized (Watkins Liu 2017).

CRT places race at the center of analyses by defining racism as an intrinsic and normal part of the organization of the U.S. (Crenshaw et al. 1995, Meyers 2005). Because it is built into systems, CRT argues that white supremacy does not need to rely on individual racists or overtly racist policies to maintain the racial hierarchy, instead social systems and the dominant culture operate in ways that normalize white privilege and justify nonwhite subjugation. White elites in

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power create a dominant culture and social systems which rearrange themselves when necessary in order to protect the privileges and interests of those in power (namely wealthy, white men) such that the interests of marginalized people will only ever be met if and when they converge with white interests (Crenshaw et al. 1995, Carbado and Roithmayr 2014). For example, a key study in CRT concluded through historical analysis that the 1965 judgement in *Brown v. Board of Education* which ended segregation in schools was not motivated by the intent to right racist wrongs, but was done in hopes of protecting the interests of the U.S. government who wanted to be viewed favorably by potential global allies during the Cold War (Dudziak 1993).

Early CRT scholars used the slow implementation of legislation following the 1960s Civil Rights Movement to demonstrate how racial disparities can persist even in the absence of explicitly racist laws (Freeman 1988, Delgado 1984). Sociological studies on race have also demonstrated how racial disparities persist in the post-Civil Rights era in regard to social phenomena such as residential segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), labor market discrimination (Roediger 1991), and discrimination in public spaces (Feagin 1995, 2006). These studies highlight that although there are no longer laws that restrict minorities from living, working, and spending time in public spaces, racial disparities persist due to implicit racial beliefs and practices that benefit whites. Findings from these studies and many more offer support for CRT's claim that racial inequality is not a malfunction of, but rather an inherent part of American society, and because it is inherent, racism continues relatively unnoticed and therefore goes unchallenged (namely by whites because it works to their benefit) (Crenshaw et al. 1995, Meyers 2005).

Despite having obvious overlap in areas of focus, there is surprisingly a chasm between the work of critical race theorists and sociological race scholars (Carbado and Roithmayr 2014).

Some social scientists have relegated CRT to only being effective in analyzing law and formal policies—a perspective that is continuingly being refuted with the production of new race scholarship. Meanwhile, some critical race theorists fear that incorporating social scientific research methods weakens CRT critiques of objectivity and neutrality (Carbado and Roithmayr 2014). Specifically, the CRT approach of starting at the bottom of social hierarchies and looking upwards toward structure, does not always mess well with the scientific tenets of objective social science. CRT also critiques the common lack of reflexivity of social scientists and argues that the race, gender, sex, and class of researchers impacts how research is collected. Still, the work of scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and Devon Carbado illustrates that there are great gains to be made when CRT and social sciences, namely sociology, inform one another's scholarship. According to Carbado and Rotihmayr (2014),

> critical race theorists should engage more deeply with social science. Social science research has much to offer critical race theorists, including empirical data and theoretical frameworks that support core CRT ideas… understood in this way, both CRT and the social sciences can be affected by cross-disciplinary exchanges (Carbado and Roithmayr 2014:150)

Sociological studies have done great work to exhibit how ideas of race are embedded within structure and work to maintain white interests and power. However, sociological race research must not forget the tenet of CRT that contends that studies of power dynamics and structure should include counter-stories and narratives of people of color in order to underline ways to resist racist systems. While there are many sociological studies which highlight counternarratives, CRT argues that more are always needed in order to continue to diminish the ever-evolving racist structure (Liu 2017, Carbado and Rothmayr 2014). Put another way, "CRT

confronts 'race-neutrality' in policy and practice *and* acknowledges the value of 'the black voice' that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy and practice" (Hylton 2010:337). In order to achieve this goal, CRT discourages reliance on white perspectives and emphasizes the need for Black and other nonwhite voices to be centered in racial analysis in order to better investigate the ways the dominant culture maintains the racial hierarchy. In this study I am concerned with the ways colorblind ideology takes the form of cultural appropriation in media, namely pop music, and in keeping with the tenets of critical race theory, I center the voices and experiences of people of color to illustrate how culturally appropriative images are reflective of hegemonic racial structure that favors whites and does harm to nonwhite group identities.

Colorblind Ideology

Much of the contemporary work on popular culture acknowledges that American race relations have generally moved away from the blatantly racist portrayals of the past, but fewer studies on pop culture place a significant emphasis on the emergence of colorblind ideology. Colorblind theory—a theory which aligns with CRT because it opposes the minimization of the effects of racism— argues that the current dominant racial ideology is one where people, namely white Americans, hold tight to the misconception that racism is no longer a significant factor in social inequality or racial disparities. Those who ascribe to colorblind ideology claim that they "don't see race" and treat and think of all people as individuals. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) describes this myth as a new form of racism, colorblind racism, that "explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (2). He goes on to say that instead of overt discrimination, colorblind racism operates through "practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial" (Bonilla-Silva 2010:3) and that "despite its suave, apparently nonracial character, the new racial ideology is still about justifying the various social arrangements and

practices that maintain white privilege" (Bonilla-Silva 2010:211). In this regard, colorblind racism theory pairs well with CRT because it shows how white people work to safeguard the racial hierarchy and maintain power albeit in a seemingly nonracial way. Unlike CRT, colorblind theory looks at race on the micro-level by investigating how race is restructured in day-to-day interactions.

Through the analysis of in-depth interviews, Bonilla-Silva (2010) conceptualizes colorblind ideology as operating through four central frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. These frames appear to be racially neutral on the surface, yet they still end up justifying racial inequality. The third frame, cultural racism, replaces old time biological racism by citing behavioral or cultural rather than biological differences between whites and minorities. Instead of arguing that Black or Latino people are genetically inferior, those who use cultural racism argue that minorities subscribe to cultures that are deficient in comparison to whiteness. In other words, whites see minorities' social position as the result of them upholding poor beliefs, ideas, and practices—much like the conclusions in the Moynihan Report of 1965. The belief in deficient culture allows whites to generalize about minorities without actually invoking racist language (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The fourth frame of colorblind racism, minimization of racism, is used to argue that racism is relatively a thing of the past and no longer has significant influence on minorities' life chances and outcomes (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The use of cultural racism and minimization of racism as rhetorical tools to preserve racist ideas without using racist language is a concrete example of the tenet of critical race theory which proclaims that racist systems and practices restructure themselves in order to protect white interests.

Cultural racism and minimization of racism are especially interesting when approached

with a CRT lens and placed in conjunction with pop culture critiques. Forms of pop culture are often circumscribed to specific racial or cultural groups in ways that parallel the cultural racism frame of colorblindness. For example, because it emerged from the Black American experience, hip hop is associated with Black communities (Rose 1994, Roy 2002). As a result, certain aspects of hip hop culture (materialism, criminality, violence) are often overemphasized and mistakenly seen as being signifiers of *all* Black American culture. This leads to hip hop culture being used to essentialize Black people as materialistic, criminal, and violent (Richardson & Goff 2012, Appelrouth and Kelly 2013). While hip hop did emerge as a Black cultural artform, it is not the main or only signifier of Blackness, as it is often portrayed in the media (Hall 1993, Rodriguez 2006). However, criticizing the "deficient" culture of hip hop becomes a way to discuss the defective culture of Black Americans and evoke racist ideas without using obvious racist language (Ghandnoosh 2010).

While the cultural racism frame uncovers how cultural signifiers are used to maintain racist views, the minimization frame can show how people point to diversity in pop culture is sometimes used to argue that racism is a thing of the past. For example, increased in racial diversity in music, film, television, and sport are used to inaccurately argue that racial tolerance has improved and discrimination is no longer prevalent (Bryson 1996). The assertion that visible diversity in popular culture is equivalent to racial equality is yet another way to minimize the continued effects of racism (Hughey 2009, Ghandnoosh 2010, Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017). Critical race and colorblind theories provide ways for researchers to identify when ideas of diversity are being used in an attempt to be colorblind and deemphasize racial inequality in popular culture. I bridge theories of cultural appropriation with critical race theory and colorblind theory by analyzing nonwhite responses to music videos in order to demonstrate how the act of

cultural appropriation contributes to white domination and to feelings of marginalization among nonwhite groups, despite media appearing racially inclusive and diverse. A critical race approach illustrates how American popular culture's history is centered on racial inequality despite cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions.

Popular Culture and Race

According to Dirks and Mueller (2007) popular culture has been "used hegemonically, as an effective pedagogical tool of dominant classes in Western culture, supporting the lessons that keep structural inequalities safely in place" (116). An application of critical race theory to popular culture suggests that pop culture is a social institution which helps to maintain benefits for whites by teaching members of society what race is, how it works, and what racial characteristics are association each racial group (Picca and Feagin 2007). The components that make up popular culture (mass produced music, TV, film, sport, fashion, social media, print media, etc.) simultaneously reflect and influence the racial ideology of the corresponding time.

As it stands, one cannot study the history of American popular culture without dealing with the concept of race. The very first film with synchronized sound, *The Jazz Singer* (1927) starring Al Jolson, included a grand finale with the actor performing a song entitled "Mammy" while dressed in Blackface (Rogin 1996). Furthermore, *Birth of Nation* (1915)*,* known for its animalistic portrayal of Black men and heroic framing of the Ku Klux Klan is credited for ushering in the new age of American filmography (Rogin 1996). These films and other forms of culture not only mark technological and industrial advances in American popular culture, but also are evidence of just how much pop culture and race are entangled—particularly in regard to Black-white race relations. Racial epithets ran rampant throughout the history of popular culture beginning with 19th century depictions of both slaves and newly freed Blacks in the South, pre

and post-Civil War. These films were extremely popular among both whites and Black Americans during the period, despite their inaccurate portrayals of Black life.

The first minstrel troupes, formed during the mid-1800s, featured white actors who performed skits, sang, danced, and enacted stereotypical and exaggerated Black behavior all while dressed in blackface. These shows became wildly popular and are considered the first true form of American popular culture (Rogin 1996, Lhamon 1998, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Roy and Dowd 2010). Following the Civil War, minstrel troupes started featuring Black entertainers, however the portrayals of Black life remained stereotypical and exaggerated. No matter the race of the actors, minstrel and vaudeville shows depicted the late 19th and early 20th century Negro as lazy, jovial, singing, dancing, naïve, and unsophisticated; all of which were characteristics that whites believed to be an authentic representation of Blacks' everyday life—even more so when the actors were actually Black (Watkins 1994, Dirks and Mueller 2007). Minstrel shows portrayed Black slaves and newly freedmen as being both content and worry-free under plantation life—which served white interests by helping absolve them from any feelings of guilt or sense of social responsibility to help improve Blacks' social conditions (Watkins 1994). Not only were these images portrayed on stage, they were commodified and sold as dolls, cookware, and other pop culture memorabilia (Dirks and Mueller 2007).

This early form of popular culture served to both promote and reify the misunderstandings that whites held in regard to the lived Black experience. The portrayals of Blacks through minstrelsy proved to both reflect and strengthen justifications for slavery and Jim Crow (Dirks and Mueller 2007, Roy and Dowd 2010), making it apparent that popular culture has consequences that extend beyond leisure or entertainment. Vaudeville soon replaced minstrel shows and both forms eventually died out, but the ideologies motivating them persisted (Dirks

and Mueller 2007). The popular culture of the late 19th and early 20th century succeeded in creating a public conversation (be it direct or indirect) regarding race. This conversation is one mostly guided by images that reflect and uphold the racial misconceptions that white Americans held.

Latino representation in popular culture also has real-world racial implications. Mary Romero and Michelle Habell-Pallán (2002) highlight how current popular culture helps shape the emerging meanings of Latina and Latino identities. They write, "popular cultural expressions range from blatant appropriation of cultural stereotypes for mass marketing like Chiquita Banana and the Frito Bandito to powerful oppositional forces" (2). They argue that in a colorblind society, media and popular culture become contested sites of meaning-making for Latino culture, particularly since Latinos have become the largest minority group in the United States. In an overview of English-language children's programs with Latino/a characters, Erynn Masi de Casanova (2013) concludes that some of the most popular children's shows fail to depict the range of diversity in the U.S. Latino population and include traditional Latino/a stereotypes. Media representations influence meaning-making and are important to members of heterogeneous Latino communities and white audiences for understanding, maintaining, or challenging the overall racial hierarchy.

Like studies of film and television, the sociology of music emphasizes how racialization also occurs within the American music industry and traces how race has been a central element of commercial popular music since its origin (Roy and Dowd 2010). Minstrel shows elevated not only white acting careers but also catapulted white American performers into popular musical artists and "the first genre of American commercial popular music arguably was the minstrel, which was based on white men's appropriation of black culture" (Roy and Dowd 2010:195).

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Music from blackface shows was reproduced via sheet music and often sold along with visuals of Sambo[3] and other racist images of whites mimicking or misappropriating Black or Native American culture. Fast forward to the emergence of the recording industry in the 1920s, record companies marketed their music along racial lines. "Race music" indicated music by Black artists and dictated which artists got radio play and which did not. Musical concerts were still constrained by the limitations of Jim Crow and overwhelmingly white artists gained mainstream success by singing songs written and performed by nonwhite artists who were denied access to studios, radio stations, and music halls (Kapano 2014). As time progressed and music companies realized how profitable it was to promote audiences across racial lines, they then tried to initially hide the race of artists and focused on acts who would appeal to all racial audiences (e.g. Nat King Cole) (Roy 2002, Roy and Dowd 2010). This switch was a capitalistic strategy and was not based on sincere attempts to end racial discrimination in the industry, but to profit from more than one racial market—in other words, it was a way to protect white interests. Ironically, due to advances in technology, the adoption of colorblind ideology, and the rise of international pop stars, this racialized history of music is often forgotten and music is frequently viewed as a racial equalizer by artists and audiences alike (Rodriguez 2006, Ghandnoosh 2010, Eberhardt and Freeman 2015).

The disappearance of traditional Blackface paired with the misbelief that America is a now a colorblind society, leads many to believe that racial images in pop culture are now inclusive, unbiased, and authentic despite being commercially manufactured (Watts and Orbe 2002, Hughey 2009). Yet studies show that racial images in popular culture are in many ways

[3] Sambo originated in the 1700's as term to identify a mixed race person who appeared more Black than White. It gained popularity after appearing in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the name of a Black overseer during slavery. It grew to become a derogatory term that embodied degrading stereotypes of Black Americans and is usually denoted by the image of a black-toned or dark-skinned child or man with oversized, bright red lips, eating watermelons, singing dancing, etc.

still rooted in stereotypes and misconceptions, and the spirit and effects of blackface exist, albeit under the guise of colorblind inclusivity. Park, Gabbadon, and Chernin (2006) find via textual and content analysis that the Black, white, and Asian participants in their study of the blockbuster film *Rush Hour 2* "…perceived and accepted many of its racial portrayals as real" (156). The authors concluded that the Black and Asian main characters in the film (played by comedian Chris Tucker and actor Jackie Chan) fulfilled very stereotypical roles—the Black male as loud, silly, singing, dancing and the Asian male as quiet, disciplined, passive and overly polite. They determined that overall the film served to "naturalize racial differences rather than to challenge racial differences" (Park et al. 2006:157). Although a film starring a crime fighting duo made of an African American man from Los Angeles and Chinese man from Hong Kong appears to be incredibly diverse and colorblind on the surface, the authors determine, "the [stereotypical] racial imagery in the film did not challenge prevailing notions of race and did not provoke feelings of discomfort or anxiety in White viewers" (Park et al. 2006:169). As would be suggested by the cultural and minimization of racism frames of colorblind ideology, the multicultural appearance of the film caused whites' to deny that the stereotypical portrayals of Black and Asian characters were racial and instead these images were believed to be representative of most Black and Asian cultures. Therefore the film confirmed stereotypes and allowed them to go unchallenged.

Content analysis, interviews, and focus groups indicate that audiences, white audiences especially, conflate stereotypical images with real world race relations (Shively 1992, Park et al. 2006). Hughey (2004) suggests that these outcomes are due to the "(a) numerical increases in nonwhite representations, (b) interracial cooperation, (c) the superficial empowerment of historically marginalized subjects, and (d) movies themselves as a cultural phenomenon, which

audiences want to believe reflects progressive race relations within the larger society" (551). I highlight the ways that cultural appropriation in music videos display nonwhite representation and cross-cultural interactions but also perpetuate stereotypes and provide a false sense of racial progress that aids in maintaining white domination.

Colorblindness, popular culture, and hegemony

Contemporary work demonstrates how popular culture advances the myth of colorblindness. Dirks and Mueller (2007) write,

> The problem with the stranglehold popular culture has over dictating the way that the populace "knows" people of color is that for people who have very little real, interpersonal experience with individuals from these groups, they can believe in an essentialist vision composed of every stereotype and myth promoted. (127)

Since colorblindness is not accompanied by actual meaningful racial interaction and/or understanding, when it is embedded in a hegemonic institution such as media and popular culture, it results in unsophisticated racial interpretations (Dirks and Mueller 2007). Dirks and Mueller go on to say that researchers should adopt a view "that marks popular culture as pedagogical and, against the backdrop of this assumption, consider what the racial lessons are that we learn from popular culture" (Dirks and Mueller 2007:115).

When thought of as a hegemonic tool, popular culture can be said to teach us what to expect of race relations. Therefore, oversimplified, limited, and stereotypical portrayals of race are problematic because they normalize racial disparities (Hughey 2004, Dirks and Mueller 2007). Although the images in pop culture are "imaginary" to some extent, according to Bonilla-Silva, (2010) "because these story lines are *social* products, the media plays an important role in reinforcing them" (99). If the story line presented in pop culture is colorblind and insists that race or racial boundaries no longer matter, the message that is sent is one that allows for racial

disparities to be ignored and racial stereotypes to be essentialized. More than that, the literature

indicates that whites are especially susceptible to these misconceptions because of their limited

interactions with minorities (Dirks and Mueller 2007, Crockett 2008, Krestsedemas 2010).

Studies of white appropriators conclude that "colorblind ideology provides whites with the

discursive resources to justify their presence in the scene, and more important, to

appropriate…by removing the racially coded meanings embedded in the music and replacing

them with colorblind ones" (Rodriguez 2006). In sum, popular culture messages are formulated

and are interpreted in conjunction with a racial ideology that benefits whites. Therefore,

whatever racialized imagery pop culture presents as normal, acceptable, or essential will have an

influence on society's general racial beliefs.

Opportunities for Resistance

Although hegemonic forces promote racial misconceptions, they simultaneously present

the opportunity for resistance (Gramsci 1932, Dirks and Mueller, Hylton 2010). Dirks and

Mueller (2007) emphasize this argument when they suggest, "contemporary media culture

certainly provides a form for the reproduction of power relations based in racism (and classism

and sexism), yet its very fluidity and contestation provide some space and resource for struggle

and resistance (116)." Critical race theory also positions the importance of presenting

counternarratives in order to chip away at hegemonic structures as one of its major tenets.

Historically, resistance has always accompanied pop culture. For example, minstrel and

vaudeville shows had themes of resistance despite their overall racist imagery. Many shows

(mostly those performed by Black actors in front of Black audiences) mocked whites' ignorance

of Black experiences (Rogin 1996, Lhaman 1998, Dirks and Mueller 2007). Black actors and

audiences were able to poke at the white hegemonic structure through these acts, even if only

momentarily. Furthermore, as more Black entertainers were added to troupes with the hopes of increasing "authenticity," they essentially made headway for more roles for people of color in the future (Rogin 1996). Similarly, the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s included music from artists such as James Brown, Nina Simone, Gil Scott Heron, Joan Baez, Marvin Gaye, Public Enemy, and others who resisted white beauty standards, challenged the white power structure, and promoted racial and labor movements. During this period, not only did nonwhite popular culture outright challenge the racial discourse, it also aided in creating a sense of unity and an identity for racial groups which in turn helped people of color combat real life racial hardships (Watkins 1994, hooks 1996).

Recent examples of pop culture resistance include: activist and NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick leading a movement to bring attention to police brutality of Black Americans by kneeling during the national anthem at professional games; social media hashtags such as #OscarsSoWhite highlighting unequal racial representation in Hollywood; syndicated sitcoms such as ABC's *Blackish* and *Fresh Off the Boat* or Netflix's *One Day at a Time* which openly address issues of race and culture for Black, Asian-American, and Latino families; or music videos such as Donald Glover a.k.a. Childish Gambino's *This is America* which makes a statement on gun violence, racial domestic terrorism, police brutality, and the appropriation of Black culture. Each of these occurrences illustrate the utility of pop culture for investigating the reproduction and the resistance of racism and white hegemony even in an era which presents cross-racial or cultural interaction as nonproblematic.

Conceptualizing Appropriation

If the ideology of society is that race is a nonissue, then it follows that cross-racial or cultural interactions would be permissible and even encouraged. However, when people cross racial or

cultural boundaries power dynamics are introduced as well as the potential for cultural appropriation. Appropriation occurs when cultures come into contact with one another and overlap either physically or symbolically and an outsider of a group takes or uses the music, film, medicine, scientific knowledge, art, food, dance, dress, theology, folklore, etc. produced by the insiders of a group (Ziff and Rao 1997, Rogers 2006, Young 2010). Theories range from framing appropriation as unavoidable contact that is necessary for the development of society (Rogers 2006), to framing appropriation as being rooted in power, oppression, and exploitation (hooks 1992, Ziff and Rao 1997). Interpretations vary depending on people's understandings of the power dynamic and cultural appropriations have been "celebrated as signs of increasing tolerance or, alternatively, decried as sites of exploitative cultural appropriation or essentialism. These conclusions rest on conflicting accounts of whether and how participants interpret cultural practices in racialized terms" (Ghandnoosh 2010:1582).

As a race scholar, I approach cultural appropriation as being characteristic of white racial domination, with the understanding that cultural expressions often times parallel racial and ethnic lines (Roy 2002) and expressions are regularly interpreted based on the existing racial hierarchy such that cultural symbols associated with white people are seen as the most desirable (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015). Those expressions and behaviors that are associated with groups who rank low on the racial hierarchy—with Black ranking the lowest—are often seen as the least desirable (Picca and Feagin 2007, Appelrouth and Kelly 2013). Expressions associated with people of color are used to justify their marginalized social positions (Rodriguez 2006). However, the paradox of appropriation is that these same expressions are pillaged and exploited by the white-dominated media for the benefit of white industries or persons (Ziff and Rao 1997). Below I present the various definitions and theories of appropriation that undergird this study

and are the most useful for illustrating the relationship between appropriation, racial ideology, racism, and pop culture, namely music. I also present arguments which attempt to disregard claims of appropriation as forms of essentialism or reverse racism and I illustrate how my study which amplifies the voices of the appropriated helps to discredit these critiques.

The concept of appropriation is, if nothing else, ambiguous and chaotic. At the center of the concept is the idea of culture which can encompass values, morals, tangible or intangible products, artifacts and more. Because culture is multidimensional, there are many ways that appropriative acts can occur in multiple realms at the same time, which makes appropriation pervasive and hard to spot. The scope of what is included in culture can be overwhelming and it can make tracing the origins of more abstract elements such as values or morals extremely hard. In this case, it is more helpful to think in terms of modes of appropriation which can have more or less harmful effects on groups.

Appropriation can be happening at any time, in any place, however certain modes of appropriation have concrete effects on communities (Ziff and Rao 1997). For example, nonnative people sharing folklore that originated within indigenous communities around a camp fire could be considered an appropriative act by some definitions, but it does not cause much harm to indigenous groups who originated the story. However, the use of indigenous cultural artifacts like headdresses or tomahawks as a logo for professional sports teams can cause harm to indigenous people by reifying stereotypes while at the same time financially benefiting nonnative team owners (Strong 2004). Rather than focusing on every instance where an outsider interacts with another group's culture, researchers of race and culture should concern themselves with modes of appropriation that cause symbolic or concrete harm to appropriated groups, such as the reification of stereotypes, the erasure of history, the economic exploitation of art forms, etc.

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These harmful modes of appropriation involve "the taking—from a culture that is not one's own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge and profiting at the expense of the people of that culture" (Ziff and Rao 1997). I endorse a definition of appropriation as an act of taking from others for the benefit of oneself.

Too often, researchers have determined what modes of appropriation are or are not harmful to various groups without any input from those groups. In this study I provide a space for racial groups whose creations or expressions are habitually appropriated to tell us which modes of appropriation they consider to be harmful. In a synthesis of perspectives on appropriation, Rogers (2006) defines appropriation as "the use of one culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture—regardless of intent, ethics, function, or outcome" and he say does not "limit cultural appropriation to instances where those engaged in appropriation do so 'to further [their] own ends'' or in a way that necessarily serves their own interests" (476). Rogers' refusal to define appropriation as serving the interests of appropriators stands in opposition to my approach. However, he comprehensively identifies four common categories of appropriation: cultural exchange, transculturation, cultural dominance, and cultural exploitation.

Cultural exchange is considered a form of appropriation where a symmetrical and equally beneficial exchange of cultures occurs between groups of equal power. Cultural exchange is considered an ideal model of cross-cultural interaction because there are very few instances where power does not impact the interactions between cultures. That power can be industrial, ideological, military, political, or economic (Ziff and Rao 1997). Perhaps one can imagine true cultural exchange occurring among individuals who decide to share cultural information with

one another, however, the sociohistorical and political contexts that placed those two individuals in the same place at the same time still more than likely implies a power imbalance.

A second perspective, transculturation, centers a recurring cycle of multiple appropriations such that it is difficult to determine which is the originating culture. This viewpoint argues that cultures are fused together through processes such as globalization and neocolonialism resulting in cultural hybrids which in turn has more influences on culture (Rogers 2008, Ardalan 2009). In other words, this perspective claims that cultures shift, overlap, and interact so often that it is too challenging, and less imperative, to determine which cultural expressions originated with whom. Therefore within transculturation the central focus is not on understanding how power dynamics impact the interactions of distinct cultures, but on reconceptualizing culture as combination of events or circumstances.

Rogers (2008) believes that transculturation is a more encompassing and optimistic approach to understanding appropriation. I, however, believe that cultural exchange and transculturation theories ignore the power dynamics which force cultures, and specifically *races*, into contact with one another. Much like racial boundaries, cultural boundaries are messy. They appear to be very distinct and recognizable on the surface, yet it is not always easy to tease them apart and determine which groups originated which expressions. However, there are many cultural expressions that have direct ties to specific cultural, racial, and ethnic groups such as Southern Black American cuisine a.k.a. soul food which stems from slavery, sharecropping, and Jim Crow (Poe 1999). Although some cultural trajectories are much less clear, to ignore the direct links between some cultural creations and racial groups only serves to disempower those groups from solidifying their collective identities and protecting their traditions from being distorted by the dominant culture which benefits whites.

I believe that appropriation is best approached through either a lens of racial/cultural dominance or exploitation. Cultural dominance refers to the imposition of a dominant, "sending" culture onto a less dominant, "receiving" culture. Cultural dominance occurs when cultural elements are sent unilaterally from the dominant to the less dominant culture and "implies a relative lack of choice about whether or not to appropriate on the part of the ''receiving'' culture because of the ''sending'' culture's greater political, cultural, economic, and/or military power" (Rogers 2006:487). Jared Ball (2011) argues that nonwhite populations in America have a colonized relationship with the dominant culture in America, which serves to "marginalize black and other nonwhites and reaffirm white supremacy" (Kopano 2014). As a result, nonwhite groups must learn to navigate the impositions of white American society. Nevertheless, members of receiving cultures or races may respond to dominance by choosing to: 1) assimilate and fully accept the dominant culture while displacing their native culture, 2) integrate and take on only some of the dominant culture while protecting aspects of the native culture, 3) outwardly resist the dominant culture, or 4) mimic the dominant culture by performing what looks like assimilation but without internalizing dominant values or beliefs (Rogers 2006). Pop culture is a site where dominance and the various responses to it can be analyzed, particularly in terms of race.

Cultural dominance is apparent within the social institution of media, specifically in regards to media imperialism. Media imperialism is described as a process where the structure, ownership, distribution, and content of the media of a dominant country can exert influences or pressures over a less dominant country without experiencing reciprocal influence (Boyd-Barrett 1977). For example, the United States distributes media images to many Asian or African countries via syndicated television or global news conglomerates yet there are far less examples

of Asian or African content being distributed in the U.S. With U.S.-based media distribution comes white American customs, values, beauty standards and more. While this does not mean that Asian or African cultures are wiped out by the presence of U.S.-media, it does highlight the ability of the U.S. to both export and simultaneously block the import of culture due to its political and economic power.

The perspective of cultural exploitation illustrates how dominant cultures take the expressions of less dominant cultures and use them to serve their own interests. With this form of appropriation, marginalized groups have their culture extracted or stolen and commodified to the benefit of the dominant group (Rogers 2008). As explained above, and forthcoming in Chapter III discussing capitalism, the racial and ethnic representation in media and popular culture (music, sports, television, etc.) are sites where cultural exploitation is exhibited. American racialized media is riddled with examples of cultural exploitation, be it the use of indigenous group symbols in sport team names and logos, the mainstreaming of hip hop culture, the "discovery" of ancient methods of Eastern medicine, or the use of global cultures as the backdrops of music videos. These nonwhite cultural expressions or products have been extracted, repurposed, or distorted usually to the benefit of white capitalists who have found ways to commodify the culture of racial groups (both American and global) and sell cultural expressions, products, or creations while making themselves the primary benefactors (Collins 2006).

Researching Appropriation and Colorblindness

Traditional theories of appropriation discuss power dynamics and how they impact cultures, but still miss the opportunity to explicitly discuss race. Because the power structure in the United States, the nation with the most political and military power in the world, is racialized and serves the interests of whites above all, it becomes necessary to detail how cultural

appropriation reflects the power dynamics between racial groups based on their associated cultural expressions. This is an especially interesting task during a time where cultural racism and minimizations of racism are pervasive. Some sociological studies have attempted to highlight the connection between colorblindness and appropriation by studying the experiences of whites engaging in cultural artforms where race is salient.

In a society focused on commodification and consumption, whites can satisfy desires to interact with Others through consumption—similar to those whites that bought minstrelsy memorabilia in the 19th century. In her overview of Blacks' presence in contemporary TV sitcoms, Jennifer Fuller (2010) notes that for black shows to be successful they must also appeal to whites. The crossover success of black casts with white audiences speaks to whites' attraction to nonwhite culture. However, social researchers argue this attraction is often based in white supremacy and white privilege rather than progressive racial attitudes (Mills 1997, hooks 2006, Rodriguez 2006, Ghandnoosh 2010). Charles Mills (1997) claims that rather than progressive attitudes, white involvement in nonwhite culture is often rooted in a sense of white "discovery" and "exploration" which takes the nonwhite culture out of its historical and political context and labels it as important and interesting only after it is validated by whites (45).

Esteemed public intellectual bell hooks presented a theory on the consumption and commodification of nonwhite culture by white audiences, referred to as "eating the Other" (a concept she borrowed from Brazilian literary and cultural studies). hooks (2006) argues that nonwhite ethnicity is used as "spice" to "liven up" the dullness of the white mainstream (hooks 2006:365). The dullness is a result of whiteness being normalized and seen as the default for all societal standards. Nonwhite culture, in contrast, is perceived as different, exotic, and interesting. Nonwhite respondents in my study also thought of white as dull or boring and saw it as a reason

why nonwhite cultures would be appealing. For example, a Black respondent, Tasha commented while watching a video, "white culture must be that bored," to which Vanessa responded, "must be that [they] have to steal everybody else's." Tasha and Vanessa's quick exchange indicates that they have a sense that whiteness is not as interesting or exciting as nonwhite culture which causes whites to partake in nonwhite expressions.

hooks suggests that the desire to eat the Other enables the commodification and appropriation of nonwhite cultures to satisfy the demand to liven up the dullness. She argues that whites generally perceive these cultural commodities as signs of racial progress rather than exploitation. Drawing on media and popular culture, hooks (2006) argues that the media and its audiences mistakenly perceive eating the Other as anti-racist, progressive, and inclusive simply because there is white-nonwhite contact. In other words, audiences falsely attribute the presence of minorities in pop culture to the end of institutional racism.

This sentiment is reflected in later work by Doug Hartmann (2009) who concludes that many whites view diversity simply as a way of making whites' lives more interesting and exciting. Ashley Doane (2014) adds to hooks' and Hartmann's claims and argues that in the colorblind era, the focus on fulfilling a white sense of interest and excitement, makes it possible to then "consume diversity through a kind of cultural tourism… which further solidifies the feeling of living in a post-racial society" (18). Similarly, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo (2014) uses the term "diversity ideology" to characterize the contemporary concept of diversity which focuses primarily on individuals' intentions to be diverse rather than their actions. Mayorga-Gallo (2014) argues that focusing on intentions provides a false sense of inclusiveness which in essence ignores real structural outcomes. In later work, Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017) further elaborate on diversity ideology, writing that one of its tenets is "diversity as commodity," where

"nonwhites are treated as objects rather than people and are used by whites as objects to serve to benefit, entertain, or color the lives of whites" (897). Mainstream television, music, movies, etc. are predominantly white and serve as sites where white entertainers benefit from breaking away from the white norm by engaging the Other. As a result, elements of cultural tourism and diversity as commodity can be observed within pop culture.

Interaction and engagement with various cultures is crucial to improving cultural competence, however when white curiosity and intrigue of the Other overshadows the context and history of the nonwhite group, it is no more than cultural appropriation. People of color can also appropriate each other's culture, but whites' appropriation introduces conversations of structure and hegemonic power. Given that many people of color are still stigmatized and discriminated against for partaking in their own in-group expressions (hairstyles, religions, foods, styles of dress), whites who choose to engage in those same expressions for leisure or entertainment highlight some of the privileges of whiteness. That is, whites are essentially allowed to investigate the Other at will and without significant consequences—in fact they are encouraged to do so under the guise of colorblindness—while people of color have to question, alter, or hide any in-group expressions that do not align with white hegemony in hopes of avoiding discrimination (Ziff and Rao 1997, Mills 1999; hooks 2006, Eberhardt and Freeman 2015).

Social research has applied hooks' eating the Other in an attempt to expand colorblind theory by focusing on white involvement in nonwhite culture. For example, Rodriguez (2014) conducted an ethnography of white hip-hop concertgoers. His study: 1) investigated whites who are actively eating the Other by partaking in a Black American art form, and 2) investigated how white individuals put colorblindness into practice within a context where race is salient. He

determined that whites openly exhibited their desire to eat the Other, which required them to explicitly acknowledge race. However, they simultaneously employed colorblind tactics by attempting to decentralize race or remove it from the context entirely (Rodriguez 2014). He concluded that "racial power is leveraged for cultural appropriation in the name of color-blindness" (Rodriguez 2006:661). Rodriguez's findings show that ignoring race, and as a result eating the Other, becomes easy to do because the language of colorblindness allows whites to escape talking about race, even when race is significant. His findings exemplify how macro-level racial ideology (in this case, colorblindness) is embedded within micro-level, racial(ized) practices.

Ghandnoosh (2010) also analyzed whites who enjoy hip-hop in her study of white hip-hop dance instructors and students. Ghandnoosh found that in the hip hop dance setting, whites were simultaneously racially aware, racist, and colorblind. She writes,

…dancers with racialized views eschewed colorblind ideology and recognized difference in the lived experiences of blacks and whites; some dancers held essentialist views tying skill to a biological concept of race; and dancers with non-racialized views embraced white instructors who appropriated the cultural form as their own. Cross-racial cultural engagement can therefore connote tolerance, essentialism or appropriation, but determining which of these implications best characterizes a particular case is not as straightforward as has been suggested (1595)

hooks' eating the Other and Rodriguez's (2014) and Ghandnoosh's (2010) white, colorblind hip-hop lovers provide insight into the complexities that undergird white expressions of nonwhite culture. They also lead to two conclusions: 1) racialized content is a fundamental aspect of American popular culture and 2) whites have a history of placing themselves at the center of

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racialized and racist pop culture content. Still, these studies are almost uniformly centered on whites' interpretations, behaviors, and explanations.

Investigations of cultural appropriation have focused on whites' behaviors—what music they listen to (Rodriguez 2014), what clothes and merchandise they buy (Howes 1996), and how they perceive their presence in nonwhite spaces (Ghandnoosh 2010; hooks 2006; Watkins 1994). The perspectives of the racial and ethnic groups whose cultural products are routinely eaten or appropriated continue to be overlooked. The overwhelming focus on white actors leads us to ask: what about the group(s) being appropriated? How is cultural appropriation perceived and discussed by white *and* nonwhite audiences? One of the ways I contribute the existing literature on appropriation is by shifting the focus from white assumptions about which aspects of nonwhite culture should be permissible to them, and instead centering people of color's explanations of the ways white appropriation of their cultures can be harmful. Pairing my findings with existing work on white appropriators will help to provide a comprehensive understanding of the racial implications of cultural appropriation.

Opposing Cultural Appropriation

Critics that oppose claims of cultural appropriation tend to rely on two arguments: 1) that claims of appropriation have no grounds because culture is multidimensional and ever evolving or 2) that appropriation essentializes racial groups by dictating who can partake in which cultures based on race. One of the primary scholars publishing work critiquing research on appropriation writes,

> Each racial group produces its own distinct and easily recognizable cultural forms. In terms of African American culture, jazz, and blues are easily identifiable because they are "Black" art forms. These cultural forms are separate from "Latin" salsa or "White"

classical music because they are marked as "Black…" The appropriation model furthers the misconception that each cultural form is considered pure and autonomous because it originates from a distinct racial background. The argument with this model is that if a cultural form is labeled "Black," one must be African American to participate in that form. Consequently, anyone who is not African American is necessarily not authentic and cannot make anything but inauthentic derivations or parasitic copies. (Hancock 2007:21)

This excerpt contains a few misguided assumptions. The author assumes that the differentiation between cultural expressions stems from the fact that they are racialized. Contrarily, these expressions are different not because the people who engage in them look different from one another (although even groups who look phenotypically alike can have very different cultural expressions, i.e. African Americans and Afro-Latinos), but because the expressions are born out of different (although overlapping) sociohistorical and political events that contributed to their arrangement. For example, the enslavement of Africans from different regions in New Orleans or the migration to and concentration of Cubans in New York City contributed to the formations of jazz and salsa. Historically, race was a primary contributing factor in this process. The racialized labels placed on these expressions are in part a result of white power structures which defined whiteness through the exclusion of others and forced the physical and social segregation of communities along racial lines, resulting in distinct cultural creations (Harris 1993). In other words, many nonwhite cultural expressions came to be because the groups who created them were legally prevented from sharing space or culture with whites.

Hancock and other defenders of appropriation often base their conclusions off of conversations with or observations of appropriators rather than the appropriated, which leads to assumptions that ingroup members of cultures are unequivocally against outsiders. However,

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nonwhite participants in this study are vocal about their hesitation to entirely exclude whites or other outsiders from participating in their cultures. On the contrary, when given space to talk through their thoughts on appropriation, participants are welcoming of outsiders who demonstrate an understanding and respect for their culture. They believe that culture can be shared across group lines, but they assert that outsiders must find a way to partake without causing harm and that outsiders should acknowledge rather than deemphasize the contributions the ingroup has made to the cultural creation.

Hancock (2007) sees appropriation as a contemporary form of essentialism, not much different than ideas of biological racism.

> By trying to account for the differences in structural power between racial groups, appropriation reduces all African Americans and all Whites to one-dimensional groups with uniform attitudes and identities. Structural accounts of appropriation maintain a strategic essentialism whereby racial domination operates through skin color.

The author misguidedly places the fault of essentialism on those who challenge appropriation, when, as mentioned above, appropriators have commonly been the ones to apply essentialist views onto racial groups and the cultures associated with them, as was the case with Ghandnoosh's (2010) white hip hop dancers. Participant commentary in my study illustrates that ingroup members actively worked to dispel essentialist ideas. They were aware that their racial group is thought to be bounded to specific cultural expressions, yet, they repeatedly emphasized that there is variation within groups and that outgroup members are not incapable of having genuine connections to a culture. I find that participants did not blatantly accept stereotypes or essentialist ideas about their group, instead they saw cultural expressions as nuanced and as a way to solidify group identity. They did not see all whites as innately racist, but they saw white

outsiders who attempted to appropriate culture for their own benefit as being reflective of the racist power structure.

Critics who challenge the existence or impact of cultural appropriation have written the concept off as a way to essentialize stereotypes by assuming that calling out appropriation is dog whistle for segregation, or they have written it off as a form of reverse racism in that it aims to exclude whites. A failure to utilize a critical race lens leads critics to continue to prioritize the interests of whites over the experiences of nonwhites. In this study I use the data to provide nuance to the concept of appropriation and attempt to shift the literature from focusing on whites' arguments for why borrowing nonwhite cultures should be permissible, to focusing on how white interactions in nonwhite cultures can cause harm to those communities.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, I aim to investigate cultural images and cultural representation displayed in some of the most popular American music videos. Second, I aim to understand audiences' varying interpretations of cultural images in music videos and, third, to understand how cultural appropriation is identified and defined by different racial groups, especially by those racial groups whose culture is routinely misrepresented in popular culture. In order to answer these inquiries I employed a qualitative research design that includes both in-depth content analysis of popular music videos and focus group interviews. This dual qualitative method allowed me to analyze the content in the music videos, individual and group interpretations, as well as any overlapping themes that emerge in both content analysis and group conversations.

A comprehensive investigation of images helps researchers understand what types of images audiences may be consuming. Content analysis in sociological research is among the most effective methods for analyzing images and sound simultaneously (Neuendorf 2017). Using this method allowed me to systematically examine the imagery in each video while also highlighting overarching themes and patterns. It allowed me to capture minuscule details while not losing sight of the big picture. The content analysis portion of this study answers the question: *What cultural imagery appears in the selected musical videos, how are images presented throughout, and do they fit the definition of cultural appropriation?*

A common critique of content analysis is that while it is an excellent descriptive method, it does not adequately explain how content is interpreted by audiences (Neuendorf 2017). I added focus group interviews to the research design to help overcome these limitations. The content analysis for this study is composed of the five videos shown to the focus groups as well as six

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additional videos that sparked conversations in the public discourse around appropriation. Videos were premiered between 2013 and 2017.

Content Analysis

Selection of stimuli

For this study, I used popular music videos and musical performances to stimulate group discussions about the images shown. The use of stimuli in focus group interviews is a common approach (Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang 2009; Dilshad and Latif 2013). All of the music videos have at some point been the topic of conversation in online news articles and blogs because online media is usually the most proficient at producing commentary about pop culture events as soon as they happen. In order to ensure that the focus group discussions centered on relatively recent pop culture events I only included videos that debuted within three years of the start of data collection. I conducted a Google search with the terms "cultural appropriation musical performances," "music videos cultural appropriation," and "pop culture cultural appropriation." These search terms yielded articles from popular internet news and entertainment sources such as: *The Huffington Post, Buzzfeed, Complex Magazine, Teen Vogue, Jezebel, The Guardian*, and *The Atlantic*. Many of these articles provided a listing of performances that occurred in popular culture which prompted discussions of cultural appropriation in the public sphere. I included a music video or performance if it was listed more than three times in the first ten pages of the Google search, on any search term and aired on a major cable or television network. This method ensured that the selected videos were: 1) fairly popular and easily accessible, 2) related to the topic of cultural appropriation, and 3) the official video or performance was directly produced by artists and their camps. The headlines from these article searches were also used in the focus

groups as discussion prompts. The videos that appeared more than three times in the first ten

pages that were included in the study and shown to the focus groups were:

"Hymn for the Weekend" by Coldplay featuring Beyoncé

"Bounce" by Iggy Azalea

"How to be a Man" by Riff Raff

"Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift

"Unconditionally" by Katy Perry (performed live at the 2013 American Music Awards)

"Gods and Monsters" (Tropico) by Lana del Rey

There were additional videos that appeared more than three times that were selected for content

analysis but were not shown to the focus groups for the sake of time. These videos were used to

check for coder reliability and helped to highlight emerging themes and patterns that also existed

within the set of videos shown to participants:

"Hard Out Here" by Lily Allen

"Come and Get It" by Selena Gomez (performed live at the 2013 MTV Music Awards)

"Dark Horse" by Katy Perry featuring Juicy J

"Hello Kitty" by Avril Lavigne

"I Blame Myself" by Sky Ferreira

After selecting which video performances to include in the analysis, I searched YouTube

and found the version of the video or performance that was posted by the artists' official

YouTube or Vevo page. Vevo is an official video hosting service owned by Universal Music

Group, Google, Sony Music Entertainment, and Abu Dhabi Media (Vevo 2016). The top three

recording companies in the nation have deals with Vevo, resulting in the creation of Vevo

channels for those artists, where their official videos are streamed and promoted by the Vevo

platform on YouTube. For this study Taylor Swift and Iggy Azalea's videos were viewed on

Vevo pages on YouTube. Videos by Coldplay and Riff Raff were viewed via their official artist

pages on YouTube and Katy Perry's live performance from the American Music Awards (aired

by ABC and CTV) was viewed on an individual YouTube user's page who was not affiliated with Perry, her record company, or Vevo. This selection process proved to be efficient as majority of participants reported that they were familiar with the videos, songs, and artists when asked. The total run time of all videos was 23 minutes and 6 seconds with the average length of the videos being 3 minutes and 51 seconds.

I borrowed the operationalization of "cultural images" from a 2008 study on race and advertising and determined that videos in my study would be coded as having cultural images if they included artists engaging in any "symbolic, visual, or rhetorical representation" of traditionally nonwhite culture (Crockett 2008: 248) such as "speech and phonetic conventions, folklore, style, fashion, and music" that are historically tied to nonwhite communities (Crockett 2008). The images in the selected videos included but were not limited to African-American Vernacular English, hip-hop clothing, rap, traditional Japanese styles of dress, and South Asian dance styles and clothing (see Table 1). While these cultural markers are in no way an exhaustive representation of nonwhite cultures, they are historically tied to and are commonly thought to be born out of specific nonwhite communities. Some of the cultural images listed are also used to stereotype these groups. The use of these expressions as indicators of cultures is not meant to reify stereotypes; rather I used the social meanings attached to these symbols (be they accurate or inaccurate representations) to solicit conversations from participants. Table 1 provides a summary of the artists, the videos shown to the focus groups, the culture displayed in the video, the cultural images displayed in them, and how many times the video had been viewed on the YouTube platform at the time of the content analysis:

Table 1. Summary of Music Videos Shown to Focus Groups

Artist	Song Title and Year	Culture Displayed	Cultural Imagery Displayed	Number of Views at time of Content Analysis
Coldplay ft. Beyoncé	Hymn for the Weekend, 2016	Indian/Islam/Hindu/Sikhism	Holi festivities, "floating"/meditating; Hindu prayer practices, symbols of Hindu Gods, Rajasthani dolls, Rajasthani and Sikh turbans, gesture for "namaste," henna, Indian classical dancers, Hindi text	733,313,907
Iggy Azalea	Bounce, 2013	Indian/Hindu	African American Vernacular English, rap, Indian bridal dress and jewelry, Hindu practices, cricket, Hindu crown, Holi festivities, smokes bhang (Indian drug), Indian monuments (e.g. Taj Mahal), Bollywood dance style	90,748,394
Katy Perry	Unconditional (live performance), 2013	Asian/Japanese	Japanese kimono; Japanese cherry blossom tree, bonsai trees, cherry blossom/flower confetti, Japanese umbrellas & fans, Artist wears Geisha style makeup (heavily powdered face, hair in a bun with a flower, red lips), bowing gestures, Eastern Asian instruments (drums and guitars)	819,898
Lana del Rey	God's and Monsters, 2013	Latino/Mexican/Cholo	Cholo/Los Angeles Latino gang dress style, old school cars with hydraulics, tattoos, face paint similar to Día de Los Muertos; Catholic alters, candles, and other symbolism	1,453,850
Riff Raff	How to be the Man, 2014	Black/Hip Hop	African American Vernacular English, rap, cornrow and high top fade hairstyles, gold/diamond grills, gold chains, Egyptian fans and gold food platters, Ankh (ancient Egyptian symbol for life), gold chalice/pimp cup, street graffiti, street basketball	4,994,824
Taylor Swift	Shake It Off, 2014	Black/Hip Hop/Jazz	Dance/Dress styles: Ballet (tutu), lyrical/contemporary/ribbon (leotards), hip-hop (boombox, track jackets and pants, gold jewelry, sunglasses, b-boy stances, twerking), cheerleading (skirt/pom-poms), jazz & blues (suits, instruments)	2,138,561,335

Coding and Analyzing Stimuli

I created a coding scheme to code each music video. The schemes were created based on my initial viewing of the videos, definitions of cultural appropriation from the literature, and previous studies focusing on music videos/TV images (Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang 2009; Dilshad and Latif 2013; Ghandnoosh 2010, Hughey 2009, Lutz 1990, Rogers 2006). Given the overwhelming amount of data one can abstract from music videos, the goal in creating the

scheme was to be systematic but not restrictive. Coding included descriptive variables such as:

artist(s), song title, year video was released, musical genre (as indicated by Apple iTunes), and

the number of views on YouTube. I created the following thematic variables based on initial

viewings of the videos and taking into consideration the common patterns described in the

appropriation literature: cultural expressions, cultural tourism, ownership, stereotypes, erasure,

historical context, congruency, and inclusive diversity. A complete, detailed explanation of the

coding scheme can be found in Appendix A.

To increase inter-coder reliability, three coders (myself and two additional coders) coded

the five videos shown to the focus groups while two coders (myself plus one other) were used for

the remaining videos. Each music video was coded in two stages. During the first stage the video

was viewed in its entirety with no interruptions to gain familiarity and insight into the song,

artist, setting, and overall themes. At the completion of the first stage, the coder used nominal

coding to indicate whether themes were absent (0) or present (1). The coder also took notes and

open-coded the cultural expressions or symbols they saw. This uninterrupted viewing of the

music videos allowed for the coder to view the images in the same way that the majority of the

viewing audience does. The second stage of coding allowed the coder to critically view the

images and notate the frequency of occurrence for each thematic variable. During the second

viewing the videos were watched and coded in 30 second increments. Every 30 seconds the

coder paused the video and coded the images in that interval, including the images paused on the

screen. The coder also used a frequency scale to indicate the amount of occurrence in a particular

30 second interval from no occurrence (0) to high occurrence (10). The strategy of using multiple

stages of coding and the use of 30 second increments in this form of content analysis have been

used in previous studies and make data more manageable and to make coding more efficient and

systematic (Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang 2009, Hughey 2009, Nama 2003).

Focus Group Interviews

While content analysis is an effective method for investigating images within music

videos, investigating interpretations of those images requires conversation with the audience.

Focus group interviews prove to be an efficient method in this regard. They allow the researcher

access to people's perspectives as well as insight into the ways people come to interpret and

understand content via group interactions (Morgan 1996). According to Gamson, "it [focus

groups] allows us to observe the process of people constructing and negotiating shared meaning,

using their natural vocabulary" (2002, p. 17). One of the goals of this study is to examine both

individuals' interpretations as well as group consensus and disagreement regarding cultural

images. Therefore, the use of group interviews in this study answers the questions: *How do*

various racial audiences come to understand and discuss cultural appropriation? How do

nonwhite audiences come to understand and interpret the appropriation of their own culture as

well as the cultures of other nonwhite groups within popular culture media?

Group interviews did not only tell what individuals thought and felt about the images in

music videos or about cultural appropriation, but also told something about how they came to

settle on and articulate those conclusions via interactions with others. Eleven separate focus

groups led by trained moderators provided the opportunity to probe for more information and

allowed participants to build on one another's ideas (Bertrand, Brown, and Ward 1992). Such

rich data would not be attainable through individual interviews or surveys. In total 61

participants completed the focus group interviews. Table 2 shows participant demographics by

race and gender.

Table 2. Participant Demographics by Race and Gender

Race	Gender		Total (N)
	Male	Female	
Black	19	29	48
White	4	5	9
Indian	2	0	2
Latino	1	1	2
Total (N)	**26**	**35**	**61**

Still, focus group interviews have some weaknesses. One of the most common critiques is that focus groups are not generalizable (George 2013, Morgan 2006). That is, focus group data is not representative of a significant portion of the target population. However, what focus groups lack in generalizability, they make up for in richness of the content collected. The research method is also commonly critiqued because of the role of the moderator. The presence and social position of the moderator in relation to the group participants may interrupt the flow of interaction between group members or impact what is said and how it is said (George 2013, Morgan 20006). Being mindful of the content of the group conversations and matching the moderator on as many social characteristics as possible helps to alleviate some of these obstacles (Weiss 1994). Focus group interviews, made up of participants from the same self-identified racial or ethnic group, were moderated by someone of the same racial/ethnic group whenever possible. Literature suggests this matching aids in the moderator being viewed as more of an in-group member, which makes participants more willing to speak, and makes it easier for the moderator to intervene when necessary in order to keep group discussions on topic (Weiss 1994). The only exception was the Latino focus group, which was led by a Black moderator.

Participants were recruited on the campus of the University of Cincinnati (UC), a large Midwestern, urban, research focused, predominately White university in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati is a metropolitan city of approximately 298,550 people, with a metropolitan area of about 2 million. According to University of Cincinnati records the total student population is approximately 44,338 (undergraduate, graduate, and professional students) with a racial make-up of 69% White, 8% Black, 3% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.9% two or more races, and 0.2% American Indian. The Black-White racial composition of the university is not representative of the composition of the city. Both the city and the university represent a Black-White dichotomy, with very small and isolated Latino, Asian, and Native American communities. The racial makeup of the city is 49.3% White, 44.8% Black, 2.8% Hispanic or Latino, 1.8% Asian, 2.5% two or more races, and 0.3% American Indian (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). The racialized history of Black and Latino communities in the city is quite unique.

Historically Cincinnati has always been polarized city in regard to race and racism. Located directly across the Ohio River from Kentucky, 19th century Cincinnati was both an ideal location for abolitionists and key stops on the Underground Railroad as well as being a hotpot for slave catchers. During the Civil War, Cincinnati and Ohio pledged support to the Union, however, many white Cincinnatians moved southward to fight in favor of the Confederacy and in support of the continued enslavement of Blacks. The generations following were marked periodically with race riots, initially sparked by Whites who feared competition from immigrants and Black laborers. Latino communities also formed in Cincinnati, albeit much slower, and were less visible than those in similar cities such as Cleveland and Columbus. During the 1800's, Latino immigration to Ohio was scarce, however, those who did live in the area found paying

jobs in factories or agriculture. The last 10 years has marked a significant increase in the amount and visibility of Latino (mostly Mexican) influence in the city; making it rapidly a target destination different from traditional destinations such as New York, Miami, or Texas, particularly for undocumented persons. The two Latino participants involved in the study were vocal about being undocumented. The significant increase in Latino residents has also been meet with white resistance and has sparked statewide discussions of immigration policies, citizenship, and the like. These contentions are embedded within the history of the city and are still evident in the residential, educational, economic, health, and criminal justice disparities of the city (Kiesewetter 2001, Ohio History Connection 2017, Taylor 2005).

More recent uprisings have occurred and were largely based on reactions by Black residents to police brutality and killings—such as the 2001 uprising in response to the killing of Black, unarmed 19-year-old Timothy Thomas by white Cincinnati Police Officer Stephen Roach during an attempt to arrest him for warrants issued for traffic citations. Most importantly to this study, during the time of recruitment and data collection the university and the city were in the national spotlight for the off-campus shooting death of a Black resident, Samuel DuBose, by White campus police officer, Ray Tensing, during a routine traffic stop. The event sparked city and campus protests, a student movement (The Irate 8), university programming on race and policing, and community and campus town halls.

There were also the police killings of three Black men in other cities—Delrawn Small, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile—within 72 hours in July 2016, which reignited national debates over the racial disparities in policing, use of force, and lack of indictments and convictions of accused officers. All of these incidents were especially upsetting for nonwhite participants as the images of the men's deaths were circulated in media and online. The African

American student union on campus, where the majority of Black participants were recruited and where all but one of the Black focus groups were held, was transformed into a safe space for conversation and healing. Within 4 months of these incidents, many Latino and Muslim students were particularly upset and concerned about the results of the 2016 presidential election and the conversations surrounding deportation and the possible creation of travel bans targeting their communities.

As a Black woman living near campus, a sociology instructor, a mentor to Black students, and a social activist involved in city and campus protests, I also faced emotional and mental fatigue and angst during these periods. Therefore, I made the decision as the head researcher to exercise self-care, to respect participants' feelings, and to avoid possible skewing of data by rescheduling focus groups and suspending recruitment efforts during these times. The fact was not lost on me that many of my White colleagues, while also affected by the campus and national climate, may not have been moved to make the same decisions that I did—decisions which decelerated the progress of my research. This experience forced me to grapple with how race and racial trauma differentially impact researchers of color and scholar activists. Despite having to reschedule, conversations never led to any discussions about police brutality or killings when data collection resumed.

Recruitment of participants

To take part in the study, participants had to be 18 years old and willing to self-identify their race. Some participants were recruited via in-person announcements made in courses (e.g. math, English, chemistry) between May and September 2016. After contacting course instructors via email and obtaining permission, I attended classes and gave brief announcements describing the project and the incentives for participating (food and beverage during the focus group and $5

cash upon completion). Sign-up sheets were passed around the class and students provided their

name, email, phone, and age if they were interested in participating. Eventually, the sign-up

sheets were edited to allow students to self-identify their race in order to ease the creation of

race-specific focus groups later. This recruiting method yielded mostly white participants.

It is important to note that the white participants in this study are more racially conscious

than would be expected of the average white American. Aside from being college educated at a

large urban university in a majority-minority city, four out of the nine white participants in the

study were involved in student government. Student government at the university emphasizes

diversity and inclusion among its members through initiatives, seminars, and orientations. It

became obvious during the group interviews that the white participants from student government

were comfortable and proficient at directly discussing racial and cultural content—which is in

contrast to what research says is common for most white Americans (Bonilla-Silva 2010). The

four participants involved in student government were in the same focus group, however, they

did not know each other due to the fact that the organization has more than 100 student members.

To recruit Latino and Asian participants I attended welcome week events—the Latino

Student Welcome and the Asian Student Welcome.[4] I visited student organization booths,

watched performances, ate, and danced with attendees. This method allowed me to personally

interact with potential participants in a comfortable setting and relatively safe space. I believed it

was important to engage in these activities given that the context of the study deals with cultural

exchange. One possible limitation of this recruitment method is that these student welcomes may

have attracted a type of student more racially or culturally conscious than those who did not feel

inclined to attend. Moreover, the events were hosted by the Ethnic Programs and Services unit, a

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[4] The Asian Student Welcome was mostly attended by students who identified as East Asian and South Asian (e.g. Indian, Chinese, and Japanese).

division of Student Affairs, and were attended by many student groups that are organized around racial or cultural identity (e.g. Latinos en Acción and The Japanese American Student Society). Still, if this sample is in fact more racially or culturally conscious than the general public, their opinions on appropriation warrant investigations as previous literature suggests they could be expected to be among the most protective of the cultural artifacts and expressions of their communities (Vasquez and Wetzel 2009). That is, members of racial groups who have a strong sense of group identity use discursive strategies to highlight their distinct group traditions and protect the symbolic boundaries of their racial or cultural group (Vasquez and Wetzel 2009).

Black participants were largely recruited via verbal announcements and one-on-one conversations in the Black student center on campus. Center staff encouraged students to participate and a flyer and sign-up sheet were left in a high traffic area. Many Black participants were also recruited via snowballing. Since Black focus groups were held in the Black center, some participants decided to join because they saw the group gathering or because they heard about the study from classmates or friends. Once again, given that they have sought out a racialized space, the type of student who frequents the Black student center can be argued to be more racially conscious than the general population. As an involved graduate student in the Black student center, I also found that I had a rapport with many participants and through their conversations and their excitement toward participating, I surmised that there was a level of trust and comfort with me as a researcher and ingroup member.

Conducting focus groups

Focus groups were held on the University of Cincinnati campus between July 2016 and July 2017. All of the Black, Latino, and South Asian focus groups were conducted in the conference room of the Black student center (a stand-alone building on the edge of campus),

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while white focus groups were held in a central classroom or conference room on campus.[5] These locations were chosen due to the availability and convenience of the Black student center for majority of Black participants as well as to ease the conversations occurring in the Black focus groups. A neutral classroom was chosen for the white groups because I did not want to cause hesitation or discomfort among nonblack participants who might have felt uneasy discussing race while meeting in a majority Black space. Latino and Indian (South Asian) groups were held in the Black student center as well, albeit on a weekend during the summer months. I believe any influences or discomfort from being in a Black space were alleviated because participants were the only ones occupying the center at the time. After obtaining consent, participants were allowed to choose pseudonyms and ask questions. Each participant completed a questionnaire which included demographic questions (birthdate, gender, race/ethnicity, and year in school), as well as one question regarding how much they keep up with pop culture. Groups lasted from one to two hours.

Each group was led by a moderator of the same race, with the exception of the Latino group which was led by a Black moderator. I conducted the majority of the interviews firsthand as the majority of the sample is African American. While I was not present in the room during the White, Latino, or South Asian focus groups, I set up all equipment and waited in a room next door in case the moderator ran into any issues. The additional moderators were both advanced sociology Ph.D. students—one a White woman, the other an Indian American man. The question of whether to race-match the interviewer with participants is complex and the answer is far from self-evident (Twine 2000; Weiss 1994), however, I subscribe to research that indicates that race-matching facilitates group discussions in significant ways (Blauner & Wellman 1998, Zinn 1979,

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[5] To remain consistent and ease group conversations, the desks and seating in the classroom were arranged to appear more like a conference room than a lecture class.

Weiss 1994). This was especially important because literature indicates that White research participants in particular tend to speak more freely and honestly about race when in a same-race group (Weiss 1994). Also, it was important to have an Indian moderator lead the South Asian focus group because the stimuli shown to the groups contained cultural representations or symbolism that I did not have the knowledge to speak about comfortably and that participants might not have felt comfortable speaking with me about (e.g. Hinduism, Holi festival, or Indian wedding rituals). All moderators used semi-structured interviewing, following a questionnaire guide but allowing group conversations to flow naturally (Appendix B). This flexibility allowed space for the observation of group dynamics and the introduction of any probing questions that were not originally included in the guide. Moderators also took field notes during each session which later provided context during transcription and aided in the beginning stages of data analysis (Bertrand, Brown, and Ward 1992).

All focus group discussions began with general questions regarding participants' interests in popular culture such as, "What form of pop culture do you engage in or consume the most?" "How do you normally consume pop culture?" "Do you find that you normally watch TV or listen to music that is made by people who look like you?" These questions helped to get participants thinking about the popular culture products they consume as well as creating a rapport and sense of comfort with the moderator and one another. Groups were then shown five or six music videos (two groups only viewed 5 videos due to participant time constraints) with targeted discussion questions posed after each video played. They were instructed to pay attention to specific aspects of the videos such as: settings, clothing, costumes, dance styles, etc. and were allowed to take notes or jot down thoughts while viewing. While most participants did not choose to write notes, some did, and all notes were collected by the moderator at the end of

the session. Videos were shown in a randomized order during each session to minimize any effects the order of viewing may have had on group discussions.

After a discussion about the images in the video, the group was shown two headlines pertaining to the specific performance they just watched—one headline was critical of the performance, the other supportive or indifferent (Appendix C). Headlines were shown after the discussions about the specific video and did not ignite new conversation but mostly served to confirm what had already been discussed. Group members were asked to discuss which headline most closely echoed their feelings regarding the performance and why. These headlines served as prompts to help participants to identify their feelings about each video, however, they were encouraged to disagree with both headlines if they desired, which some did. After all of the videos were viewed, participants were asked their favorite and least favorite videos and why, to point out any important observations they feel were overlooked in the discussion, and to share any comments or thoughts they had not gotten a chance to mention.

Focus Group Data Analysis

All focus groups were video recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party transcription service. I watched all videos while reading the corresponding transcripts and utilizing interview notes in order to make corrections and clarify portions of the discussion that may have been misinterpreted or marked inaudible by the transcriber. I entered, coded, and analyzed all transcripts using NVivo qualitative data management software. This allowed me to combine, organize, compare, and interpret an overwhelming amount of data.

I used open codes in the initial stages of coding. Namely I was interested in participants' mentions of the thematic variables used in the content analysis as well as: boundary making (in-group vs. out-group dynamics), definitions of appropriation, capitalism/marketing, intentions of

musical artists, cultural knowledge, and positive interpretation of appropriation. These categories

were then examined for explicit and implicit relationships and subgroups were created for each.

These codes were then sorted based on the race of the focus group and the race/culture being

portrayed in the video. The chapters that follow focus on these themes by highlighting

participants' conversations in the focus groups in conjunction with the results from the content

analysis.

CHAPTER III: CAPITALISM, POWER, AND APPROPRIATION

"I just think when it comes down to it with pop culture, in any media industry, it's all about money." – Kevin (Black male)

As technology advances, the world continues to feel smaller. Undoubtedly, today it is easier to learn about and engage in cultures thousands of miles away than it has been in the last 50 years. With the click of a button you can find unlimited video, audio, images, and texts on just about any country or community on Earth. You can also exchange goods and services and ideas with these communities. In many ways, this access is exciting and offers an opportunity to connect human beings and highlight our similarities rather than our differences. However, the differences between groups are usually connected to their unique histories and heritage, which should not be ignored. Geographical locations, styles of dress, food, music, dance styles, and hairstyles, all help to tell a story of a place or a people. Ideally, cultures intersecting would create reciprocal cultural exchange or result in new, hybrid cultures (e.g. Bollywood—a mix of Indian cinema and Hollywood musicals), but more often what happens is one culture comes to dominate the other (Ardalan 2009; Quijano 2000; Rogers 2006; Robertson 2014). In discussing various approaches to globalization, Kavous Ardalan (2009:523) writes,

> The current phase of globalization is an unprecedented compression of time and space with enormous intensification of social, political, economic, and cultural interconnections and interdependencies on the global scale. But people experience globalization in different ways.

For nonwhite communities, increased globalization means more interconnectedness with Eurocentric powers of domination and white supremacy (Collins 2006; Quijano 2000; Robertson 2014). As told by Quijano (2000:540),

In effect, all of the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony. Europe's hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony.

So, while globalization led by the Westernized world expands and cultures continue to come into contact, it is increasingly important to unearth power dynamics and how these interactions impact nonwhite groups specifically. This chapter will highlight how globalization forces cultural contact and creates power dynamics which lead to cultural appropriation. I connect popular culture to the phenomena of globalization and capitalism by analyzing group responses to appropriative images within the music industry.

Globalization and Power

Economists center the growth of free trade and open markets when discussing the nature of globalization. Most social scientists, however, discuss the various social implications that are a consequence of these expanding markets. Overwhelmingly, they describe the phenomenon of globalization as coming about through unprecedented technological advancement. Ardalan (2009:518) writes, "globalization involves the rapid marketization of most social relations dedicated to self-interested economic calculation, the endless solving of technological problems, and the satisfaction of ceaseless consumer demands." Here Ardalan discusses globalization as a process which centers the economy and technology and impacts social relationships. Functionalists view this process as one that potentially aids and advances cultural exchange. As defined by Rogers (2006:477), cultural exchange is

the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between

cultures with roughly equal levels of power... Examples include the reciprocal borrowing

of linguistic words and phrases, mutual influence on religious beliefs and practices,

technological exchange, and two-way flows of music and visual arts. In its ideal form,

cultural exchange involves a balance of this reciprocal flow.

Simply put, globalization is referred to as a vehicle for cultural exchange—the world grows

closer through technology and open markets allow for the voluntary, reciprocal, and balanced

exchange of ideas, beliefs, clothing, food, music, arts, gadgets, and more (Rogers 2006). This

cultural exchange goes on to create more economic markets and hybrid cultures that serve to

reach beyond political control, geographical boundaries, or social differences (Ardalan 2009;

Rogers 2006).

From this point of view, because globalization erases geographical and cultural

boundaries, institutions and individuals become a part of a global community and take on a sense

of global citizenship (Ardalan 2009). Rather than operating as distinct entities, through

globalization nation-states begin to operate as a part of a shared political, economic, and moral

system. The theory of cosmopolitanism looks at this new global citizenship and universalism

fueled by globalization as desirable. It emphasizes that global citizenship creates unity,

sameness, coexistence, and inclusivity—yet it also emphasizes the importance of recognizing

difference. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006:xv), one of the most cited scholars on

cosmopolitanism, writes

there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea

that we have obligations to others…that stretch beyond to those whom we are

related…the other is that we take seriously the value of not just human life but particular

human lives, which means taking an interest in the beliefs and practices that lend them significance.

However, he also notes his belief that we come to understand one another "not *through* identity but *despite* difference" and argues "we can fully respond to 'our' art only if we move beyond thinking of it as ours and start to respond to it as art… My people –human beings—made the Great Wall of China, the Chrysler Building, the Sistine Chapel" (Appiah 2006:135). The cosmopolitan perspective as explained by Appiah asserts that there must be acknowledgement of and respect for difference. Yet, it also asserts that culture cannot and should not be claimed or owned by one group, which assumes that all cultural expressions should or can be performed or exhibited by any members of any group. This raises the question of how one might respect difference and cultural histories but still claim universal ownership of cultural artifacts and products. The same question advances the study of cultural appropriation. For example, how can racial and cultural products such as hip hop or traditional Japanese dress be seen as the direct products of Black or Japanese people but also simultaneously be up for grabs for white performance and consumption? One of the challenges for cosmopolitanism, and for this study, is to locate the balance between encouraging unity and respecting the contributions of particular groups. Due to the suggestion that globalization has helped do away with political, economic, and social boundaries, I argue that cosmopolitanism ultimately justifies cultural appropriation which benefits groups who are wealthy and white by disregarding collective group ownership and exploiting nonwhite cultural goods.

A "pure" form of cultural exchange is not a common occurrence. It is hard to think of real-life examples of reciprocal, balanced, and voluntary cultural exchange because there are few instances when power imbalances do not a have a meaningful impact on the interactions between

nation-states (Ardalan 2009). Instead it is most common to find instances where there are large quantities of Westernized, usually white American, cultural products and beliefs disseminated to less politically or economically powerful nations of color. Although America imports plenty of products from around the globe, its position as a political-economic superpower protects its hegemonic structure from being widely transformed by the cultural products it imports and as a result there is not cultural exchange. Rather, America and other Westernized nations impose their hegemonic culture and beliefs onto the world. In other words, "globalization constitutes an irreversible process, and… Anglo-American norms and values underwrite the culture of the new world. Americanization is associated with globalization because the USA is the sole superpower" (Ardalan 2009:518). It is true that some locales and industries are sustained through globalization. However, globalization is also a process that creates and exacerbates the stratification of nations, which leads to cultural imperialism, the imposition of dominant culture on less powerful cultures, and commodification, turning cultural goods into products to be bought and sold. Put another way,

> Globalization provides tremendous wealth and opportunity for a privileged few, while subjecting many to conditions of deep poverty and hopelessness. Globalization is both a great destroyer and a powerful creator of new ideas, values, identities, practices, and movements. (Ardalan 2009:523)

The Culture Industry and Cultural Appropriation

As American markets broaden their reach, they come into contact with more cultural norms, values, and beliefs. To analyze the outcome of this intersection, we must investigate the connections between capitalism and culture. Some contemporary sociologists investigate capitalism in terms of class-property relations and how access to the means of production

structures our lives and social interactions. In other words, it is not uncommon for the field to focus on who owns property, who does not, how this social order impacts institutions, and how individuals live their lives because of it. While focus on ownership of the means of production certainly has a place in understanding the media industry as a whole (i.e. media ownership or the rise of media conglomerates), it is a cumbersome approach to understanding how artists benefit financially from utilizing cultural appropriation. For this reason, I turn to the Frankfurt School, specifically Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and their conceptualization of the culture industry. When applied to the contemporary music industry, the culture industry provides some explanation of if, and if so how, capitalism encourages cultural appropriation.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) applied Marxist perspectives on capitalism to the entertainment and popular culture industry (films, radio programming, and magazines). In the chapter titled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they suggest that capitalism creates a system where culture can be standardized and produced for mass consumption, not much different than how factories produce chairs, clothing, or cars for sale. They argue that within capitalist societies, culture is mass-produced and disseminated to satisfy the need for leisure or pleasure which grows out of dissatisfactory economic circumstances. They go on to suggest mass production by a limited number of broadcast companies creates an illusion of choice which serves to homogenize consumers and make them passive and docile because they are too focused on consuming pleasure. Furthermore, they argue that mass-produced culture is a threat to the more "sophisticated" high arts because it is easily consumed rather than intellectually stimulating. They write, "the truth that they [films and radio] are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce" (Adorno and

Horkheimer 1944:95). Adorno and Horkheimer do not hide their contempt for the development and expansion of pop culture and contemporary researchers of media and culture disagree with their assumption that pop culture production is "trash" and a threat to "fine arts" (Gitlin 1979; Hesmondhalgh 2017; Parker 2017). Pop culture can been a site of resistance and political progress—as suggested by Solange's and Jesse Williams' commentaries on race. It can also be a way to introduce more traditional fine arts and make them more accessible and affordable to different communities, e.g. cooking shows that focus on high end cuisine (Watkins 1990, Hall 1993). Still, I find Adorno and Horkheimer's conceptualization of culture as industry to be especially useful in analyzing participants' discussion of cultural appropriation and music videos in this study.

Specifically, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979:95) write, "all mass culture under monopoly is identical, and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by monopoly, are beginning to stand out." They suggest that the culture industry presents options to consumers that appear to be diverse on the surface but are actually quite similar to one another due to monopolies which limit the range of choices available. They maintain that because of monopolies "culture today is infecting everything with sameness" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979:94). bell hooks also discusses the connection between the pop culture industry and sameness, specifically in terms of race. hooks's concept of "eating the Other" references the consumption and commodification of nonwhite culture by white audiences. Eating the Other is fueled by capitalism which is tied to white supremacy because it enables the commodification and appropriation of nonwhite cultures—where racial and ethnic symbols are considered to be products that can be bought and sold—for the benefit of whites. In other words diversity becomes commodity (Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017).

The music industry as a colonial power

M. K. Asante Jr. (2008) argues, specifically in regard to Black culture, that the music industry is a current day reflection of traditional colonial power at work. Asante (2008) asserts that the top record companies (Universal, Sony, EMI, and Warner Music) treat Black culture, namely hip hop, in the same ways colonial empires (England, Portugal, France, and Spain) treated non-European countries. The colonial powers invested in explorers who traveled to Africa, South America, and Asia to observe what those lands had to offer. They imposed their beliefs on the people of that land, extracted raw materials (oil, gold, spices, human labor), took them back to the mother country, and then commodified and repackaged those materials as goods which were resold around the globe, including to the nations who provided the raw materials in the first place. (Asante 2008)

Asante (2008) argues the same process happens with Black culture in the music industry, where record executives scout art in Black communities, decide what is desirable and marketable, sign Black artists directly or take their likeness, and then repackage their creations and art and resell it back to Black *and* white consumers. History provides examples of this process, with cases such as Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, and Big Mama Thornton who watched as their musical styles, lyrics, and dance moves were taken by Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, The Beach Boys and others who gained thousands to millions of dollars, unprecedented fame, and went down in history as the originators and kings of rock and roll (Kapono 2014). In this instance, white elites are able to extract raw goods (artists' talents) and also gain the power to control and influence images (Kapono 2014). Technological advancements such as YouTube, Twitter, and SoundCloud also make it so that nonwhite communities can be surveyed, and their art forms can be extracted by record executives from afar—making it much easier to take

nonwhite aesthetics, styles, and expressions without ever contacting or meeting with originating group members. Participants in my study often spoke about the music industry as a place where pillaging and white exploitation were apparent and rampant. They spoke of record labels as showing interest in aspects of their cultures, or outright stealing them, for the sole sake of profit for themselves and their artists. The commentary I present from participants in this study highlights how the music industry is perceived as turning diversity into a commodity.

Findings

Perceptions of the Music Industry

Participants in this study alluded to the idea that contemporary artists are searching for ways to break away from the monotony or sameness of the industry and that using cultural images of people of color is a way to create difference, particularly when performing for white audiences. For respondents, the culture industry pressures musical artists to seek images that set them apart from other artists. In focus groups, many participants assumed that the market set the stage for cultural appropriation by allowing or promoting major pop stars who use nonwhite cultural expressions out of context. For these participants, the use of nonwhite culture as a marketing tool was unethical, was an example of the privileges of capitalists and whites, and served to keep nonwhite artists from benefiting from their own cultural creations.

When asked why they believed artists portrayed cultures different than their own in music videos, a common explanation participants gave was the belief that artists or their companies desire to appeal to both white and nonwhite consumers. Within almost every focus group, the use of cultural images was spoken of as a marketing tool to appeal to ingroup members of the culture represented or as way for the artist to appear interesting or to gain publicity—in other words, to perform better on the white market. Like hooks' concept of

ethnicity as "spice," participants saw the use of Black American, Indian, and Asian themes as a way to entertain (mostly white) American audiences by introducing cultural expressions different than the white American norm.[6] Participants also thought that the strong desire to appeal to audiences and appear interesting was the reason why some music videos had images that were seemingly unrelated to the artist's own racial identity or the song's content.

All participants were asked if they believed popular culture was racially or culturally diverse. Some participants argued that diversity existed in film, TV, and music, and had improved throughout recent years. But rather than being a true sign of racial progress, they believed it was based in an attempt to pacify nonwhite audiences, entice white audiences, and as a result create revenue. John, a middle-age white man, especially questioned what he viewed as increased diversity in pop culture.

> I think a lot of pop culture — current pop culture — even if it's only for the sake of marketing, does try to draw attention to and celebrate diversity. Or at least pays lip service to it… I think it exists but I think it could vanish tomorrow. It's all about the bottom line.

Zack, a white male involved in student government at the university, also was doubtful that increased diversity in pop culture was a sign of true racial progress.

> I think sometimes pop culture can be blind to diversity if it'll sell anyways. Like a lot of the stuff we watch in pop culture, their primary focus is to make money. So, I do feel like, especially people of color that are coming up in pop culture, they've been putting a lot more attention to them *now*, definitely [more] than like 10, 20 years ago, but it's still,

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[6] Participants never explicitly defined what they meant by the white norm or white mainstream. However, when discussing nonwhite culture they often juxtaposed it with ideas of European beauty standards or they referenced television shows and films with overwhelmingly white casts to illustrate examples of white culture or the white mainstream.

at least through my eyes, it's all a money business, and so, if diversity will get them more money, then that's what they'll do.

John and Zack, in addition to other participants, saw the connections between pop culture and capitalism. They viewed the social phenomena of music, movies, TV, and social media, as being fundamentally profit-driven. For this reason, John, Zack, and others discussed diversity in popular culture merely as a byproduct of attempts at capitalistic gain. In their view, diversity is the current money-making trend within the pop culture market, suggesting that the trend could change at any moment and representations of people of color could stall or reverse.

It is important to note that a majority of group interviews took place during a time when racial representation in media was a part of the public discourse. For example, the social media campaign #OscarsSoWhite had called for a boycott of the 2016 Oscars due to The Academy's failure to nominate any actors of color for the second year in a row. The campaign was discussed throughout the awards season by various media outlets and by many celebrities, especially those of color, and reportedly the 2016 and 2017 Oscar award shows experienced some of the lowest ratings in multiple years (Patten 2017). Additionally, breakout shows *Blackish*, *Insecure*, *Atlanta*, and *Queen Sugar*—each created, written by, starring people of color and highlighting race within their content—were also hot topics during the time of the interviews. While there was no exhaustive discussion of these specific TV shows in the focus groups, some participants mentioned them in passing and it is likely that participants were aware of the success of these shows or the discussions surrounding them.

Although it is not my goal to compare responses across racial groups, it was noticeable that John, Zack, and other white respondents appeared to be more accepting of the idea that diversity existed within popular culture, whereas nonwhite participants were more skeptical.

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Black participants especially noted that nonwhite representation in popular culture had increased throughout the generations (at times noting the shows mentioned above), but they were hesitant to agree that this increase signaled *significant* or *lasting* increases in diversity. Still, no matter participants' race or if they felt increases in diversity were significant or inconsequential, they overwhelmingly believed that any diversity, or lack thereof, was most probably financially motivated. Popular culture as an industry was referenced as a site where diversity and cultural awareness is fostered or encouraged, but more often it was used as a point of reference for how capitalistic gain influence racial inclusion.

Participants not only believed diversity was short-lived due to capitalism, but they also believed appropriation was a direct result of financial motivations. Zack's perception of Katy Perry highlights this point.

> This is sort of what I think I was talking about when I said pop culture and diversity, like a lot of times if I'm making money, if I'm looking cool, whatever that is, that's where they can kind of throw the whole 'why diversity matters aside.' Some of that would stop appropriation. Again, as long as Katy Perry puts on a show for, what was that the American Music Award or something?... Then you know, who cares if she just insulted thousands of people.

Zack understands the industry as disregarding the feelings of communities for the sake of profitable or attention-grabbing performances. While insulting an audience does not seem like a good business decision, Zack believes that the financial benefits from presenting an interesting or different performance still outweighs any consequences that may stem from offending nonwhite audiences.

When discussing white rapper Riff Raff, one Black female participant, Meesha, detailed how she saw appropriation as an attempt to increase profit saying,

> I really don't understand, cause it's like, there are so many Black artists out here doing this (laughs). I feel like just because he looks like the majority of the people who are putting money into the music industry—which is something we didn't talk about before, which is why I feel like cultural appropriation in the film industry and the music industry are a thing because people want to consume media of people that look like them for the most part. So, it's like they're just going to take things from us, and then, like, put it on a white person so that they make money.

Meesha interpreted the Riff Raff's arguable success as aa rapper as being due in part to his hip hop persona being wrapped in whiteness and therefore more palatable and appealing to both white capitalists (music executives) and white audiences. Alex, a Black female participant who particularly felt profit rather than cultural awareness was a motivation behind Iggy Azalea's "Bounce" video said, "it just blatantly feels like this is not Iggy Azalea. She is completely doing this for the money." Meesha added to this sentiment saying,

> Meesha: Do they count that the Black rappers are doing the same thing, but they don't get into the mainstream? I'm just talking about money here.

> Moderator: You feel like he's doing the same thing other rappers do, but he's gotten more attention because he's white?

> Meesha: Yeah.

> Moderator: Do you consider that appropriation or is that not appropriation?

> Meesha: I just feel like it's wrong because so many... It's something that Black people came up with, so for somebody else to be profiting financially off of that is just, I don't really like it. I don't know what the solution is.

Frankie, a Black woman in the same focus group as Meesha, also spoke about the ability of white rap artists to benefit more than Black artists when portraying Black American cultural expressions.

> I feel… it's not that white people can't do what Black people are doing. It's just it can be annoying when a white person does what plenty of Black people are doing, and they're making a profit off of it when we've been doing it for years.

Further into the conversation Meesha adds to Frankie's point.

> Moderator: Who's the crowd you think he [Riff Raff] was trying to appeal to?
>
> Frankie: Like, Black people. A majority of the people who listen to rap.
>
> Meesha: It's more white people [who listen to rap]…
>
> Moderator: So you're saying you think he's doing it to appeal to Black people, and [points to Meesha] you think he's taking Black stuff to appeal to white people?
>
> Meesha: Yeah, and I don't know if that's his intention, but I feel like big business is… what fuels cultural appropriation in general because you're just naturally drawn to consume media [from people who look like you].

Meesha, Zack, and Frankie's comments imply that despite Riff Raff and Iggy Azalea engaging in a traditionally Black American art form, they and others have something to gain by excluding rather than including Black originators.[7] Azalea has especially been called out for lacking an understanding and appreciation for hip hop pioneers, but still profiting off of the art form (Morrissey 2011). The respondents' comments suggest that Blackness (as it is embedded within hip-hop/rap) is more desirable when presented by white artists. Existing literature also suggests this may be true. Historian Tricia Rose (1994:5) writes, "there is abundant evidence that white

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[7] Neither Azalea nor Riff Raff included Black people in their hip hop music videos. Iggy Azalea's music video featured her with only Indian people as extras and, with the exception of one child as an extra, Riff Raff did not include Black people in his video.

artists imitating Black styles have greater economic opportunity and access to larger audiences

than Black innovators." White rappers such as Eminem and The Beastie Boys found great

success and longevity in their rap careers. Unlike Riff Raff and Iggy Azalea, they were widely

accepted by Black hip hop fans because they acknowledged their whiteness, how it contributed

to their success, and did not attempt to mock Black culture (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015). I

suspect that the racialized meanings associated with Black styles or expressions are not

interpreted the same when presented by whites. Interestingly, data shows that hip hop audiences

today are 80% white, much like Meesha argued (Asante 2008). If there is in fact a profit to be

made from the simultaneous adoption of Black innovations and the exclusion of Black

innovators, then it suggests there is an institutional incentive for appropriating, at least for white

artists. That is, if white artists taking nonwhite cultural expressions and excluding nonwhites is

found to be profitable, then the music and pop culture industry is actually driven by

appropriation rather than diversity and inclusion. In her analysis of Blackness in the global

marketplace Patricia Hill Collins (2006:301) writes about the impact globalization has had on the

demands for new products including nonwhite, namely Black, commodified culture. She writes,

> Marketing and advertising often create demand for things that formerly were not seen as
>
> commodities, for example, the rapid growth of the bottled water industry, as well as for
>
> intangible entities that seem difficult to commodify. In this regard, the rapid growth of
>
> mass media and new informational technologies has catalyzed a demand for Black
>
> culture as a commodity.

Meesha, Zack, and Frankie's interpretations of Katy Perry's Asian-themed performance and Iggy

Azalea and Riff Raff's rapping suggest that, from their perspective, the growth of mass media

has commodified aspects of Asian and Black American culture to the benefit of white artists

performing to mostly white audiences but also trying to appeal to nonwhite audiences under the guise of being inclusive or culturally aware.

On various occasions, focus group participants indicated that they were critical of the use of cultural expressions when the artist seemed to profit or benefit more than the cultural group they borrowed from. Umi, an Indian American student, spoke about this during his focus group when discussing "Hymn for the Weekend" by Coldplay featuring Beyoncé:

> I mean, I feel like in that case, if they're trying to modify the culture that they're modifying it to their gain. So, in that case they're not appreciating it, so I feel like that's odd. Because I, I've never seen that kind of attire on an Indian woman. I know because it's a music video…and people try and look as good as possible to what they know will appeal to like the masses…[but] that is not their culture. So, they're not appreciating an accurate description of the culture. They are just trying to showcase the culture in a way they think is more beneficial for their performance.

Here Umi is reacting to a low-cut Indian-inspired dress Beyoncé wears throughout the video, which he viewed as being uncharacteristic of the usual Indian feminine style of dress. He recognized Beyoncé's dress as being born out of traditional Indian garb, but saw the modifications to the dress as an appeal to larger audiences with hopes of increasing revenue. Most notably, he noted that changing certain aspects of cultural garb to appeal to the masses shows a lack of appreciation and benefits the artist more than the originating cultural group. Tom, a white male, made similar points regarding Iggy Azalea, saying, "it's still Iggy capitalizing on Indian culture for her own gains... Like if you actually look at who does it benefit? It's still Iggy." Tom's commentary also highlights his belief that the artist is gaining or profiting by centering herself in the cultural expressions of a group she does not belong to. In

sum, Tom and other participants noticed the use of nonwhite culture, picked up on the changes made to that culture, and recognized that the white-dominated music industry benefited financially from those changes.

Congruency

As the process of globalization continues to expand, nations come into more contact with one another and have more access to the cultural symbols and traditions of groups across the globe. However, increased contact does not usually include comprehensive understanding of the meanings and significance of a culture. Ignoring the historical contexts of a culture's expression is one of the central components of cultural appropriation. To ignore context means that the symbolism, significance, or tradition of an expression is lost (Lutz 1990). During the content analysis, we found that the videos in our samples rarely included historical contexts in their use of cultural imagery. Overwhelmingly, the videos spotlighted traditional aesthetics, dance styles, gestures, or symbolism outside of their intended contexts or meanings. For example, Indian garb usually reserved for weddings was worn by Beyoncé, Iggy Azalea, and Selena Gomez although weddings were not being shown in their videos. The Indian tradition of throwing colored powder, usually reserved for Holi festival, was also highlighted in Coldplay and Azalea's videos, however, the context of the traditions or meanings surrounding the festival were not displayed or explained. In the Japanese culture, geishas have historical significance and generational history, yet Katy Perry's performance failed to provide any background or significance to traditional geisha imagery.

Without historical or social context, content analysis coders and participants found the meaningful connections between the song lyrics, performance, and/or imagery in the videos to be lacking. Coders noted that the use of Japanese, Indian, Latino, and Black American expressions

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did not coincide with the artists' background or with the themes of the songs themselves. For example, Selena Gomez, of Mexican and Italian descent, wore a chunni (long Indian headscarf), which normally indicates respect or modesty, while singing lyrics such as "if you want it come and get it." Similarly, Iggy Azalea wore the same type of garb while singing lyrics such as "shake that shit." The disconnect between the artists' background, the song lyrics, and the images, paired with a lack of historical or social context, suggests that these videos did not aim to provide nuanced or comprehensive portrayals of cultures and as a result were appropriative.

Katy Perry, Iggy Azalea, and Riff Raff were the artists mentioned most by participants as appearing to intentionally portraying cultures different than their own for the sole purpose of profit. Zack said, "I don't know anything about Riff Raff but it really does seem like he's capitalizing on the market rather than expressing something that's from within himself." Participants like Zack who believed motivations for using cultural images were financially based were likely to note that the images shown were not congruent with the artists' own race or culture, with the instrumentation (e.g. taiko Japanese drums), nor content of the song. When respondents were asked their general reactions to Perry, Azalea, or Riff Raff, they often responded by questioning the relevance or purpose of using cultural themes. For example, here is an exchange from a Black focus group reacting to Katy Perry:

> Moderator: Okay, general reactions to Katy Perry. What did you think about that one?
>
> Hakim: It didn't make no sense. (others laugh)
>
> Roselyn: The song has nothing to do with any of [how she dressed.]
>
> Darnell: She could have really just did like an American theme to that song.
>
> Taylor: I can see how she kinda like tried to make the beat of the song kinda intertwine with like... I don't want to say China, I want to say Asian… but I don't understand why you gotta do that.

Roselyn: I feel like there was no reason except I feel like it's a money factor. Like just what can I do to add extra to my performance to make it like, you know. I don't know. I feel like there is no reason for that display for that song. (laughs)

The conversation continues but eventually circles back to themes of congruency and profit:

Hakim: Like I get the whole money factor but like when you put other people's cultures out there just for the money factor like I don't [get it...]

Derek: Yeah, I feel like he said, at least be relevant to the song.

Roselyn: Yeah… like she literally just sat there and was like, 'um, I'm just gonna do some type of vibe like this.' (laughs) Like she just thought 'would this make me money?' I feel like that's the type of situation.

Hakim, Roselyn, Darnell, Taylor, and Derek were especially taken aback by Katy Perry and Iggy Azalea's videos. They noted the lack of Asian participants in Perry's performance and pointed out the content of Iggy Azalea's "Bounce" video as having little connection to Indian themes. Other Black focus groups had a similar exchange regarding the lack of connection between Indian dress, styles of dance, and the content of Azalea's song.

Mia: You brought up the fact that people are in their traditional gear and they have their dancing specifically for that, but most likely they're doing it to their music and they're learning the cultural aspects of it. This is [Iggy] making a music video for something like "make it bounce" but you don't put your culture in… that ties *you* to it. It's different.

Finesse: Like you know, she kind of downgrades their culture a little bit.

Reese: That is very true.

Moderator: She downgraded their culture?

Shay: Yeah. The song had nothing to do with the people (laughs).

> Reese: This one was worse than all. Talking about make it bounce. You're talking about shaking your ass while you're doing their dance. It has nothing to do with that.

In some cases I do question whether or not stereotypes of the sexless Asian played into respondents' responses to Azalea's dancing in Indian garb (which I discuss further in later chapters). Some respondents' commentary implied that anything sexual or sensual could not be in line with Indian culture, which is a common stereotype portrayed in the media of Indian and other Asian groups (Mok 1998; Tung 2006). However, participants were clear in noting that no matter what meanings Indian clothes or dances held to Indian communities, they felt Azalea should not be the one to display them. During coding of the content analysis. Both Azalea's and Perry's videos were found to have the least congruency between the race of the artists, lyrics, instrumentation, and the images shown. The participants explained this lack of congruency as being connected to the desire to make money. The blatant incongruency in the videos confirmed for the participants that commodifying culture was the main goal for these artists. In their perspective, the themes in the videos were not appealing or intriguing, but were misplaced and unnecessary.

Participants such as Mia and Finesse interpreted the use of cultural expressions as inappropriate and irrelevant. However, while others still found the images problematic, they spoke of the use of cultural expressions more matter-of-factly. Sean and Myzel were in the same focus group as Mia and Finesse but were less critical of Riff Raff. For them, Riff Raff's motivations were clearly connected to profit, a result of the culture industry, which they felt should be expected.

> Sean: It's hustle. He's getting paid. He wanna do what he wanna do, that's Riff Raff for you, but I mean you can't really get on him because that's how he's making his money and that's how he's doing it. I mean at least he ain't selling no drugs or nothing in this video. Most of his videos, I barely see any drugs. I more see like girls and random props.

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Myzel: I think he's honestly just doing what he knows would give him shit [trouble], but, he's like, 'Okay' (shrugs shoulders). The things y'all hated, at the end of the day some people are gonna watch this video just to buy. He's just joking around… I think he's serious, but then he also knows, 'If I do this and this and that, I'm gonna get a bad look but also I'm white so I can do it. People are gonna watch it no matter what.'

Moderator: So do you find anything offensive about what he's doing?

Shay: Like all of it.

Myzel: I mean it's offensive to me but then again, I know the reason why he's doing it because he's gonna make good money at the end of the day.

Moderator: Okay, so you do find it offensive. What in particular do you find offensive?

Myzel: I mean just the derogatory version of the women, the materialism. Trying to like bring it to the hood. Like there's a lot of stuff that he did that were wrong but then again, I know the reason. Like the reason is that's gonna make him money and going to get him views at the end of the day.

In this exchange Myzel and Sean agreed that Riff Raff's portrayals were incongruent, not desirable, and even offensive. However, they also displayed an understanding, and seeming acceptance, that the market encourages potentially offensive displays of cultures. Myzel and Sean's matter-of-fact approach to understanding Riff Raff reflects Adorno and Horkheimer's (1979) claim that audiences become accepting and passive in response to the culture industry. Ironically, they openly question the appropriateness of Riff Raff' images, but they also display an indifference to his behavior because they accept the structure of the culture industry. In addition, Myzel expressed an understanding and acceptance that Riff Raff's whiteness allows him a sense of security and ability to take risks on the market. He speculated about Riff Raff's justifications for including stereotypical hip hop aesthetics in his video and surmised that the

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rapper's race provides him a shield of protection from losing profit, even if his images are incongruent or cause him to get a "bad look." This response suggests that Myzel and Sean are aware that the structure of the music industry works to advantage whites more than nonwhites.

Conclusion

Participants' discussions regarding marketing and profit say something about the mainstream music industry and how it is interpreted by audiences. They agree that money is the central force driving the images in the pop music market and that the incorporation of nonwhite cultural expressions gives certain artists better positioning in that market. Specifically, participants of color suggest that white artists benefit the most from this tactic. They argue that cultural appropriation is a form of exploitation where whites have the industrial and economic resources to exploit people of color and promote images that reify stereotypes. They also suggest that the desire for profit causes artists or their record labels to take cultural expressions out of context and embed them in songs or videos where they ostensibly do not belong—creating incongruence between the artists' own image, their creative visuals, and the song's content and composition. When faced with this incongruence as an audience, participants of color are forced to question why it occurs and overwhelmingly they conclude that money is the motive.

Echoing earlier relations of colonialism, the reach of technology as a result of globalization has placed nonwhite culture even more within the grasp of powerful white seeking to exploit and make profit. The music industry works to maintain hegemony and commodify nonwhite culture in a way that only appears to be racially inclusive on the surface. As indicated by Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017), the participants in this study deduced that racial diversity becomes just another commodity to help improve the experiences or positions of whites, specifically white artists in the pop music market. They saw the inclusion of different races and

cultures as insincere and a smokescreen for capitalistic greed. The following chapters will

discuss the varying ways in which people of color discuss interpretations of their own culture

and other nonwhite cultures being utilized in pop music. Their discussions of boundary-making,

representation, and cultural inclusivity provide a nuanced understanding of what appropriation

looks like, when it is most harmful, and what communities of color might prefer to see in the

media instead.

CHAPTER IV: CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES

I just feel that whoever's doing it, you just need to know the background.
I mean where it's coming from, the history... – Ray (Black male)

Americans lead segregated lives. Despite the eradication of Jim Crow laws, white Americans can still easily live their lives without having significant interactions with people of color at school or work, in their neighborhoods, social networks, or in their families (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006, Bonilla-Silva 2010, Feagin 2010). The "hyper-segregation" (Massey and Denton 1998) of the present day suggests that whites in particular do not have meaningful real-life interactions with minorities, resulting in their reliance on stereotypical media to teach them about other racial groups. Television, film, sports, and the music industry are just a few areas of popular culture where stereotypes and misconceptions run rampant yet are still perceived as accurate. (Shively 1992, Entman and Rojecki 2000, Hughes 2004, Strong 2004, Park Gabbadon, and Chernin 2006, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Crockett 2008, Hughey 2009, Caspi and Elias 2010, Fueller 2010, Ghandnoosh 2010, Hylton 2010, Roy 2010, Carrington 2013)

Because of their limited interactions with minorities, white people are especially susceptible to believing homogenizing misconceptions about nonwhite groups (Dirks and Mueller 2007, Crockett 2008, Krestsedemas 2010). This pattern extends back to the late 1800s vaudevilles and minstrel shows, the first forms of American pop culture, where exaggerated portrayals of Black culture were often seen as accurate by white audiences. Content analyses of contemporary cinema suggest that although movies are more diverse on the surface, the racial messages and imagery they display continues to align with traditional racial bias and stereotypes (Park et al. 2006, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Hughey 2009). Furthermore, analyses of interviews

and focus groups indicate that audiences, white audiences especially, conflate these cinematic images with real world race relations (Shively 1992, Park et al. 2006).

White participants in this study admitted to occasionally turning to media to learn about other cultures. For example, Tom said, "I try and learn about the world through the media I consume. So, you can really get an understanding of culture through the different media you look at." If the majority of white audiences and pop media consumers are like Tom and rely on media images such as music videos to educate them about other groups, it becomes important to investigate the accuracy of cultural images displayed as well as the use of stereotypes because they may influence viewers' cultural knowledge. Participants had a sense that whites generally have little contact with people of color and they looked for demonstrations of cultural knowledge to indicate that white use of cultural products was not shallow or based on stereotypes. I define cultural knowledge as the ability to display a more than marginal understanding of the meanings, symbolisms, and significances that cultural expressions and products hold for specific racial or cultural groups. It was important to the participants that artists demonstrated their efforts to gain or master cultural knowledge about the group whose symbols they were displaying in their video.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the importance of artists and audiences having cultural knowledge about the groups they are engaging. I then investigate how a lack of cultural knowledge leads to a reliance on stereotypes, and I analyze participants' responses to stereotypical representation in the music videos. Last, I use participant conversations to highlight how the same pervasive stereotypes in the media, which are used to justify the marginalization or discrimination of nonwhite racial and ethnic groups, are also used in videos as sources of entertainment by white pop culture artists who remain relatively free from stigma.

Demonstrating Cultural Knowledge

Focus groups frequently discussed the level of knowledge an artist has about the culture they were engaging. While I have no way of actually knowing how much Katy Perry knows about Japanese culture or members of Coldplay know about Indian cultures, I am able to analyze the participants' assumptions about the artists' level of knowledge and how it impacted their views on appropriation. In general, artists whose videos were described as appropriative or offensive often had their knowledge of the culture brought into question. Respondents did not trust that artists who appropriated had an understanding of the histories, traditions, or symbolism behind cultural expressions and felt it was essential to demonstrate familiarity or first-hand experience in order to properly express cultural appreciation rather than appropriation.

Many respondents spoke of appropriation and cultural awareness as being intrinsically linked. Ray articulates this point when asked if utilizing others' cultures in videos should be seen as positive:

> I think it's a positive thing 'cause it definitely shows your awareness for different styles and cultures that's not yours or that's not necessarily linked to you as a person or whatever your background is. I just feel that whoever's doing it, you just need to know the background. I mean where it's coming from, the history... If you have good intentions because you appreciate the culture, you're interested, you wanna know more about it, that's a positive thing.

Ray's commentary suggests that artists cannot truly appreciate a culture without having learned about its background or context. In his point of view, artists have a responsibility to gain an understanding of a culture if they want to interact with it and to do so is indicative of good intentions. For Ray and others, it was perplexing that an artist would attempt to display cultural

expressions without having demonstrated that they understand what those expressions mean to the group associated with them.

Sarah, a Latina woman, takes Ray's commentary a step further and reasons that the depth of cultural knowledge is also essential in avoiding cultural appropriation:

I think we're so used to the surface-y food and celebration. "I'm appreciating the culture. I'm learning the culture because I ate their food." Or "I wore their clothes," and that's not all that's to a culture. There's a lot more and if you are only willing to take someone's food and someone's wear but you're not willing to delve in... and actually understand and get to know those people, understand the issues or the context... then you shouldn't deserve to steal those things. So I feel like looking into cultural exchange, there needs to be more in-depth look into what that actually means.

Sarah did not believe that outsiders dressing in cultural garb or eating cultural foods indicated real cultural awareness. She saw cultural food and dress as a basic level of engagement and at most a possible entry point to learning about other cultures, but she still believed a lot is missed when the effort is not made to learn about more than food and clothing. The content analysis revealed that cultural dress and celebrations (namely Holi festival) are indeed ways that artists displayed other cultures (along with dance styles and gestures). In their study of white millennials, Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017) also found that food and entertainment were common ways that white people subscribed to diversity ideology claiming that among their sample, "commodification is well represented by the value attributed to the food and entertainment that racial and ethnic minorities bring into predominantly white spaces" (898). They conclude that their participants "desire to be in a space where people of color can teach them something and share new foods and experiences with them; they are pleased with the

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presence of bodies of color because these bodies come with benefits to them" (898). It seems that Sarah and others were not sold on the idea that certain artists were truly knowledgeable about the cultures they highlighted because they did not display more than entertaining and celebratory parts of cultures.

In a Black focus group, Bobby passionately articulates an argument similar to Ray's and Sarah's and describes his take on the importance of having firsthand experiences in order to correctly avoid appropriation.

> I feel like to truly give credit to another culture, no matter what, you need to experience it. You need to be deeply involved or experience it firsthand. I feel in the sense of Katy Perry, she might've gone to China or gone where this originated from, been involved with it, but from the outside looking in we think, "alright, she hired somebody, she paid somebody to say, 'This is what we're gonna do, this is the culture that we're gonna follow. We're gonna pay them nothing.'" She didn't experience that firsthand. And I still view that [Chinese culture], that's a minority, period. You have to experience that firsthand to truly understand what you're appreciating. Otherwise it'll be appropriation, even if you happen to get it correct. Even if you happen to get every detail of that culture correct, I still feel at that same time, you still need to experience to truly appreciate what that means to be in that situation. Because that's people's lifestyle that you're messing with. That's people's homes. You know, we grew up, Sunday morning breakfast, waking up to some [R&B music] sometimes, you know. That's who we are. So if that's portrayed on TV and somebody's portraying it and you're like, "What do they know about this?"…So, [if] they don't experience those things firsthand, they don't truly understand what it means for it to be our lifestyle. So no matter who it is, whether it's minority people or not, they still need to experience it for it to be... I wouldn't even say acceptable. I just want to say, just kind of morally right.

Bobby offered a few interesting takes on the importance of cultural awareness and its relationship to cultural appropriation. First, he suggested that the level of involvement with the

culture matters and that evidence of significant interactions should be apparent. He mentioned that Katy Perry might have actually spent time in Japan (which he mistakenly refers to as China) but if she did, she failed to relay any meaningful understanding of the culture in her performance. As an outsider, Bobby is not convinced that she has taken the Japanese culture seriously, at least in regard to her performance. Perry utilized traditional styles of Japanese dress in her performance which, as noted by Sarah, may not be enough to indicate a true understanding of the culture. When asked what would convince them that Perry did have significant knowledge of Japanese culture, Bobby and others almost unanimously agreed that collaborating with Japanese performers (not as background dancers or extras) would have been more convincing.

Second, Bobby linked experience and knowledge directly to appropriation. He did not indicate that privileged people or groups wanting to learn about the Other should always be classified as violent or appropriative but he did argue that without experience one cannot justly or fully engage in another's cultural expressions. Additionally, he suggested that expressions could be displayed correctly but experience is still imperative. I gather that Bobby assumes experience (he did not describe what activities count as experience) improves cultural knowledge and he believes when outsiders have knowledge of cultural expressions, they will not participate in the appropriative acts of stealing, repurposing, renaming, or taking culture out of sociohistorical context and meaning. Although idealistic, having a comprehensive understanding does not mean that culture cannot or will not be appropriated or misrepresented. However, the fact that Bobby and others believe that comprehensive knowledge increases appreciation and deters appropriation tell us how minority groups might prefer their culture be approached or interacted with.

Third, Bobby linked cultural expressions to the lived experiences of minorities. Based on his interpretation, cultural expressions are symbolic of real-world experiences that ingroup members share which help form a group identity. Sarah also connected cultural expressions to shared group history and experiences, saying, "food, music, and cultural wear come from situations and what makes those people. The things that they've been through and [their] politics. That needs to be taken into consideration." Sarah expresses an understanding that dress and food is not purely aesthetic and she claims that the sociopolitical history that influences those styles should always be considered. Bobby provided a specific example of shared group experiences by arguing that Sunday meals and old-school R&B music are cultural group identifiers for Black Americans. To take those expressions lightly is to take lightly the essence and spirit that sustains the people (though all members of a racial or ethnic group will not feel the same connections to the same cultural expressions). Bobby believed that exerting an effort to learn and experience a culture in a deep and meaningful way says something about the morality of the artist and how they value the group identity of the culture being engaged.

Not everyone viewed the process of gaining or demonstrating cultural knowledge like Sarah and Bobby. Justin, a white male, spoke about gaining cultural knowledge as a fun and messy process that requires mistakes and mishaps:

> Justin: Possibly making a fool of yourself at someone else's culture is kind of…it's kind of part of the process really. When you think about it.

> Moderator: What process are you thinking of?

> Justin: Like, trying to understand someone else's culture by doing it, by actually experiencing it. Because that's obviously the more fun way, in my opinion, first of all. And then secondly, you don't know all the rules and everything like that. You just think something is pretty and it might have a lot of meaning to it but that doesn't mean that you

truly understand it, but at least you're going out there and you're trying new things is kind of how I view it. Like you're trying to understand and be a part of it.

Justin sees firsthand experience as a part of learning about other cultures, however, he thinks of exploring other cultures as a messy and fun process, whereas Sarah and Bobby believed that learning about other cultures should be approached seriously and with as few mishaps as possible. Justin's approach centers firsthand experience, not for the sake of gaining an accurate, reflective understanding of the cultural group, but because it is more interesting and fun for the appropriator. Although it is not the goal of this study to compare interpretations between racial groups, Justin has a much more lighthearted approach to learning about culture than Ray, Sarah, and Bobby. What Justin sees as a commendable, fun attempt to learn about others, respondents of color interpreted as neglectful or immoral. Justin's perspective was not representative of the majority of white respondents in the study, but his commentary, when placed in contrast with participants of color, illustrates a possible disconnect between white approaches to cross-cultural interactions versus those of people of color. In some ways, the difference between Justin and Bobby's positions parallels that of the white-dominated media and nonwhite groups who actively speak out against the use of their images for entertainment[8]. Justin's comments demonstrate how whites' sense of exploration and the desire to eat the Other can intrude upon the significant meanings that people of color have for cultural expressions.

Audience cultural knowledge

Respondents often spoke about themselves as a part of a larger general audience and they discussed what the knowledge level of that audience might be and how it may impact interpretations. Whether talking about themselves or a generalized larger audience, participants

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[8] One example of groups speaking out against appropriation include the "We're a Culture, Not a Costume" poster campaign created by students at Ohio University in 2011.

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believed that the audience's familiarity with and knowledge of cultures impacted their reactions and would determine if the video was perceived as appropriative or not. An audience who is unaware of the history of geishas or stereotypes of Asian women as submissive might interpret Katy Perry's performance differently than those who are aware of the stigma associated with such images.

After viewing Coldplay's video, John says, "if you take a festival day, from a culture whose religion we don't understand or maybe have never even seen, you don't even think in those terms. It doesn't bug you a bit." John's comment implies that the audience has to have a shared understanding of the cultural expression before any claims of cultural appropriation can be made. If the audience is not aware that an expression has a deeply rooted history or has been taken out of context, then there is not much chance that they will take issue with it. Ingroup members are the most likely to be knowledgeable about the intended social context for certain expressions and therefore will likely have a different reaction than outgroup members.

Audience studies have shown that groups interpret media in different ways based on their cultural knowledge (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, Banjo 2011). For example, in a study exploring white enjoyment of stereotyped entertainment, Banjo (2011) investigates racialized interpretations of ethnic humor and summarizes other studies on the topic saying, "healthy [antiracist] interpretations of ethnic humor largely depend on the cultural competence of the audience" (141). The author concludes that culturally aware white audiences have more developed interpretations of stereotyped media. Findings such as these imply that 1) audiences' knowledge is important for their consumption and interpretation of media and 2) white cultural knowledge is especially important for preventing the reification of stereotypes. Therefore, John's

assumption that a lack of cultural understanding allows for cultural appropriation to continue unchallenged aligns with academic research.

Participants indicated their own lack of knowledge about cultures but still demonstrated cultural and racial sensitivity, as evidenced by their opposition to cultural appropriation. During some conversations participants themselves mistook Japanese culture for Chinese, stereotyped Indian culture as asexual, or referred to Japanese women as meek or submissive. Still, even with their own misinformed comments, nonwhite respondents felt some sense of solidarity with other nonwhite cultures. Even when they did not know the significance of certain cultural products due to their unfamiliarity with a culture, they still believed that meanings most likely held some significance for the members of the group associated with it and should be approached carefully by outsiders. Sarah demonstrates this when she says, "I mean, I guess personally I'm not offended because I don't know much about this culture and it's not mine, so I can't say I'm offended. But, it does make me feel, it's just kind of off."

One of the benefits of focus groups is that it allows us to observe group processes. I observed how cultural knowledge was shared among group members, and impacted their perceptions of cultural appropriation. As knowledge was exchanged through conversations in the focus group sessions, participants altered their perspectives. In at least two groups, one participant explained the history of geishas or the Holi festival to others and, armed with new information, other participants concluded that Katy Perry's, Coldplay's or Iggy Azalea's performance could be interpreted as offensive. Their improved knowledge about the meanings associated with cultural expressions intensified participants' insistence that artists be knowledgeable of and cautious when engaging other groups. The sharing and (re)production of knowledge made them more critical audiences.

The white respondents in this study can be assumed to have more cultural knowledge

than the average white pop music consumer because they are college-educated, self-selected to

participate in a study on culture, and were partially recruited through the university's student

government, which encourages and at times requires involvement in racial and cultural diversity

initiatives and programming. Their commentary aligned with the nonwhite commentary in this

study in a way that research suggests is not representative of most white Americans, especially in

the colorblind age (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, Rodriguez 2006, Bonilla-Silva 2010). However,

their presence as an informed audience tells us how white cultural proficiency is helpful in

bridging the perspectives of white and nonwhite groups. Cultural proficiency is especially

important for white audiences because they are a part of the dominant group that holds the power

over hegemonic media representations. Banjo writes,

> It seems that a viewer's racial identity as White presumes a biased interpretation of Black
>
> humor that reinforces some Whites' disproportionate perceptions of Blacks (Entman and
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> Rojecki, 2000; Oliver 1999). However, a viewer's disassociation with White racial
>
> identity suggests an informed interpretation—one that is not influenced by White racial
>
> supremacist ideology, but cultural proficiency" (139).

In other words, white audience members who exhibit some level of cultural proficiency (which I

refer to as cultural knowledge) tend to interpret racialized media in a way that counters the

perspectives of average white Americans. In this study, the cultural knowledge of white

participants meant they were more adept at recognizing stereotypes as false generalizations and

were sensitive to the idea that racial and cultural groups might take issue with white artists

utilizing their culture for entertainment purposes. The responses of both white and nonwhite

participants here show that being an informed audience and consumer can inhibit the reification

of stereotypes and possibly the proliferation of cultural appropriation in pop culture media images.

Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes and Pop Culture

Some research on race and pop culture investigates the frequency of racial representations in entertainment media—how many groups are represented in media and at what rate (Kidd 2014; SAG 2000). Other research investigates how traditional racial stereotypes (such as the angry black woman, black male criminal, effeminate Asian male, oversexed Latina woman, or savage American Indian) have been repackaged and presented in new ways (Park et. al 2009, Muhammad 2012, Oh 2012). Race scholars are interested in media stereotypes because they communicate racial meanings to the masses. For example, critical race scholars Picca and Feagin (2006) define the white racial frame as a system of racialized meanings that white Americans (and many people of color) use to understand society. Within the white racial frame, stereotyped knowledge and images as well as racial understandings and interpretations are imbedded in white minds. The representations of nonwhite people in the media help inform this stereotyped knowledge and racial understanding. Studies find that although there are more alternative and positive racial representations offered to audiences today, stereotypical portrayals have not disappeared from TV, film, or other forms of media. Stereotypes can be found even within media that centers minorities or presents multiracial or multiethnic characters or casts (Nama 2003, Banjo 2011). Cultural appropriation in media may be perceived by some audiences as progressive and colorblind because it displays people reaching across racial or ethnic lines, however, appropriation often makes use of stereotypes.

Participants in this study had the feeling that diversity in media had increased, but stereotypes were still pervasive. Black participants like Darnell felt that Black people were still relegated to limited portrayals in mainstream media.

> Darnell: Ah, I mean in the TV I've noticed that a lot more shows are including the main character as Black. Like *Empire*, like some of those shows, somewhat have a negative connotations towards black people. So…there's some things that's good, like *Luke Cage* where they show a black superhero…so some of it's good but some is still pretty bad.

Black respondents almost always mentioned that they felt racial diversity was more visible today than in the past, but they were concerned that Black representation was still more negative than white representation on average. They often pointed to the proliferation of reality television or the marginalization of positive Black media to only a few cable channels or the internet. Their hunch that despite more representation, Black portrayals are still limited is in line with current research (Gitlin 1979, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Hughey 2009).

In a study of television ads, Crockett (2008) found that many TV commercials emphasize the "consumption of the other" (p. 255) for white consumers. Commercials in his study were comprised of various Black expressions but appeared to be targeting *white* audiences. In other words, the commercials presented stereotypical and symbolic Blackness as something to be bought and consumed by the white mainstream, a diversity commodity. Crockett found that most of the commercials employed stereotypes about African Americans and he concluded that although there is much to be gained by introducing white audiences to cultural representations of minorities, the TV commercials in his study work to essentialize stereotypes and commodify and appropriate culture.

Studies have shown that whites enjoy media with stereotypical black characters. Krestsedemas (2010) examined audience responses to the portrayal of the "angry black woman"

trope on a popular TV show. While the participants in the study agreed that there were no positive depictions of Black women on the show, they still did not see it as a racial issue and they enjoyed the program. He writes that the study led to "a paradoxical conclusion: there were no positive depictions of Black women… and some of these depictions clearly were racial stereotypes, but this ultimately had nothing to do with race or racism" (Krestsedemas 2010, p.169). His paradoxical findings emphasize the complexity of racial portrayals in the colorblind age as well as pointing to whites' affinity for consuming (exaggerated) representations of Black life. These findings become more intriguing when we consider that a vast majority of representations of minorities in popular media are stereotypical and are being promoted for consumption by white audiences (Fueller 2010)—similar to the era of minstrelsy and vaudeville (Kidd 2014). If white audiences are shown to have an affinity for stereotypes, then it is not surprising that these images are the ones that selected for media displays because they are the most recognizable. Fuller (2010) adds,

> The problem with the stranglehold popular culture has over dictating the way that the populace "knows" people of color is that for people who have very little real, interpersonal experience with individuals from these groups, they can believe in an essentialist vision composed of every stereotype and myth promoted (127).

Popular culture also promotes the idea that nonwhite culture can be commodified for white consumption.

The content analysis found that stereotypes were present in every music video in the sample. Content analysis coders found that overall, the videos included the following common stereotypes: India as a slum, Indian people as impoverished but carefree, Indian people as majestic or overly spiritual, Japanese women as delicate or geishas, Latino people as sexual and

criminal, and Black people as intrinsically tied to hip hop and materialism. These stereotypes are common tropes about various racial/ethnic groups and were displayed by different artists in different ways. Participants in the study provided their perceptions and interpretations of these stereotypes and others in the music videos and in pop culture generally.

Because two videos in the study used India as a backdrop to the video, Indian stereotypes were discussed frequently by all groups. In a Black focus group, Derek and Roselyn describes what they saw to be stereotypical:

Derek: She just showed like just like what everybody thinks about India so.

Moderator: Which is what?

Derek: Like the belly dancing and just like the, the new type of like music and vibes they have.

Taylor: It just seems like she mocked it. Mocked the clothes, the culture...

Roselyn: She didn't like try to immerse herself, she kind of just like went on the internet.

Taylor: Like, "oh, these outfits are cute!"…

Roselyn: Stereotypes.

Taylor: "…I want to wear these. I'm gonna learn how to do the [dance moves]."

Roselyn: It looked like she just literally went off the typical stereotype with the colors and the elephant and the old men like (laughs) doing whatever they do and kind of just didn't even try to show their culture at all.

Derek, Taylor, and Roselyn assumed that Iggy Azalea's use of Indian stereotypes was linked to her lack of effort to immerse herself in the culture. They perceived the images she utilized to be one-dimensional and assumed that any research she had done was surface-level and resulted in her presenting common misbeliefs about Indian people. In a white focus group, Zack also detailed Indian stereotypes used in the Coldplay video:

Zack: Whenever they were going to the streets it was just like, let's see how many exaggerated Indian elements that we can show.

Hannah: Right.

Moderator: What were some of the things you felt were exaggerated?

Zack: I'd imagine it's normally more, like actual India, is much more crowded, and there's a lot more normal people walking around. Like every shot that they had was…like the monk that was like balancing on the pole next to the other one, the one of him playing music… As an American, I'm thinking like "What do I think of when I think of India?," then it's like, that's what they're showing.

Zack's analysis of the Coldplay's video coincides with Derek's description of Azalea's in that both videos are said to endorse the existing stereotypes Americans believe are true about life in India. Instead of presenting new, nuanced, or profound information about Indian culture to the American audience, the video confirmed what audiences already believe. Participants cautioned against these misrepresentations in pop videos because of their wide-reaching impact. According to Bobby, images and stereotypes mattered because "that may be a misrepresentation. And even if it's not, you're still broadcasting stereotypes of a group of individuals through one of the biggest music videos in the world."

In the Latino focus group, Sarah and Joaquin responded to an excerpt of Lana del Rey's video *Gods and Monsters,* which depicted stereotypes of Latino Americans, specifically the Cholo subculture. Lana del Rey, who was born as Elizabeth Woolridge Grant and formerly performed under moniker Lizzy Grant, released a 30 minute short film titled *Tropico,* featuring music written and performed by her. The film excerpt that is the video for the song *Gods and Monsters* featured del Rey as an exotic dancer and her male partner as the head of a gang of Cholos—Latino gang members, usually Mexican or Mexican American, in Los Angeles who are

stereotyped as wearing tank tops visible under button down plaid shirts with only the top button buttoned, khaki pants or shorts, and high knee socks with house shoes or sandals.

> Moderator: So she has been one of the artists that has been kind of called out in the media because of what you just said, that she's a white artist portraying this kind of Latina gangster culture. Do you find that offensive? Do you find that she used stereotypes?

> Sarah: Oh yeah... let's start the checklist of stereotypes! One by one. I feel like she literally did that...

> Joaquin: Yeah she did *all* of the stereotypes (chuckles)

> Sarah: I mean, that's not a culture that…even though it's "Latina"… that's not like the culture but in America, that's what Latino culture is. Negatively portrayed, I guess.

> Moderator: Okay, so give me some kind of specific things, that specifically you think [were stereotypes].

> Joaquin: The main frame actually… the whole car, with the hydraulics in it. The guys with the guns and the tattoos... (chuckles)

> Sarah: I mean, the tear marks are from any culture, but pretty much symbolizes that you've killed people.

> Joaquin: Um, and yeah, like the fact that there was a lot of women there, you know, in the club dancing or stripping.

Neither Sarah and Joaquin identified as Mexican, however, they were able to detail examples of stereotypes associated with Cholos. They were keenly aware that although they considered del Rey's video to be obviously stereotypical and exaggerated, it would be viewed as accurate by others. Joaquin went on to connect the stereotypical displays in the video to real life acts of discrimination against Latino people in America.

Joaquin: I was actually thinking that, yeah, American culture portrays Latinos, especially the Cholos, like these... I don't know, monsters. And from that, a lot of people that get deported from LA to their home country… that actually, that gives a very bad impression of people that yeah, these people are actually monsters. That's the first thing that I could see like, "Wow, this is terrible ..." (chuckles)

Sarah: Yeah. Just having the name of the song with the lyrics and how it's being portrayed. I'm like, "That's not helpful." It's a difference if you're in that culture and you are talking about your culture. And there's positive and negatives… But when you're outside of a culture, that's a very fine line.

Joaquin argues that the media images of Cholos as monsters and unwanted people in American media impacts how they are seen in real life. He argues that being seen negatively in media impacts how Latinos are viewed in the general public and the negative labels (monster, criminal, etc.) follow them no matter where they go. He also hints that the misrepresentation of Latino people can be used as a justification for deportation. Sarah believes that Lana del Rey's social position outside of Latina culture makes her display of stereotypes more distressing.

Unequal Stigma

The final finding related to stereotypes was the varying impact of stereotypes for artists versus the members of the nonwhite groups they borrow from. Participants made the intriguing argument that the same stereotypes that were being displayed by the mostly white artists in the videos for entertainment are simultaneously perceived as negative or undesirable when displayed by members of the originating group. In other words, the same things that are seen as beautiful, interesting, edgy, or intriguing on white pop stars are used to discredit, marginalize, or discriminate against the everyday nonwhite person. Roselyn's commentary highlights this point:

Roselyn: I feel like for pop culture, fashion-wise, a lot of stuff that is pop culture in that certain category is from us but we don't get the credit because when we do it it's like

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"oh." You know? But then when white people do it, it's like this new fashion trend but we've been doing that. So I feel like we do have pop culture, but like we don't get the credit for it or it's only glorified when it's for people not of color…kinda like appropriation...

Aaryn: So you think it's appropriation that is popular rather than diversity?

Roselyn: Yeah, I feel like they appropriate our stuff but then like when we do, it it's just like seen as, you know [shrugs her shoulder] but if they do it, then it's like [seen as better].

The idea that cultural expressions are perceived as better or more acceptable on white bodies than nonwhite bodies is an important yet overlooked aspect of cultural appropriation. Roselyn and others felt that Black expressions on white bodies were perceived as more appropriate by the public. For example, during a discussion about the "discovery" and renaming of hairstyles in the media, Dee mentions that a Black braiding technique called cornrows is sometimes referred to by different names, e.g. boxer braids, by the white-dominated media. In response, Mack says, "it doesn't matter what they call it. *You're* going to be looked at as ghetto if you wear it." In this exchange Mack is noting that although the hairstyle originated with Black culture, it is stigmatized when worn by Black people in a way that does not happen when worn by white people. She is also implicitly noting that even if the white public called cornrows by its original name, it would still be seen as "ghetto" on Dee versus a white person. Dee and Mack's conversation suggests that respondents are aware that the power differential between white and Black people benefits whites in such a way that even the same cultural expressions garner different reactions from society.

Noelle uses the topic of hair to provide an eloquent description of how navigating the stigma of Black hair is a point of trepidation or concern for Black women in public spaces like school and work, while the same styles became a source of beauty or esteem for white women:

> I remember I wanted my hair to be silky straight and long. I wish my hair would flow like the white girls or like some of the other girls in my school where they had the nice long hair and stuff like that. And it's just, I don't know, like seeing people, white people just turn it into something like that's [theirs] ... Like there are still people now… this girl got kicked out of school because her hair is too big. We can't go to work because you supposed to keep your hair-

> Rainey: "Neat."

> Noelle:-Yes. And can't wear dreads. You can't wear dreads. You can get fired from a job for wearing dreads. Like this is my hair. My hair can't straighten like yours because when I start to straighten it, it's unhealthy. So I don't know, I just feel that especially as a Black woman, finally starting to wear my natural hair out… it's such a sight to see how white people can just like snatch our pride away, and just make it into their own. And then it's just like, wow. And *y'all* [white people] still are praised for it, and we're still getting bashed.

Noelle passionately described her experiences dealing with the politics of hair as a Black woman. In parts of her commentary not shared here she also mentioned skin tone and discussed instances from her adolescence when she would avoid sunlight in hopes of not getting darker because she had been indoctrinated with the idea that dark skin was unattractive—a feeling that she constantly juxtaposed with overhearing her white classmates brag about tanning in order to be darker and more attractive. Noelle's examples of hair and skin tone illustrate how behaviors and cultural expressions are seen differently when presented by different racial ethnic groups. Nonwhite cultural expressions are not considered valid until they are endorsed by whiteness, even if that expression has been in existence long before a white person engaged it. Moreover,

Noelle notes, that there are real-life consequences, such losing a job or being disciplined at school, that exist for Black people who engage in their own cultural expressions, while simultaneously white people are allowed to use those same expressions without facing stigma. The ability for white artists to remain relatively free from stigma and discrimination when displaying Black and other nonwhite cultural expressions is a testament to white privilege and the power of hegemonic whiteness as in media and everyday life.

Conclusion

Social researchers have shown that the media serves as a site for white people, who usually have little interactions with people of color, to learn about other cultures. Researchers have also shown that the media propagates misrepresentations of minority groups, despite an increase in minority representation. These findings suggest that white media consumers may perceive minority representations in unintended ways and take stereotypical depictions as literal and accurate reflections of minority cultures (Shively 1992, Entman and Rojecki 2000, Hughes 2004, Strong 2004, Park et. al 2006, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Crockett 2008, Hughey 2009, Caspi and Elias 2010, Fueller 2010, Ghandnoosh 2010, Hylton 2010, Roy 2010, Carrington 2013). Based on previous literature and the analysis of responses in this study, I propose that when white record executives, video directors, or artists choose to depict nonwhite culture in their music videos, they likely choose reductive, stereotypical, or misguided images to represent entire racial and ethnic groups because: 1) they believe these images are accurate based on their lack of cultural knowledge as informed by their own consumption and internalization of the images in the white-dominated media, and 2) they choose images that are easily recognizable to the mainstream white audience because they are commonly circulated. As a result, when white artists choose to portray nonwhite culture in their videos, they extract cultural expressions from

their original context and base their portrayal on generalized misconceptions. This cycle strengthens racial misbeliefs and provides justifications for cultural racism by promoting inaccurate images.

Artists whom research participants saw as appropriators were also seen as lacking cultural knowledge. Similarly, respondents argued that the general audience's level of cultural knowledge, as well as their own level of knowledge as study participants, impacted their understanding of the significance of the cultural symbols used in music in videos. However, participants still opposed appropriation despite of their own lack of knowledge about the meanings of specific cultural expressions. In other words, not knowing what an expression meant to another group did not make appropriation more acceptable in their eyes. Still, respondents believed that general audiences will overlook appropriation if they have no understanding of the original, intended context. Cultural knowledge, and preferably experiences with other cultures, is essential in order to avoid committing cultural appropriation and for audiences to spot when it occurs. Because media is a source of information for audiences, the presentation of stereotypes under the guise of colorblind cultural exchange allows homogenizing misconceptions to go unchallenged, which provides justification for real-life marginalization and discrimination against minorities. This discrimination upholds a system that protects white interests and keeps whites atop the racial hierarchy.

Chapter V: SYMBOLIC AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES IN POP CULTURE

"We have a bottom line understanding of everybody's culture, which is why a lot of minorities are able to get away with certain sharings... White people are not because they have been the main people judging and disrespecting those cultures." – Dee, 20 year old Black female

No matter if the outcome is seen as desirable or undesirable, the act of cultural appropriation is an act of crossing symbolic and social boundaries. Sociologists use the concept of symbolic boundaries to describe "the conceptual distinctions individuals draw, reproduce, and subvert in order to classify the groups, objects, and practices that constitute their world" (Appelrouth and Kelly 2013:302). People come to agree on shared meanings based on symbolic boundaries which promote feelings of similarity and membership among them. Social boundaries are "forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities." (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168). In essence, symbolic boundaries normalize or enforce social boundaries along the lines of class, race/ethnicity, or gendered expressions. For example, one's taste in and knowledge of wine can be seen as a symbol to indicate if someone is middle or upper class versus lower class. The privileged draw and maintain social boundaries between middle/upper class and lower class groups so that middle and upper classes have access to more social prestige, resources, and status on average. Symbolic boundaries such as music genres, dance styles, or styles of dress are also associated with racial or ethnic groups. Since race is a hierarchy, those symbolic boundaries say something about the social boundaries set for racial and ethnic groups. For instance, having a preference for rap and hip hop is associated with Black Americans and is therefore associated with the social stigmas that accompany that racial group (poverty, violence, sexual promiscuity, etc.). However, when cultural appropriation occurs, say a white artist engages rap or hip hop

culture, symbolic boundaries are crossed in a way that brings the social boundaries of race and ethnicity into question.

Sociologists know a lot about the ways people maintain social boundaries in social institutions such as schools (Carter 2005), labor markets (Roediger 1991), families (Osuji 2013), and neighborhoods (Massey and Denton 1993). This work helps us to understand how various racial and cultural groups work to reinforce or reproduce boundaries in order to maintain group identity or gather and protect social resources (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Much like schools, labor markets, and neighborhoods, popular culture impacts and is impacted by processes of racialization—the process of connecting racial meanings to people, places, things, or behaviors (Jacobson 2015). Although the subfield is growing, sociologists know less about how racial and cultural boundaries are created, maintained, interpreted, and resisted in the realm of popular culture. It is important to advance this knowledge because media produces hegemonic ideas of race as well as allows for marginalized groups to resist (Dirks and Mueller 2002, Lamont and Molnár 2002, Appelrouth and Kelly 2013, Jacobson 2015).

Most participants in this study often introduced the concept of social boundaries. While most spoke about it implicitly, some explicitly spoke about boundaries by using words such as "us," "them," "mine," "we," "ours," theirs," and even "borrow" and "take" in response to the images in music videos. Their language and conversations indicate that they understand cultural expressions and ethnic symbols as belonging to or being created by distinct racial groups, and they discuss if, when, and how outgroup members can or should interact with other cultures based on existing social boundaries.

Theorizing Social and Cultural Boundaries

According to Lamont and Molnár, "cultural sociologists center their attention on how boundaries are shaped by context, and particularly by the cultural repertoires, traditions, and narratives that individuals have access to" (2002:171). Cultural sociologists specifically rely on the concept of homology, which is the notion that boundaries between groups usually fall in line with the cultural expressions each group produces (Roy 2002). So, cultural expressions and traditions (e.g. hairstyles, dialect, food, music, dance, dress, social values, etc.) are signals used by group members to specify who belongs and who does not belong in certain racial, gender, or economic categories. Roy (2002) refers to these symbolic expressions as "aesthetic identity," where a group uses elements of culture to distinguish their group from others and solidify group identity. Participant discussions in this study recognized aesthetic identities as being bounded to certain racial and cultural groups but they did not see those boundaries as impermeable.

Music has been a marker of group distinction either in terms of class as discussed by Bourdieu (1984) who distinguishes between high art (e.g. classical music) and low art (e.g. popular music) as belonging to upper and lower class groups. DuBois's (1997[1903]) investigation of music describes it as a form of resistance and identity for enslaved and newly freed Black Americans. Roy states, "different audiences have preferences for different artists and musical genres, and conversely those genres often help constitute boundaries between groups" (Roy 2002:461). No matter the order of the relationship, music is thought to be bounded to racial and ethnic groups such that hip hop is Black, country is white, salsa is Latina, and Bollywood is Indian (Appelrouth and Kelly 2013; Campbell 2004; Mann 2008). It is important to emphasize that I do not claim that all members of a racial group embrace the same aesthetic identity. However, people are aware that they are a part of racial or ethnic groups that are associated with

specific musical genres or other cultural expressions and they often show pride for their group by engaging in those expressions. Moreover, regardless of people's individual preferences, members of society ascribe them to cultures based on their race and interacts with them based on that assumption.

Musical artists' use of aesthetic identities in American pop culture—a majority-white but still multi-ethnic space—signals to audiences that they are a member of or are knowledgeable about certain groups. However, history has shown us that whites participating in nonwhite culture has not coincided with significant changes in racism, only in how racism is spoken about (Bonilla-Silva 2010, Jacobson 2015). Studies show that white hip hop concert-goers or white hip hop dancers still hold essentialist and racist perspectives, despite engaging in racialized cultural creations. (Rodriguez 2006, Ghandnoosh 2010). In this chapter, I introduce findings about how symbols of aesthetic identity and racial boundaries are interpreted and discussed by pop culture consumers. I revisit the existing literature on boundaries and apply it to the realm of popular culture music. I then present and analyze participant discussions which demonstrate how some consumers of pop culture think of and discuss boundaries between racial and ethnic groups.

Identifying Boundaries

Participants in this study noticed the crossing of racial boundaries and at times spoke about this without any prompting from the moderator. For instance, in the Latino focus group Joaquin says,

> The music [Coldplay] video actually had two artists from different backgrounds in terms
> of music and stuff. But at the same time, they actually didn't have anything to do with the
> Indian culture. And the fact that I saw that right away when I was seeing the video at
> first, that really gave me that uncomfortable feeling that something's wrong again.

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Emma says something similar in a white focus group:

> I just thought it was really interesting, 'cause it was the two actual singers and famous people, it was a white male and a black woman, and Beyoncé had henna on her to make her look very much like she was from India, or almost made her to look like a goddess almost, but she isn't a part of that culture. Which, didn't really make sense to me, so I was a little confused by that.

Neither Joaquin or Emma identified as Black or Indian but still detected the crossing of boundaries, and although they could not articulate why they felt the crossing of boundaries was wrong or awkward, they noted that it made them uncomfortable and confused. Black respondents such as Sofia also noticed this, but used their own experiences as the reference for understanding why other nonwhite groups might oppose the crossing of racial and ethnic boundaries.

> Sofia: I think for me it's like ... I'm obviously not Indian, I'm not Asian so I can't relate to it, I can't say like 'That's my culture,' but I can definitely relate to the appropriation if that makes sense.

Joaquin, Emma, Sofia, and others recognized that ethnic boundaries were being crossed, which suggested that these boundaries were noticeable and hold crossing them holds some type of meaning for them.

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) theorized that boundaries do not weaken as a result of increased contact as would be expected. He argues, "cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence" and claims that the increased interaction or proximity of different ethnic groups (i.e. at school, work, home, etc.) will not eradicate the existence of social boundaries (Barth 1969:10). Rather, more interaction increases the need for group

members to signal membership to one another (and as a result exclusion to others) which then serves to stabilize boundaries between groups (Barth 1969, Osuji 2013).

"Us" versus "Them" Rhetoric

White use of nonwhite culture in media can potentially heighten the desire for nonwhite groups to reclaim their cultural symbols in order to reify the difference between "us" and "them." Keeping in mind that cultural appropriation often entirely excludes the originating group, I argue racial group distinctions are reinforced by ingroup members, not as a way to essentialize, but as a way to protect group identity and to determine who is an ally and who is not. Barth (1969) also speaks to this when he writes,

> The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game', and this means that there is between them a potential for diversification and expansion of their social relationship to cover eventually all different sectors and domains of activity. On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest. (Barth 1969:15)

Therefore, ingroup members make the determination about who truly holds the same shared meanings, values, and understandings, which is usually done by abiding social constructions of "us" versus them." (Lamont and Molnár 2002, Roy 2002, Roy and Dowd 2010, Osuji 2013). Osuji (2013) reiterates this point saying,

boundaries divide "us" from "them" and are a way of creating distinction and order in multi-ethnic social spaces. They are both internally and externally determined with actors signaling their identification to members and nonmembers of their racial categories (180).

Even when Black respondents were not a member of the nonwhite culture being displayed in the video, they still drew distinctions between white and nonwhite groups. For example, in response to Hakim who saw the Indian theme in Coldplay's video as a positive step toward diversity, Derek directly spoke about it as an "invasion."

> Hakim: I like how they use the Indian festival of color. That was a good choice because it represents everybody trying to make more diverse music and stuff and so it was good they used a cultural theme.
>
> Derek: I recognized that they invaded somebody else's culture. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but they stepped into someone else's culture.
>
> Moderator: So you said you [Hakim] think it's a good thing that they are using other images or cultures, and then on the other hand you [Derek] interpreted it as an invasion in a way?
>
> Derek: Yeah. I don't know if that's bad or good, but it's an invasion.
>
> Moderator: So what makes it seem like an invasion?
>
> Derek: Because I mean that's clearly not their culture because we know they're both Americans, Beyoncé and Coldplay. They're… the video was shot somewhere, it looks like it's in India and that's not their home, so I guess that it's clear that that's not their country.

Hakim was not the only one to have a positive interpretation of the Coldplay video (which is a British not American band). As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported the video was the least problematic of all videos shown. However, many respondents also echoed Derek's sentiments and noted the crossing of racial and ethnic

boundaries (in this videos and others) as conspicuous, uncomfortable, or unacceptable. Joaquin also highlights this in the Latino focus group, saying, "to me, it kind of feels that it's not right if you're not that culture, or maybe, *maybe* if you've been to the culture or the place, then maybe yeah." Here we see that, although Derek and Joaquin are not a part of the culture being portrayed, they still hold fast to ideas of social boundaries. Derek does not see himself as a part of the Indian community, but his use of the word "invasion" suggests he sees the artists as outsiders entering a space that is not theirs. Joaquin felt uneasy about the crossing of boundaries, although he admitted to not knowing a lot about the culture being appropriated. These reactions are representative of how most nonwhite participants felt.

DeNora (2000) has produced some of the leading work on the meanings embedded in music and its impact on constructing identity. Through her work, DeNora (2000) finds that individuals often use music to help construct a self-identity, an understanding of "me." Listening to music can either help this "me" transcend groups of people by creating a sense of solitude, such as the act of listening to music at home in one's room or through headphones on a busy subway, or it can help the "me" understand how it relates to others through comparisons with those who do or do not have similar musical tastes. According to Roy and Dowd (2010) "groups likewise use music as a tool for building an identity—an 'us.' Music is identified by people inside (and outside) the group as belonging to it, and membership in the group is marked partly by embracing the music" (Roy and Dowd 2010:190). The sense of "us" is strengthened when groups come to see music as a signifier of their group similarities as well as their group plight— much like African Americans have traditionally done with slave spirituals and more recently with hip-hop (Roy and Dowd 2010, Appelrouth and Kelly 2013). Roy and Dowd (2010) stress the importance of sociologists investigating the role of music in constructing group identity

saying they should pay particular attention to "music's role in the defining of 'me versus not-me' and 'us versus them'" (Roy and Dowd 2010:190). Black participants in this study did not use "us" and "them" frequently, but they did make it clear that they saw certain musical styles and genres as being bound to specific groups and they saw themselves and other nonwhite groups as belonging to groups that are different than the white artists in the videos.

Responses to Iggy Azalea and Riff Raff particularly sparked these conversations, given that they are white rappers and that rap is associated with Black and U.S. Latino American culture. Azalea was seen as attempting to be an ingroup member or implying that she should be granted access to the ingroup, in this case hip hop and, by proxy, Blackness. Ray goes on to explain how common these occurrences are:

Ray: I feel like at this point of time, we're used to seeing people who aren't of color try to place themselves in the mix of the culture.

Jazzy: Yeah.

Ray: …so it's kind of like 'oh you've seen another white rapper try to be black' and maybe turn your head, you know? [he shrugs his shoulders]

Artists in this study such as Iggy Azalea and Katy Perry were criticized more than others because participants felt they failed to acknowledge their outsider status or successfully demonstrate their insider status. Respondents would often say Iggy Azalea was "doing too much" or "trying too hard," common Black American colloquialisms meaning she was excessively, and unsuccessfully, trying to look cool or fit in. Ray, Vanessa, and Tasha highlight this point in two different focus groups:

Ray: I mean I have a couple of her songs, but I just felt like she kind of tries too hard. I

mean, I don't care about you being form Australia. I don't care that you want to be around

Black people, you know. Learn about Black people. I feel like she just pushes a little bit

too much. She tries a bit too hard.

Vanessa and Tasha have a similar exchange in a separate focus group:

Moderator: So it's fine with you that she's rapping?

Vanessa: This still... this whole thing though, is still not okay. But if she was a better

rapper and didn't try to bla... [pauses] I feel like she just tries so hard to fit in with us. If

she didn't try so hard and if she didn't try to change the way she talks…

Tasha: Yeah.

Vanessa: …it'd be fine.

Tasha: We don't all...we don't sound like that.

Vanessa: Exactly.

Tasha: Some, but no. That ain't it...

Vanessa: *imitating Iggy Azalea's voice* Bounce. [group laughter]

Tasha: *imitating Iggy Azalea's voice* Shake that shit! Shake that shit! [group laughter]

The conclusions that Iggy "pushes a bit too much" and "just tries too hard to fit in with

us" is rooted in the fact that she is an outsider disseminating the cultural cues or signals used by

the ingroup. Ray, Vanessa, and Tasha are reinforcing boundaries that serve to exclude Azalea

because of what they perceive to be her misinformed and poor performance. The boundary is

also reinforced when Vanessa, Tasha, and the rest of their group laugh at Iggy Azalea's attempt

to sound like "us," in other words sound Black. Their laughter solidifies their positions as

ingroup members with one another. They are able to laugh and mock her voice because they are

ingroup members who share an understanding of the diversity in Black dialect and vernacular

and find humor in her failed attempts to belong.

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Vanessa and Tasha's observation of Azalea's dialect as a performance of blackness parallels existing sociolinguistic literature, which argues that language is imbued with racialized meanings and the use of language sends signals about race to audiences. It has been argued in both academia and the public discourse that Azalea's use of African American English (AAE), also known as a "blaccent," is a form of figurative blackface (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015; Guo 2016). Although she does not darken her skin, AAE is an aesthetic identity that she boldly and obviously uses to mimic stereotypical portrayals of Black people (Black women in hip hop specifically) in an effort to reach across symbolic boundaries and "black-ify" her music for profit (Cooper 2014; Eberhardt and Freeman 2015).

Iggy Azalea was also criticized because she was attempting to cross multiple racial boundaries at once. Both participants and content analysis coders made mention that Azalea's voice imitates those of southern Black rappers, while her music video centered her, dressed in a sari, doing Indian-influenced dance moves in an Indian town, surrounded by Indian people. Carlton introduces this point and is joined by Lolo and Zo:

> Carlton: Iggy, she was trying to be too different, like two cultures... trying to be like black but at the same time...
>
> Moderator: Oh, so two cultures different than what you think she is?
>
> Carlton: Yes…
>
> Moderator: So for you Iggy is a little worse [than Katy Perry] because she's rapping *and* she did the Indian theme?
>
> Carlton: Not even that she's just rapping, it's the *way* she's rapping.
>
> Moderator: So specifically what is it that bothers you about her rap style?
>
> Lolo: Once again like I said, it's just not natural. I personally don't really know much

about Australia. What I do know is the way *I* speak and the way the people around me

speak. She came into the scene with like the stereotypical rap sound that not even a lot of

rappers even have themselves.

Zo: And then everything that she raps about. She can't rap either, I'm sorry (laughs).

Carlton: Yeah. Like when she said 'dat' [imitates Iggy's voice], I can tell you that

Australians don't sound like that (laughs).

Lolo: I have heard Australian accents and like whether it be in movies ...And actually

like I said, I watch a lot of YouTube. I even watch Australians, and it's like that's not

natural. That's not how they come off as. And it's just like you're playing so hard into a

persona that's not really even common with most people where you even got the idea

from. You're doing that plus you're adding it with the Indian theme, it's... It just kind of

makes it overwhelming.

Carlton, Lolo, and Zo once again are noting the differences between Azalea's race, nationality,

and the Indian and Black aesthetic identities she displays in her performance. Lolo, much like

Vanessa and Tasha, is relying on her understanding of her own group's speech and dialect to

reinforce the difference between her group and Azalea's and to explain why Azalea is not

successfully able to cross boundaries. Existing literature also reminds us that although whiteness

is the norm, it is still a racial identity which has signals that dictate in and outgroup behavior

(Osuji 2013). Therefore, Azalea is also crossing the boundaries of whiteness and although it was

not investigated in this study, previous literature suggests she could face sanctions from other

whites in the U.S. or Australians for "trying to be Black." (Morrissey 2011; Osuji 2013).

Nonwhite participants in the study did believe that positive results could come from

crossing racial boundaries, even if appropriation was present. Hakim believed that having white,

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well-known celebrities traveling to other places and engaging other cultures could financially benefit the communities being portrayed and could encourage people to learn more about a culture they know little about:

> Hakim: I already didn't think it was bad because like regardless of the fact that they [Coldplay and Beyoncé] are not Indian or nothing, this brought money because you have to pay the area to set up and record and all that, so this brought money to the area regardless of the fact if it was, you know, all the money from the video went to them, they still brought money to the area. They also brought like knowledge and exposure to this culture. So it's like there were upsides to them showing this in here and then like the fact that like a lot of artists who do that ... They like to immerse themselves in the culture, it's like a newer thing. Like if you're gonna play the part of something that you're not, you kind of like study it or you, you'll go there and just be one of them until you can better portray it in the movie.

It may be true that that communities are paid for their participation in videos or that audiences decide to research new cultures when they are exposed to them through their favorite artists. However, I think Hakim's interpretation is based on the optimistic assumption that artists are spending significant time with and gaining knowledge about a place or community while they are filming their videos. In some ways Hakim's assertions have been proven true, as is the case with the video which circulated showing Beyoncé having a firsthand experience, spending time with and being taught by Indian people. This video silenced some of the accusations of appropriation against Beyoncé because it showed that in preparation for the video, she experienced Indian culture under the guidance of Indian people. On the other hand, the use of stereotypes, the lack of inclusion, and the misrepresentation of certain fashions, dance styles, etc.

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that were also displayed in the videos in this study suggest that artists are still more than likely engaging in shallow interactions with other cultures, if any at all.

Ownership

As discussed in chapter three, in colonialism, when boundaries between nations are crossed and there is an imbalance of power, one nation comes to dominate another. Similarly, an interpersonal approach to analyzing boundaries suggests outsider participation in ingroups can allow for the member of the more dominant or powerful group to explicitly or implicitly claim familiarity or rights to the cultural products of the less dominant group (Barth 1969; Quijano 2000; Rogers 2006). In the content analysis, I operationalized ownership to reflect a music video where the artist is presented as though they are a part of the ingroup of the culture or racial group being centered (Kopano 2014). That is, the video centers the artist displaying aesthetics or expressions of a racial or cultural group different than their own to the extent that the artist appears to be as familiar with, or more familiar with, the culture as compared to ingroup members (e.g. Azalea wearing a sari and doing Bollywood). All of the music videos in this study were found to display some level of ownership, according to the content analysis, with some having more clear or egregious examples than others. In addition to artists being portrayed as belonging to the culture, some videos also lacked significant inclusion of ingroup members. Content analysis coders found videos from Iggy Azalea, Katy Perry, Riff Raff, Selena Gomez, and Lana del Rey to display the starkest images of ownership. Study participants also noted this trend.

For example, throughout her entire video, Iggy Azalea is dressed in traditional Indian garb while participating in Indian dances. She is shown dancing comfortably and singing in

Indian neighborhoods alone or, when she is shown with others, she is physically placed in the center or above Indian people in the frame. Azalea is never depicted as being invited by, taught by, or led by Indian people. Moreover, while many Indian faces are present, they are not given significant camera time or speaking roles, and some even stared into the camera with somber expressions while Azalea smiled and danced around them. Coders and participants found these images served to portray Azalea as an important ingroup member of Indian culture, or even as socially superior to Indian people. For example, she was centered in every frame of the video, wore adorned headpieces, and was often placed physically above the Indian people in the scene. She was not presented as an outsider sincerely learning about the cultural group. Similar findings were found with Selena Gomez's live performance where she wore a chunni (scarf) and bindi and used Indian customs such as the "Namaste" pose (meaning greetings or respect). Unlike Azalea, Gomez performed with mostly white-passing dancers, which coders interpreted as adding to the sense of ownership displayed due to the exclusion of Indian performers.

Katy Perry and Lana del Rey's videos also displayed images of ownership. Albeit stereotypical displays, both artists dressed and interacted with cultural artifacts associated with the Japanese and Latino cultures they were engaging in and there was little equity in the inclusion of ingroup members. While Perry appeared to use mostly Black and white-passing background dancers for her Japanese-themed performance, del Rey included Latino people, but solely as extras or backdrops. Moreover, del Rey was framed as a leader of a Latino gang. Despite the lacking presence of visible ingroup members, Perry heavily infused Japanese architecture, instrumentation, dance styles, dress, and styling in her performance. Lana del Rey's use of Catholic symbolism and stereotypical Mexican-American gangster aesthetics portrayed a familiarity with or equal ownership of Latino or cholo culture in her performance. The centering

of the artists, the notable exclusion of Japanese people, and the use of stereotypical Latino roles is indicative of cultural appropriation in that the artist is portrayed as successfully crossing a cultural and racial boundary and as a result having the right to be at the center of another group's cultural expressions with very little inclusion of ingroup members. The freedom for these white artists to make themselves at home with nonwhite culture and exclude members of the culture is indicative of the privileges of whiteness.

Hymn for the Weekend was also found to display images of ownership, but in a more nuanced way than the videos mentioned above. Coders discovered that the main sources of ownership were found in scenes featuring Beyoncé. Unlike the members of Coldplay, Beyoncé was dressed in Indian influenced garb and henna and was not shown interacting with Indian people. While Coldplay shared screen time with Indian people, Beyoncé was shown engaging in Indian cultural expressions alone. She was also presented as a Bollywood star whom Indian people were flocking to see on screen. This suggests that not only was she a part of the ingroup but also occupied a high social position within the social hierarchy. Without Beyoncé's scenes, coders found the Coldplay video to display very few images of ownership and to have more meaningful diversity and inclusion than the rest of the sample.

Participant conversations paralleled content analysis findings in regard to ownership. Black participants often steered the discussion toward outsiders being unjustly credited with the creation or improvement of cultural expressions. This was a very common topic of conversation and often redirected the discussion to instances of appropriation that extended beyond the videos.

> Noelle: I feel like culture should be shared, and it should be appreciated, and you should always give credit to that person. Like if you want to dress up as a geisha and like you want to do it properly. I don't know what the proper way of dressing up as a geisha is, but if you want to, put respect on that culture. Go ahead and do it, but I feel like we [people

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of color] should always hold the standard. That's just like the corn rows stuff. Like I don't mind white people wearing cornrows. I mind when you don't give us credit for it. I mind when you steal it and try to take it and to turn it into something new and we've been dashed [downed] for it and all of a sudden it's a new trend. It's the Kardashians. You know, so it's like ...

Mack: So what are you supposed to say every time you wear cornrows? 'Oh, this is Black people's cornrows?'

Noelle: No, you say, 'It's cornrows.'

Moderator: So are you saying not taking it and giving it another name or acting like it's a new thing?

Neal: Yes.

Noelle: Yeah!

A conversation regarding hair and ownership credit emerged in another Black focus group:

Moderator: I've heard us use the word appropriation. What does that mean to you all?

Carmen: It's like, when you find something about a different culture appealing, but you represent that incorrectly.

Skylar: Or like it's yours.

Carmen: Yeah, like you try to like own it like it's yours. Like for instance I remember when my friend was talking to me and she was like, 'Oh, I want braids like Kylie Jenner.' And I'm like, 'Braids like Kylie Jenner?' (laughter) Right, I was like, 'What you mean?' Braids like who?'

Skylar: Right.

Carmen: I'm like, 'I've been getting braids all my life. Like what do you mean?!'

The only video in the study which highlighted cornrows was Riff Raff's video and some participants did note that he was borrowing from black culture by wearing the hairstyle. The exchanges above were not directly in response to Riff Raff's hair, but they still provide commentary on respecting and crediting cultures and get to the core of one of the criticisms of crossing racial and cultural boundaries. The actual crossing of the boundary does not bother Noelle, however it is when boundaries are crossed *and* the originator of the expression is not credited with creating or owning that expression that gives her pause. The act of renaming an already existing expression or tradition or bounding it to an outgroup member (such as the case with Carmen's example of cornrows and reality start Kylie Jenner) was a common topic brought up by participants. Yet another discussion regarding hair was discussed by Skylar and Vanessa, this time including the act of renaming:

> Skylar: For me, I'm not annoyed by the Kardashians wearing braids or stuff. The thing that annoys me is when the media puts it like they are the ones who started those trends. I think that's the thing. That's like African American women having blonde hair. What if the white people started getting mad at that? Like, that's not the thing to get mad at...

> Vanessa: They're making money off it.

> Skylar: Yeah, well the media are the ones portraying them as the ones, the Kardashians, who started the braid trend. That's what we should get mad at.

> Carmen: I forgot who it was but they had bantu knots [an African originated hairstyle] but they called them baby buns and I'm just like you're completely obliterating an entire culture. Because bantu knots aren't just a style, they're a part of an entire culture. Like it's an entire culture that you're completely disregarding.

> Skylar: When I see people get mad at Khloe Kardashian for the bantu knots it's like, she might just like the style. But it's the media or the designer who is like 'she has the baby buns!

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Vanessa: It's just when you're taking credit for something that has already been done in the past, like *all* the way past, and you're turning it into something that you feel like you created and started a whole new trend. That's when we have a problem. That's when we have an issue. Like, I don't care if you have bantu knots or not, just don't try to turn them into something else.

During this exchange, Skylar, Vanessa, and Carmen clearly lay out their problems with the appropriation of Black hairstyles. As ingroup members, Skylar, Vanessa, and Carmen have a shared understanding of the deeply rooted meaning that bantu knots hold for Black people and are resentful of outside group members being attributed ownership or credited with popularizing a style that was crafted by their ancestors. For them, crossing the racial boundaries of hair should be done carefully and knowledgeably because the innerworkings of Black hair holds a significant meaning in their group history. Moreover, Black participants in other groups also noted that Black people are often times still discriminated against or experience microaggressions for wearing cultural hairstyles.

The Kardashian-Jenner family has been routinely accused of cultural appropriation in that much of their fashion, aesthetics, taste in music, networks, associations, etc. are directly inspired by or rooted in Black culture and have been used to propel the family to unprecedented fortune and fame (Dent 2017). One of the clan, Khloe Kardashian, had recently been a topic of discussion in the media for posting a picture on Instagram with her hair tied into an assortment of small knots or buns. Around the time of the focus group interviews, "mini" or "baby" buns were being discussed in mainstream pop culture outlets as a new stylish trend inspired by a 2015 Marc Jacobs runway show (featuring mostly white models) and then popularized again by Khloe in 2016. However, the style of "baby buns" is actually a centuries-old African hairstyle called bantu

knots which can be traced back to the Zulu tribes in southern Africa. The style has been and still is used as a no-fuss method to help dry, curl, manage, protect, or style the typically thick and tightly coiled hair of Black people throughout the diaspora (Gabbara 2016). Carmen and her peers recognize the history behind the style and attribute the Kardashians' use of the style as a disregard for Black culture. They also apply this belief to what they see as common physical aesthetics associated with Black womanhood.

> Carmen: I also think that a lot of ethnic cultures, not just black but like Latino cultures, things like that. Mainstream will like pick different parts that they agree with, or that they like, or that they think they can make more mainstream um, from those cultures then they'll go from there. But then they'll ignore where they got it from.

> Moderator: Okay.

> Carmen: You know like even, like for instance if you look at like the Kylie and the Kardashians, all that sort of stuff...

> Vanessa: Like why?

> Carmen: ... Black women been having they butts since ...

> Vanessa: Forever.

> Carmen: ... beginning of time. So it's like, these girls are Armenian and they have big butts, now it's a big deal. Like now everybody wants a big butt...

> Vanessa: That is fake.

> Carmen: I'm saying, that they can purchase, and it's just like that doesn't really make sense when you're completely ignoring, or like discrediting black women for something that is inherited a lot of the time. Um, so it's just like where, the disparity you can see in it. Especially being a black woman, you can see.

Research has shown that Black and Latina women's body types and styles are deeply political often stigmatized (Tate 2009). Carmen, Vanessa, and Skylar's conversations indicate that the use of Black and Latina feminine aesthetics on white bodies such as the Kardashians hold significant meanings that are ignored by both the Kardashians and the media. It is a statement about white privilege that the Kardashian-Jenners or Iggy Azalea can cross symbolic boundaries and use their white bodies to display forms of Black femininity and be met with praise and financial success rather than stigma and social isolation like many Black women experience (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015).

Race of Appropriator

With the exception of Beyoncé's feature in Coldplay's "Hymn for the Weekend," all artists included in the study were white. Still, interesting conversations emerged regarding the race of the artist engaging in the behavior. During the study, participants volunteered opinions on how the race of the actor impacted their interpretation of the images. After this topic was introduced, subsequent participants in other groups were then asked how they might perceive the images if the race of the actor was different (e.g. if a Black artist had performed the Indian-themed Iggy Azalea video). Because whiteness is the norm and the basis of hegemony (Dirks and Mueller 2002), this question was asked to help determine if drawing racial boundaries was simply about outsiders or if there was something unique about *white* outsiders. The groups provided split opinions on the topic. Some respondents felt that white-nonwhite boundaries were more significant than boundaries between nonwhite groups, and therefore they were most critical of whites who crossed boundaries and more forgiving of minorities who crossed boundaries of other minorities. In other words, they did not consider nonwhite appropriation of nonwhite culture to be as bad as white appropriation of nonwhite culture. Other participants, however, felt

that minorities could still appropriate another minority culture and should be critiqued for doing so. No matter their stance, participants were the most critical of whites who culturally appropriate versus those who are nonwhite.

Ray: So I mean, I don't want to say she's [Beyoncé] appropriating but ... that's why I said I feel like I fall in the middle. But she could be. I mean, think about it. If you take somebody else that's probably a person who's not of color and they did that it'd probably like, "You appropriating culture!" You know?

Moderator: So, so her being a person of color makes you look at it a little differently?

Ray: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I know that could be bias but it does. It just does.

Moderator: Okay. So it makes you less likely to critique her?

Ray: Yeah.

Jazzy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Moderator: So... race really does play a part into how you interpret what you see.

Rashad: Yeah. It does. I mean ... I'm not going to lie, it does play a part.

For Ray, a person of color could be guilty of appropriation, but he later goes on to describe that he would trust a person of color's intentions more than that of white artists. For Ray, a person of color who is an outsider is still more likely to share meanings or understandings with the group they are appropriating and therefore he finds it to be less of an obvious or egregious act than when whites appropriate. Other respondents of color offered similar explanations. In response to "Hymn for the Weekend," Hakim, a Black respondents said, "at least with Beyoncé, she was

brown, so she could've gotten away with it." Sarah, who is Latina, said, "I think it was better, but still, just because you may be a person of color, that doesn't mean you can appropriate somebody else's culture. I think, that's still going to be an issue. Umi, who is Indian, said, "Yeah. I think that definitely like made it more okay-like. 'Cause suppose a white artist, if Taylor Swift was in that, the news would be full of culture appropriation, I could definitely see that." These respondents' commentary reflects an assumption that, albeit discouraged, a nonwhite artist appropriating another nonwhite group's culture is less problematic than when a white artists does it because minorities are more likely to understand one another's marginalization or oppression due to white domination. When shown one supportive and one critical headline about the Coldplay video and asked to choose which best reflected his opinion, Umi suggested that being a person of color provides shared experiences that makes appropriation more justifiable.

> The one I would agree with most would probably be, "Why I Won't Criticize Beyoncé" just because I mean, she's brown. Like, I feel, I don't know. I bet her culture has been appropriated like multiple times by artists in the same way. Maybe even like, Desi[9] artists like going to Africa, shooting music videos. Stuff like that, I could see that.

> The idea of shared understandings among minorities was at the center of an interesting exchange between Noelle and Dee in a Black focus group when I asked about the race of the actor after watching Katy Perry's performance.

> Moderator: If another person of color who wasn't necessarily Asian did this, would you interpret it in the same way?

> Noelle: I mean I feel like I would look at it a little differently because I have seen like, even [Black American rapper] Nicki Minaj has done like the Harajuku Barbie thing, where she says she's a little samurai, and it goes with her songs, but you know, she

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[9] A person of Indian/Pakistani/Bengali descent who lives abroad.

continues to do that, and we don't see it as big of a deal as this, because this is like a bigger platform…

Mack: That's always been her thing though.

Dee: And I agree with that, because black people… like us and them [Asians], other people [of color], tend to mesh together with people of color, and Asian people are people of color technically. So if I would see a black person do an Asian traditional something, I would be like, "Okay, that's a little questionable" but I wouldn't feel disrespected like that.

Noelle: But does it still make it right? Like I get it, you know, like I feel like even though I get hey it's a white person versus a black person doing it, and like, black people can ... like you know, Nicki, she's done it before, but just because she's done it before doesn't mean that she *should* do it. 'Cause I feel like… we always try to point and say, 'Oh, white people do this, white people do this,' but then when a black person do it, it's like, 'Oh, well they were just kidding,' or 'Oh, it's not a big deal. They've done it before, it's a part of this…' but I feel like it's still disrespectful to the culture. Because if an Asian person was to do it, was to try to, like not do that [motions toward Katy Perry on screen] but do something with the black culture or...

Sofia: They do!

Mack: They do in Asia, they do…

Noelle: That's what I'm saying.

Moderator: Let's let her [Noelle] finish.

Noelle: But that's what I'm saying. Y'all just got so mad because the Asian people do it, but when a black person does it to another person [of color] it's okay for you.

Dee: And I hear what you saying, and that's why I'm saying… because really and truly white people don't have a culture. They have a little bit of everybody else's. Which is why

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they keep trying to do everybody else's cultures. So my thing is, I feel like it's more acceptable for minorities to share minority cultures because we've been through a lot of the same things, so we relate to each other and it's usually a bottom-line understanding of everybody's culture because of it. Hispanics were indentured servants, black people in slavery, Asian people was in Hiroshima and all that extra stuff...

Sofia: Even like concentration camps...

Bobby: Enslavement, enslavement in America, the railroad.

Dee: Right, and they were enslaved. We have a bottom-line understanding of everybody's culture, which is why a lot of minorities are able to get away with certain sharings and stuff. White people are not because they have been the main people judging and disrespecting those cultures.

Noelle and Dee's exchange is representative of quite a few discussions that emerged in various focus groups. Noelle stated that people of color appropriating culture from other people of color did not garner much reaction within her community and she went on to question why that is. For Noelle, appropriation can still occur between groups of color because it parallels that of white-nonwhite appropriation—an outsider taking liberty to insider expressions or knowledge. She noted her groupmates' reactions to the mention of Asian-Black appropriation. For Noelle, the group seemed to resist the idea that Asian people have a right to partake in Black culture. In her rebuttal to Noelle, Dee agreed that acts of appropriation between minorities are not preferred, but went on to explain that in her opinion people of color share an understanding of white supremacy and oppression and therefore the implications for appropriators of color are not the same as for white appropriators. Dee believes that although it is not ideal for anyone to appropriate, people of color share negative experiences of white supremacy and this provides a justification for crossing racial boundaries among nonwhite groups. For Dee, this justification is not without flaw but it is comprehensible. Dee also reintroduced the concept of whiteness being dull or

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mainstream and she suggested that the desire to break up the monotony serves as motivation for whites to take culture from nonwhite groups. In a separate focus group, Shay paralleled Dee's interpretation saying,

Yeah. I feel the same because one, she's not Indian. But, I understand what he's saying because like non-white culture have had a history of white people specifically oppressing them, so it might be worse because there's a direct link to you [oppressing 00:46:26] maybe you wanna steal my culture. Black people weren't trying to snatch up [other groups] necessarily, so it's a different relationship. It's a completely different relationship to a black person, a Indian person, the two races and white race and the Indian race…

Jazzy and Ray were also more critical of white appropriators and they tied the images from the videos to their understandings of white exploration. When I asked them what they liked or disliked about the Coldplay video, Jazzy replied:

Jazzy: So to me, looking at the video is like he's in a third world country, maybe India something like that. And so, just looking at the [torn] down buildings and the kids running around with no shoes on… And then he tried to brighten that scene just a little bit with more colors and I mean, yeah. That's fine. But why couldn't you just let it be for what it is? …That's kind of ironic to me because white men going to different countries, it's really not to boast about the culture or try to help these certain people. Mainly when white men go to different countries, I feel like they make it worse. But they call it development. Some white people may go to third world countries to negotiate like gun laws or maybe some military-type thing which makes it worse for the country in itself, not better. So that's how I was looking at it. I was like, 'Okay. So white man goes into this country, has colors, and doesn't have the negative vibe, and tries to make it all positive and you know, throws Beyoncé in the mix, and people of course are gonna be like, 'Oh. Well that's great!' But not really look at the meaning that I had in my head behind it.

Moderator: Okay. So this video... It reminded you of images of white men going to third world countries for more negative reasons?

Jazzy: Yeah.

Ray: Um, I wouldn't say that for me that it kind of reminded me of white men going to help third world countries. It did kind of [highlight] the fact that they were all people of color and he was white and surrounded by people of color and in a way, like you said, [he was] more vibrant than others. Like where he was walking was very vibrant, but his surroundings weren't vibrant. Even if it wasn't meant for that, [it] still had that effect when I saw it. Just 'cause I'm a person of color.

Moderator: So, you're saying that to you that's symbolic of what? The fact that he's in colors and everything else is dull…what's the meaning that you take away from that?

Ray: That's like he's kind of the light or the help coming in. That's how I kind of thought about it.

Jasmine: Yeah. The help.

Although both Jazzy and Ray did eventually say that they considered the Coldplay video to be the least problematic out of all the videos, they were also critical of the image of white men in a nonwhite place. While Jazzy interpreted the video as mostly positive, the fact that it was white men who were crossing over into a nonwhite space was significant to her. For Ray, the image of white men who appear happy and vibrant entering a nonwhite space that seemed less vibrant was symbolic of the concept of white saviorism. White saviorism is a term borrowed from cultural studies and refers to a cinematic trope which frames the white protagonist (usually a white teacher, lawyer, coach, journalist, or similar) as saving people of color from some hopeless predicament or moral bankruptcy that they cannot get themselves out of[10] (Vera and Gordon

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[10] Examples of white savior films include: *To Kill a Mockingbird (1962), Glory(1989), Dangerous Minds (1995), The Blind Side (2009), The Help (2014), The Great Wall (2017)*

2003 and Hughey 2014). Although Ray and Jazzy never called Coldplay white saviors explicitly, they interpreted the white men in the group as coming into a "dull" or "poor" Indian space and making it better with their "vibrant," "colorful," and "positive" presence. Dee, Jazzy, Ray and others expressed a belief that white appropriators carried with them historical images, and therefore historical meanings, that made it noticeable and consequential when they crossed racial boundaries.

Beyoncé and nonwhite appropriation

Respondents held the belief that even among minorities, appropriation was problematic and deserving of criticism. As mentioned before, Beyoncé was the only artist of color in the study and her iconic status made her a polarizing figure—people either really liked her and her artistry or strongly disliked her immense popularity. Still, her presence in the Coldplay video allowed participants to talk about the idea of people of color being appropriators. I asked Roselyn how she would feel if instead of Iggy Azalea, a Black artist like Beyoncé or Rihanna had performed the Indian dances in the "Bounce" video:

> Roselyn: Like, I would still be upset. I feel like most people would be just like "Oh, it's Beyoncé doing the song," but I feel like I'd be upset for them [Indian people] because I would be upset if it was someone trying to appropriate my culture or something like that. So you can't just let them slide just because it's Beyoncé or just because it's Rihanna.
>
> Moderator: So it needs to, in your opinion, actually be an Indian person or someone who is connected to that culture?
>
> Roselyn: Yeah.

In two separate groups, Carlton and Vanessa also used Beyoncé to indicate that they believe people of color should be cautious of appropriating cultures from other people of color.

Carlton: Even though Beyoncé was in the Indian attire, it was more than what the regular Indian people were wearing. I felt like the video encouraged us to celebrate the beauty of Beyoncé as an Indian woman even though she's not Indian, and I don't agree with that.

Vanessa: My question is why did they use Beyoncé to portray an Indian woman when they could've just got an Indian woman to play the role?... That kind of stood [out] to me the most. I mean we, black people, we get mad when somebody else portrays us as black people. Like of another race. But when she does it for an Indian woman…how do they feel right now?

Lolo goes on to mention that she saw similarities between Iggy Azalea's attempt to cross racial boundaries in the Bounce video and Beyoncé's role in *Hymn for the Weekend*:

Lolo: I would just say the only negative to it was Beyoncé's nod in the end. So I guess we can't be like Iggy who does this, that, and the other. Like, why is she dressing like Bollywood? Where Beyoncé, like that's my girl. It was just like...certain gestures and things and the henna that she had. I don't really know exactly what that means, but I know it's a cultural thing for Indians. I don't know. It was kind of like she was like the star, which she is, so it's not really a lie within it, because there's probably TVs with Beyoncé plastered all over. But, I don't know. It's just like you're not [Indian], so…

Moderator: So in the same way Iggy wasn't Indian and she had on these things, you see Beyoncé kind of doing the same thing?

Lolo: Yeah.

Carlton and Lolo mention the fact that Beyoncé is not Indian and despite Lolo's affinity for Beyoncé, she is not a part of the racial group she is portraying and should therefore not display their cultural expressions. She believes that the same boundaries that restrict Iggy Azalea from

being considered an insider should apply to Beyoncé. Respondents also questioned why Beyoncé had on Indian garb when the members of Coldplay did not.

Even still, Lolo and many other respondents seemed to be less critical of Beyoncé than Iggy Azalea or Katy Perry because Beyoncé was not white and because she has a relatively nonproblematic history (unlike Azalea or Perry who are very much associated with appropriation). Many respondents believed that Beyoncé more than likely took time to include Indian people in her preparation for the video performance, in part due to the fact that she herself is a member of marginalized group. For example, in an Indian focus group, Umi believed that there was a difference between Beyoncé's appropriation and white artists' because "she's brown" and he "bet her culture has been appropriated multiple times in the same way." Respondents also were less critical of her because they considered her to be the biggest superstar in the study and therefore thought countries would be more familiar with, accepting, and welcoming of her. Some respondents also noted that after Beyoncé's role in the video was criticized on public platforms, a behind-the-scenes video circulated the mainstream which showed Beyoncé being taught dances by Indian choreographers and working with Indian fashion designers. Respondents believed that Beyoncé's celebrity, track record, and her position as a marginalized woman made her more adept at crossing racial boundaries, even though they still believed it should not be done. These same allowances and assumptions were not made for the white appropriators in the study. Beyoncé's level of celebrity could have impacted how participants interpreted and spoke about her Indian portrayals. However, other discussions about the race of the appropriator that did not focus on Beyoncé still suggested that nonwhite appropriators are seen as different, if not more acceptable, than white ones.

Bridging versus Bounding

Claims of appropriation are often meet with accusations that the concept discourages cultural exchange, reinforces boundaries, and promotes separation of groups. However, one especially interesting observation in this study was that participants were not entirely opposed to crossing racial boundaries. Whereas some participants spoke openly about their disapproval of cultural appropriation, especially in regard to white appropriators, in other cases they saw cultural appropriation as potentially positive and they were careful to not appear as oppositional to the idea of bridging cultural expressions, specifically in regard to music. Roy and Dowd (2010) argue that although music can be symbolic of social distinctions, distinctions can also become blurred when a musical genre that was once bounded with one particular group is embraced by others. As an example, Ray and Dowd refer to the mid-1900s, when record companies moved away from promoting racialized categories such as negro or hillbilly music to their Black or white listeners and shifted to promoting artists who could do well in the crossover market. Instead of making the race of the artist known, some companies worked to hide the race of the artist so they would have a better chance at being accepted in a genre different than what was expected (e.g. Nat King Cole or Teena Marie).

Some of the participants in this study paralleled the approach of these record companies and steered away from thinking of musical genres as a distinction between groups. For example, when asked if artists should or should not use cultural images different than their own in their videos, Leah, a Black respondent, says, "I don't want to be that person that says, 'you can't take my culture because this is what you have to look like in order to do this.'" Alex also expressed her opinion:

It gets iffy with me... it's like I don't want to be that kind of person that's like, 'you're white you can only do white people stuff.'... I don't want to be one of those people to police to you and say 'hey, this is my culture, stay away.'

Interestingly, Leah and Alexa's comments above were sandwiched between their critical commentaries about Katy Perry and Iggy Azalea, whom they both viewed as appropriators. Nevertheless, neither Leah nor Alex wanted to be seen as policing people's behaviors because they did not want to appear as though they viewed certain musical interests or cultural acts as only being permissible if you belong to a certain race. It was not that Perry was white and interested in Japanese culture or that Azalea was Australian and wanted to rap or partake in Indian culture, it was the *way* they enacted these cultural expressions (e.g. as diversity commodities) and the seeming intentions behind it (e.g. making money) that was problematic to respondents. Tasha and Vanessa articulated what I believe Leah, Alex, and others were alluding to:

Tasha: I think that these artists think that they're bringing awareness. 'Cuz I mean if you think about it, they're like typical white people that are just everyday white people. They're not going out their way to think, "oh, I wonder how the Indian culture is. I wonder how the Asian culture is." So I feel like these white artists feel like they're bringing awareness to their white audiences, but they're not doing it well.

Moderator: Okay. So that's interesting. So, you think they may be trying to offer something new but they're not doing it in a good way?

Tasha: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, I mean, I don't know, cuz I mean they [the others in the focus group] could disagree. I'm saying if you're gonna do it, at least get the right people to help you with implementing those strategies.

Moderator: So, it's not a problem that they're engaging in another culture; it's that you don't feel like they're doing it ...

Vanessa: Appropriately. It's not appropriate.

Tasha and Vanessa consider it normal for white people to have little knowledge about nonwhite culture, an assumption that aligns with literature which finds that white Americans typically have little to no significant interactions with people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2010, Feagin 2010). Because of this fact, Tasha and Vanessa believe that when white artists choose to highlight other cultures, they do so with limited knowledge. Even still, they see white artists as providing a potential point of exposure to new cultures for their white audiences, bridging the cultural gap, which could be seen as positive. Nonetheless, Tasha and Vanessa believe that in order to increase awareness about different cultures and bridge distinctions between groups, people of color must be involved and guiding the interaction, otherwise white artists run the risk of missing the mark and appropriating.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on reactions to the crossing of ethnic and racial boundaries. Previous studies have indicated that no matter the social phenomenon, when racial and ethnic groups come into contact with one another, boundaries do not always dissolve but are instead reinforced and maintained. The pop culture music videos of today are a site that places racial and ethnic groups into contact with one another through the use of symbols of aesthetic identity. The multiethnic space created in the music videos in the study sparked conversations that centered on "us" versus "them" rhetoric, ideas of cultural ownership, the difference between white and nonwhite appropriators, and the bridging of boundaries.

The crossing of racial and cultural boundaries in the videos inspired some viewers to implicitly or explicitly take an "us" versus "them" stance, where they viewers felt the need to differentiate their cultural expressions and repertoires from others' in order to solidify group

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identity and protect their aesthetic identities from white exploration or exploitation. White outsiders were critiqued for presenting themselves as ingroup members, particularly if they did not include actual ingroup members in the performance or prove to have substantial knowledge about the expressions they enacted. Artists such as Iggy Azalea and Katy Perry, who were interpreted as failing to demonstrate an understanding of the shared meanings and experiences of the ingroup were critiqued because their lack of knowledge was viewed as misguided and disingenuous.

The content analysis results suggest that artists in the study consistently portrayed themselves as ingroup members who had equal right to endorse or display cultural expressions of groups they did not belong to. Black participants offered examples from the both the music videos and their everyday lives of times when white outsiders were unfairly credited with creating or popularizing their cultural traditions. Many cultural expressions hold significant and meaningful symbolism for communities of color and crediting or associating white artists with things such as traditional hairstyles or aesthetics was seen as erasure of the communities who originated the expressions. This mode of appropriation was viewed as harmful to Black communities in that it stripped away at group identifiers and erased the contributions of people of color (Ziff and Rao 1997). White use of and claim over Black expressions evoked conversations of white privilege, where whites are able to display certain cultural aesthetics such as cornrows or shapely posteriors but remain free from racialized stigma because they sit atop the racial hierarchy. White artists' ability to remain relatively stigma-free and to profit off the display of nonwhite expressions is reflective of the power structure which aims to satisfy the interests of whites, often times at the expense of nonwhites (Appelrouth and Kelly 2013).

This chapter reveals that the race of the actor did impact how audiences interpreted the images in the videos with white appropriators being seen as more offensive than nonwhite appropriators. Nonwhite appropriation was still viewed as undesirable and participants usually leaned on their own experiences to justify why no one should appropriate anyone else's culture. Although all appropriation was up for critique no matter the race of the appropriator, the image of white outsiders partaking in nonwhite spaces or cultures evoked historical memories of white exploration or white saviorism which holds adverse meanings for nonwhite communities. White appropriation was seen as a form of white cultural dominance. Particularly for Black groups, the use of nonwhite culture (not just Black culture) by white artists was viewed negatively when the interaction with the culture was perceived as ungenuine or uninformed.

Beyoncé's inclusion as the only nonwhite artist in the study allowed for the discussion of nonwhite appropriation but also shows that appropriation has nuances. Beyoncé served as an example that both people of color or people who are otherwise known to be inclusive and thoughtful in their actions can appropriate but are critiqued less because it is assumed their personal experiences make them more knowledgeable of and sensitive to the preferred ways to cross racial boundaries. In addition, participant discussions suggest that nonwhite appropriators do not generally carry with them the same social and historical meanings that white appropriators do.

Lastly, one of the underlying themes of this chapter, is that participants were not opposed to the crossing of racial boundaries. They were purposeful in declaring that outsiders were not excluded from participating in behaviors that are normally bound to specific racial or cultural groups and they opposed essentialist ideas. They did not argue that artists should never cross boundaries or engage in other groups' cultural repertoires. Instead, they stood firmly in their

request that when artists, especially white artists, do cross racial boundaries they somehow indicate that they understand their position as an outsider or indicate that they actually *are* a cultural insider despite appearing not to be. Some participants saw appropriation as having the latent function of introducing audiences to new cultures and funneling money back to the community being portrayed. These participants felt that participation in other groups' cultures could increase cultural awareness. However, to unmask the positive potential of bridging racial boundaries, participants believed that artists should be knowledgeable of the group they are engaging, should not accept credit for creating expressions, should understand the racialized stigma associated with the act even if they are not impacted by it, and should ensure that their interactions are under the invitation and guidance of the target group.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, I asked: 1) what kind of appropriative images exist within pop culture music videos? 2) how do audiences interpret and discuss racial and cultural appropriation in these videos? and 3) how do audiences of color come to understand and discuss the cultural appropriation of their own culture and other nonwhite cultures? The evidence I presented in the previous chapters indicates that cultural appropriation in pop music videos contains stereotypical and one-dimensional racial/cultural images and is perceived by audiences as 1) a tool used by the white-dominated media to commodify diversity and financially benefit those in power 2) an act that reifies stereotypes about minorities and promotes racial misconceptions, and 3) a vehicle for white privilege where whites feel empowered to cross racial boundaries and not be permanently stigmatized by the dominant culture. These findings help to join together critical race theory (CRT), colorblind theory, and theories of appropriation to demonstrate how white domination is embedded within popular culture and the media industry, even when it appears to be racially inclusive.

In Chapter II, I detail some of the racial and cultural images that have been borrowed from nonwhite groups and used in music videos. At various points in subsequent chapters, I present content analysis results which show that the music videos in the sample showcased white artists (with the exception of Beyoncé) being centered in Black, Japanese, Indian/Hindu, and Latino cultures. With the exception of the members of Coldplay, all artists were centered in the cultural expressions among these groups, while ingroup members were either excluded or given limited roles. Some images displayed in the videos were based on racial stereotypes, taken out of context, or used inaccurately. Investigating these images, their inaccuracies, and who displayed them, helps to highlight how crossing racial or cultural boundaries can be based on aesthetics and

stereotypes which opposes the idea that visible diversity is accompanied by meaningful racial understandings.

Increased globalization has impacted the reach of these stereotyped media messages. Much like the expeditions of colonial empires in the past, technology and globalization have placed nonwhite culture within the grasp of powerful nations seeking to exploit the less powerful and increase their own profit (Rogers 2006). Nations like the United States that have political, economic, and military power are able to access and borrow the cultural products of other, less powerful nations (and its own marginalized populations) and profit from them (Ardalan 2009). The music industry is a microcosm of this colonial exploitation, in that it pillages global images and the images of marginalized Americans to make white American artists appear more interesting or worldly, and as a result, profit from increased sales of those artists (Asante 2008). This process of commodifying culture grows the culture industry, where culture is commodified and sold like any other material good (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979, Collins 2006). Whites are then able to buy and sell diversity in an effort to make their lives and experiences more lively or enjoyable (Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017).

In Chapter III, I highlight participant responses to the videos, where they suggested that the incorporation of nonwhite cultural expressions gives certain artists better positioning in the market. Participants noticed that the artists' race, the content and instrumentation of the song, and the cultural images displayed in the videos were not always congruent, and they blamed this on the efforts of the music industry to strengthen the culture industry. They believed nonwhite culture was unfortunately seen as more desirable on whites and helped white artists stand out from the white-dominated mainstream, ultimately gaining them great financial success and popularity.

The racial implications of appropriation have been greatly overlooked in the appropriation literature. I find that people of color take issue with white appropriation, not because they believe races must stick to themselves, but because they believe white involvement is likely to be appropriative due to racial power dynamics, and they believe the exploitation of nonwhite culture results in financial benefits for whites but little to no advancement for nonwhite communities. They also believe that appropriation is an example of the privileges that whites have which allow them to take on other cultures and disavow them when they no longer benefit them. This is an important contribution to the literature on appropriation, because it shows how a critical race lens highlights the nuances of appropriation and emphasizes how racial power dynamics, cultural commodification, and economic exploitation are maintained under the guise of colorblindness.

These findings provide empirical support to concepts from existing literature such as diversity ideology (Mayorga-Gallo 2014) and cultural tourism (Doane 2014). That is, in the era where effects of racial inequality are downplayed, white artists can signal to audiences that they are diverse and colorblind (and by extension not racist) by simply utilizing nonwhite cultures in their videos. However, the lack of accurate and thorough racial representation in the videos hints that artists have a superficial understanding of the cultures they display and the lack of representation serves to uphold the racial order by promoting stereotypes about nonwhites. This study shows how nonwhite culture allows artists to look progressive while absolving them of having to actually learn about the significance of nonwhite cultural symbols or having to recognize real racial inequality. The ability for popular white artists to appear culturally competent without having to learn about other cultures allows for colorblind ideology to go unchallenged and to further imbed itself within the institution of pop culture media—a social

institution which has a direct impact on the public's understandings of race relations (Crockett 2008; Dirks and Mueller 2002; Gitlin 1979).

Chapters IV and V moved from analyzing participants' interpretations of economic exploitation to discussing participants' beliefs about group identity and social boundaries. Studies have shown that the media serves as a site for white people to learn about other cultures and findings suggest white audiences often perceive stereotypical representations of minorities as accurate because they have little real-life interactions with them (Shively 1992, Entman and Rojecki 2000, Hughes 2004, Strong 2004, Park et. al 2006, Dirks and Mueller 2007, Crockett 2008, Hughey 2009, Caspi and Elias 2010, Fueller 2010, Ghandnoosh 2010, Hylton 2010, Roy 2010, Carrington 2013). In other words, the media is a site of acquiring racialized and cultural knowledge, and stereotypical media images reify misconceptions of race (Park et. al 2009; Muhammad and Muhammad 2018; Oh 2012). White participants in this study also admitted that the media was a place they turned to for information on other races.

Content analysis discovered that the music videos shown to the focus groups used traditional stereotypes such as dainty or infantile Asian women, poor but happy Indian people, or Latino gang members. In Chapter IV we see that participants pinpointed the same stereotypes during their viewing of the videos. They argued that audiences with limited cultural knowledge would not be able to decipher stereotypical images from accurate images of nonwhite groups and they felt artists had a responsibility to provide more complete or nuanced representations of cultures if they wanted to include them in their videos. They also felt that artists who utilized stereotypes were guilty of appropriation because they demonstrated a lack of real knowledge of or experiences with the culture. Because white audiences ascribe to stereotypical portrayals, participants saw the use of appropriation in videos as providing justifications for racial bias and

aiding in the real-world marginalization and discrimination of minorities. They also saw the stigma for certain cultural expressions as being worse for people of color than for whites. Participant commentary illustrates how reproducing and reifying traditional stereotypes about groups within supposedly culturally-inclusive media is perceived as harmful by nonwhite communities. They suggest that informed artists and audiences is essential for avoiding appropriation—a point that coincides with other studies that find cultural competence to impact audience interpretations of racialized content (Entman and Rojecki, 2000, Banjo 2011).

Lastly, in Chapter V I illustrate how pop culture music videos of today are a site of contact between racial and ethnic groups through the use of symbols of aesthetic identity. This cross-racial and cultural interaction can trigger "us" versus "them" rhetoric. It also brings to light the ideas of cultural ownership, the difference between white and nonwhite appropriators, and the possibility of bridging of social boundaries. The crossing of racial and cultural boundaries in the videos inspired participants in this study to differentiate their cultural repertoires from others' in order to solidify group identity, which aligns with findings from existing research (Lamont and Molnár 2002, Roy 2002, Roy and Dowd 2010, Osuji 2013). Those artists who were deemed as outsiders, such as Iggy Azalea and Katy Perry, were critiqued for presenting themselves as ingroup members, particularly if they did not include members from the group displayed in the performance or demonstrate considerable knowledge about the expressions they enacted. Portraying oneself as an ingroup member who had equal right to endorse or display cultural expressions of a group was seen as a harmful diminishment of the significance those symbols hold for communities of color. The race of the artist impacted how audiences interpreted the images in the videos with white appropriators being seen as more offensive than nonwhite appropriators because nonwhite people were thought to have shared experiences dealing with

white oppression. Although all appropriation was critiqued no matter the race of the appropriator, white appropriators aroused collective historical memories of white exploration or white saviorism. These historical memories were seen as reflective of the racial dynamic white endows white privilege.

Participants were not exclusively opposed to the crossing of racial boundaries and saw cross-cultural interactions as introducing audiences to new cultures or even directing money back to nonwhite communities. However, to unmask the positive potential of bridging racial boundaries, participants believed that artists should be knowledgeable of the group they are engaging, should not accept credit for creating expressions or exploit them to their own benefit, should understand the racialized stigma associated with the act even if they are not impacted by it, and should ensure that their interactions are performed under the invitation and guidance of the target group.

Limitations and Future Work

As with all studies, this research has limitations. First, I did not provide an intersectional analysis. CRT argues that intersectional analysis is an asset in research because it provides various entry points to analyzing the inner workings of the power structure (Censhaw 2011, Watkins Liu 2017). The majority of pop artists sampled were women. Future studies should consider how intersections of race and gender coalesce with cultural appropriation in regard to images of women of color and the racial messages that audiences receive about them. Because female artists' physical appearances are critiqued more than men's—and with that women of color more than white women— future studies should examine how the gender of the artist relates to the costumes they wear, the images they choose to display, the responses they garner from audiences.

Further limitations of this study are that I did not have a comparable size of white respondents and the white participants included were more racially aware than the average white American. It was my goal to center people of color and I was not attempting to generalize my findings to the population, however, future research that looks to generalize findings should provide a racial comparison of reactions to culturally appropriative. The narratives of people of color should not be deemphasized, however, a comparison of reactions could help to provide a comprehensive look at the gaps between white and nonwhite understandings of the power dynamics at play within cultural appropriation. Future research should examine what and how lower class or less educated white respondents respond to racial and cultural images. They may possibly convey messages that are different than the more racially aware, college-educated, student body government members included in this study.

In conclusion, I provide evidence that moves the literature towards a discussion of how the nuances and modes of cultural appropriation impact those being targeted. My findings demonstrate that increased diversity in media during the colorblind age still homogenizes nonwhite communities and stigmatizes their behaviors, except when those behaviors are wrapped in the cloak of whiteness. This study gives credence to using pop culture as a cite for sociological racial research, and highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalized groups in order to unpack concepts of power, exploitation, and domination. My hope is that this study encourages future work to utilize the trifecta of critical race theory, colorblind theory, and theories of appropriation as frameworks for various investigations of media in the colorblind era and I hope this work reminds us all to take more seriously, and show a greater appreciation for, the cultural expressions of the various beautiful communities that make up our social world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING VARIABLES AND
OPERATIONALIZATIONS

Congruency. The artist, music instrumentation, song lyrics, and/or images in the video are

relevant to one another. There is a logical, common connection between these elements and the

cultural expressions or images that are being portrayed. For example, a video portraying Indian

cultural expressions is performed by an Indian artist, has lyrics that pertains to India/Indian

themes or concepts, uses instrumentation customary in Indian music, or the like.

Cultural Expressions. The artist or actor in the video engages in aspects of a specific

race/culture/religion including but not limited to: styles of dress, dance styles, religious symbols

or practices, cuisine, customary practices, etc. This includes Japanese art forms or traditional

styles of dress, Black American music or dance styles, various East Asian/South Asian garb or

religious practices, the use or presentation of sacred symbols, etc.

Cultural Tourism. The main actor/artist(s) belongs to a racial or cultural group outside of or the

culture being portrayed in the music video and is portrayed as surveying or witnessing that

culture in action. For example, a white artist witnessing Indian cultural expressions. The artist

may be partaking in the cultural expressions but they are clearly framed as a tourist or guest.

Erasure. The racial or cultural group responsible for creating the cultural expression is either not

included or not included significantly in the images in the video. Or they are not given credit for

their cultural products. This may be illustrated by the artist being shown as engaging in the

cultural expressions alone or without the presence of members of that specific cultural group. For

example, an artist may portray hip hop styles of dress without the presence of Black Americans.

Or they may dress in traditional Indian garb but are not shown engaging with Indian people or communities in various scenes of the video. Or Indian persons do not play an equivalent or significant role in the video.

Historical Context. The culture being portrayed is placed within proper historical or social or cultural context with respect to history. For example, the video tells or portrays an accurate historical event or social circumstance, cultural expressions are placed in proper geographical or communal context, there is a disclaimer or caption that places the video or its imagery into context, etc.

Inclusive Diversity. The music video shows members of a specific culture being portrayed as equal to or alongside the actor/artist. In-group members are not simply visible, but are centralized and not relegated to stereotypical or supporting roles while engaging in cultural expressions. They are not relegated to roles of servitude or seen as only supporting cast members. They have relatively equal camera time and placement as the artist.

Ownership. The artist(s) or actor(s) in the video is centered in the video and portrayed as though they belong to that specific culture. The actor or artist is portrayed as central or belonging to the culture being portrayed rather than as a guest or tourist. This can be seen in the artist leading traditional or cultural dances, being the central focus in cultural or symbolic locations, or engaging in the cultural expressions of a group without significant inclusion of in-group members.

Stereotypes. The culture being portrayed in the video is limited or reduced to images that coincide with stereotypical roles or beliefs about that group. Or the image serves to essentialize

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certain characteristics as belonging to that racial or cultural groups. For example, the Black male thug, sexualized Black female dancer, Indian Bollywood star, Japanese ninja, samurai, or geisha, etc.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Questions served as a guide and probing questions were asked when needed.

- What are some forms of popular culture that you like the most? (e.g. music, fashion, film, TV, magazines, blogs, etc.)

- Do you make an effort to keep up with popular culture?
        Probe: Why? Why not?

- When you think about it, do you find that you most often end up watching TV shows, listening to music, etc. that is created or promoted by people who look like you? (e.g. of the same race or ethnicity or gender as you?)

- In general, how do you feel about diversity in pop culture? Is there not enough? Is there too much?

After each video participants were asked the following:

- What are your general reactions to the video?

- What did you enjoy in particular? Why?

- What is something that you did not enjoy or like about the clips? Why?

- Let's talk about the actual images in the video. What did you like about the costumes, clothing, or background images if anything? Why?

- Is there anything you disliked about the images? Why?

- Do you get the impression that the artist(s) in the video knows/or learned a lot about the images they portrayed in the video?

After viewing and discussing all videos and their accompanying headlines:

- Which was your favorite video? Why?

- Which was your least favorite video? Why?

- A few of these clips have been labeled as controversial by other audience viewers and in some media. Did you consider anything in the clips to be controversial?

    - If so, what in particular did you find controversial?

- Some people have viewed these clips and thought they portrayed stereotypes. Would you consider any of the clips to contain stereotypes or stereotypical images?

    Which clips and why?

- Did you find any of the clips offensive?

    If so, what in particular did you find offensive?

    If not, please explain why.

- We can see that in some clips people are engaging in cultures or practices that aren't necessarily associated with their racial group. For example, we saw white rapper Iggy Azalea do a hip hop performance and we know that hip hop is traditionally associated with Black communities. We also saw Katy Perry do a performance with Asian costumes and themes. How do you feel or what do you think about when you see performances such as these?

- Were there any clips in the video that you think borrowed from cultures or communities that you consider yourself to be a part of?

    If yes: what clip? What did they borrow? How does that make you feel and why?

- One journalist has argued that the Katy Perry performance we viewed, as well as similar performances from other artists, "mock and stereotype a country and its people for the sake of pop music." What do think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

APPENDIX C: HEADLINES FOR MUSIC VIDEOS

After each video was watched and the questions were asked, a PowerPoint slide was shown displaying screenshots of two separate headlines about the specific video and the following prompt was read:

So here are headlines from two different articles about the video we just watched. Which

headline do you most agree with and why? [show headlines—one will be in support of the

video one will be critical of the video. DO NOT initially indicate which is which, let them

discuss which headline they align with]
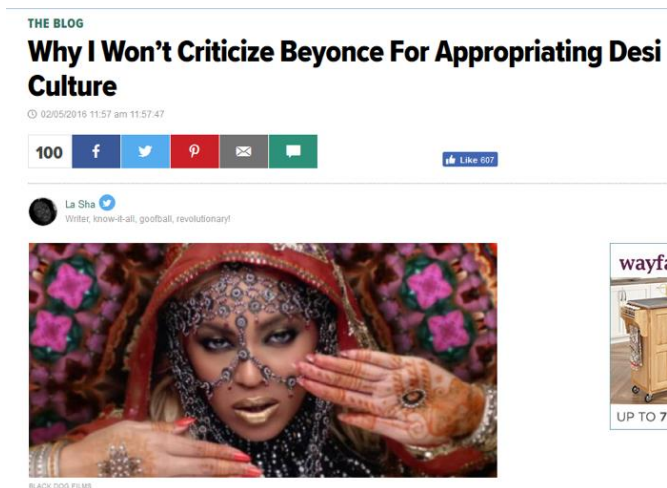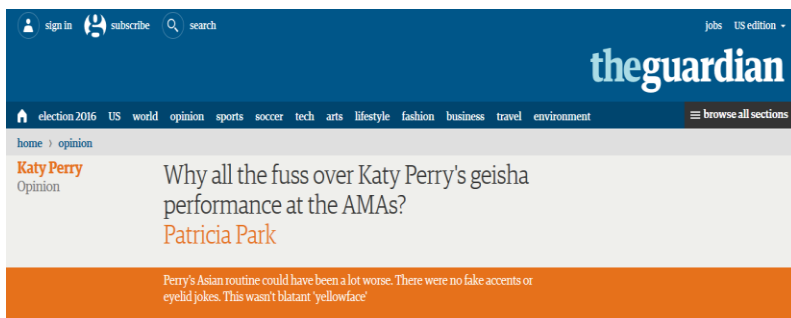
Iggy Azalea Bounces Backwards With Disappointing Clichés

by Rohin Guha May 28, 2013

Iggy Azalea Channels Bollywood For Her New Banger "Bounce"

COMMENTS

MAY 6, 2013 1:00 PM
LEILA BRILLSON

SHARE IT

With new album, Riff Raff is the evolutionary white rapper

MUSIC 12 AM 01.27.2014

James Miller

Riff Raff has been an Internet mainstay for at least two years and his artistic credibility has been defended and derided. His Warhol-esque skin, with pop

TRENDING

This is why you care more about some animals than you care about humans

What the bejesus are these white rappers doing?

By Chris Bunting

January 7, 2016 | 11:35pm

Taylor Swift Dismisses the Haters, Dances With Fans for New Song 'Shake it Off'

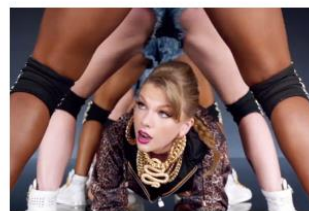Singer reveals inspiration and deluxe package for upcoming album '1989' and premieres shapeshifting new video

Taylor Swift Theo Wargo/NBC/Getty Images

Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off" is Most Certainly Racist

Written by: Jenn M. Jackson on August 22, 2014.

I meant to write about Taylor Swift's cultural appropriation antics this week but, honestly, more pressing matters in Ferguson demanded my attention. Yet, here I am, writing about Swift's new video "Shake it Off" anyway. As if the the title – or the image I chose for this feature – weren't apt enough, the entire song is about how Taylor Swift is young, white, pretty and carefree so she doesn't have to care about what people think about her. Then, she caps this narrative off by making fun of black women 'twerking' as she crawls between their disembodied legs. End plot.

I feel like what needs to be said has already been said on *Salon*, and *The New York Times*. Pay close attention in the video below to Treva Lindsey's (@divafeminist) explanation of the danger of Taylor Swift's mistaken intentionality and the hierarchy of dances and dancers in the video.

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APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONAIRE

Questionnaire
This is anonymous. Do not put your name on this form.

Please clearly indicate your answer with an "X":
    1.) What year of study are you currently in?

        ____Freshman   ____Senior

        ____Junior   ____Graduate Student

        ____Sophomore

    2.) What is your current age in years?

        ____years old

    3.) What is your date of birth? (month/day/year)

        _____/_____/_____

    4.) Are you of Hispanic, Latino/Latina, or Spanish decent?

        ___Yes   ___No

    5.) Are you a U.S. citizen? (these answers are anonymous and will only be presented in aggregate form)

        _____Yes   _____No

    6.) Which of the following races do you consider yourself to be, if any? (Please indicate all that apply)

        ____White   ____Asian or Pacific Islander.

        ____Black or African American   Please specify:_____

        ____American Indian   ____Other (please

indicate)_____

7.) How often do you guess you spend watching, listening to, or reading about popular entertainment such as well-known movies, television, music, music videos, award shows, fashion, etc.?

- o Always
- o Very often
- o Fairly often
- o Sometimes
- o Almost never
- o Never