

**Latin pop and K-pop, Counterculture and Mainstream: Hegemony Reinforcing  
Speaker Stereotypes and Status Through Music Criticism**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reviews previous studies of American hegemonic stereotypes of two of the fastest growing speaker communities in the United States, the Spanish speaking and Korean speaking communities. Additionally, it assesses available research into the importance of language to these communities, from their own standpoints. These resources lead to questions about how the increasingly popular musical genres of both these communities, Latin pop and K-pop, respectively, are viewed through the prism of American music hegemony. Further, it reviews if the music of these two genres is confined to statuses of counterculture or mainstream, as per evaluations of the speaker communities against those definitions. The study aims to answer whether hegemonic entities in music criticism have internalized these stereotypes and regurgitate them in music reviews. This paper, further, presents the juxtaposition between artists of different genders. Using thematic analysis, a corpus of 20 total music reviews, 10 from each genre and 5 from artists, or groups of artists, identifying as male and 5 identifying as female of each genre, was analyzed to answer these questions. Results are presented qualitatively as spectra of themes that were generated by researching previous studies and through multiple readings of the corpus. The results are reinforced through a quantitative analysis of the number of themes per genre and gender in each of these spectra. The research concludes that these stereotypes are indeed reinforced in music criticism both by genre and by gender. However, whether the genres are confined to countercultural or mainstream status is not clearly answered due to definitions of those terms and their dynamic, quickly changing, natures.

*Keywords:* Hegemony, speaker communities, language stereotypes, latin pop, k-pop

## 1. Introduction

Spanish speakers in the United States have been characterized as lazy, slow, and invasive per norms of language attitudes and *mock* Spanish discourse (e.g., Hill, 1998; Roth-Gordon, 2011). Representations in media reenforce these stereotypes and permeate public consciousness surrounding Spanish speakers in US. Additionally, code-switching has had a profound effect on American culture (Fairclough, 2003). The phenomenon has allowed for the language to reach further than it otherwise would, becoming part of American media over the last several decades including the children's television program *Dora the Explorer* and the rising popularity of Spanish musical forms. Immigrants in the United States have developed language communities and created subcultures that extend to the realms of popular media and music. The Latinx community prominently features in this manner of American culture. In the wake of the rising number and proportion of the Hispanic populous in America, Latin pop music has flourished as a genre in music. White anglophone attitudes of the speaker community appear to extend to music reviews, too. The present research asserts that while reviews of music by hegemonically dominant entities have become more nuanced, they extend commonly entrenched stereotypes in promoting popular musical forms like Latin pop.

Contrast the above perspective with the white anglophone perspective of the Asian immigrant communities in America, where those of Asian descent have occasionally been stereotyped as more organized, *mathy*, and conscientious (Leong & Schneller, 1997; Tashiro & Conrad, 2009). Alternatively, some of these same stereotypes have resulted in a ceiling on the roles and careers Asian Americans are able to enjoy in America (Varma, 2004). Anglophone American carelessness in differentiating between specific Asian ethnicities can lead to these stereotypes being applied to the Korean American community. Additionally, a study based on employment and income levels compared Asian Americans against Hispanic

Americans as more closely resembling White Americans (Varma, 2004; p. 90). In a further contrast against the Hispanic community, in Korea learning English is seen as a priority specifically for spreading cultural export (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Although seemingly positive, such stereotypes are no less harmful in their blanket descriptions and can inform hegemonic commentary on art and media in the United States. Furthermore, much like Spanish language media, Korean language art has exploded in the last ten years. Movies, television, and music in Korean have all been critically lauded and massively popular in America.

Milton (1960) recognized the definitions of contraculture [counterculture] and subcultural movements as including some sort of “deviant” aspects, or otherwise subversive concepts about society. While there are typical sets of beliefs that members of a countercultural movement adhere to, there are ways in which artists vary in their commitment to these beliefs and adhering to some while neglecting others still leads to a countercultural image (Fox, 1987). The media also plays a role in defining an artist and what movements they are a part of. In the United States, non-Whiteness can also be perceived as anti-mainstream and immigrants who pick up the movements and habits of white America can be characterized as part of the mainstream (Kunst, Dovidio, & Dotsch, 2018).

Extending ideas of American music hegemony to the reviews of artists and bands will provide a look inside the ways language has helped define the categorization of non-anglophone artists. The rise of immensely popular non-English musical forms has not necessarily changed the center of hegemony but rather the way hegemonic entities are able to comment on their existences.

America hegemonically presides over contemporary popular music. Furthermore, outside the realms of simply recording music and signing musicians, American music

criticism and media define what an artist is and what they are not. The extent to which old cultural stereotypes about immigrant communities with massively popular forms, like Latin pop music and Korean pop music, seep into music writing can be further explored to provide insights into how the industry of music journalism maintains barriers and order, and, how that reflects the mainstream view of the anglophone community towards non-anglophone communities. Specifically, this study delves into commentaries on two of the fastest growing immigrant communities in the United States, the Hispanic and Asian immigrant communities.

To address these claims, the present paper judges the extent to which these biases cultivate cultural differences around Latin pop and K-pop. In what ways is Latin pop music, however big it grows, considered a subcultural or countercultural and subversive movement while K-pop is confined to clean and mainstream pop music? Importantly, answering these questions will help determine whether, even in the wake of immense commercialization of non-anglophone music, these hard biases can be put to rest or continue to dominate mainstream understanding.

## **2. Background**

In the following sections theoretical embedding for this research will be developed. The research is broken down further into subsections depending on the content. This framework drives not only the leadup to the questions investigated in this paper, but also forms the basis for explaining the results in the discussion section.

### **2.1. White Hegemony & Diversity in America**

In the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States enacted laws requiring English language for naturalization and citizenship. These laws coincided with the addition of language questions to the census just prior in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Businesses and local governments

began pushing English, too. This push further tied the movement to economic responsibility and capabilities (Leeman, 2004). Participating in American society meant learning English and learning English meant assuming the American identity. Since the census grouped languages together based on notions of maintaining a language outside of what would have been deemed a white language was choosing not to be viewed as white or near white by the government.

The last decade has represented a bifurcation of the ideal of a mainstream America. On one hand, the rise of a new wave of white nationalism and the election of Donald Trump as president represents an attempt by the white hegemon to recoup their idea of America (Major, Blodorn & Blascovich, 2016; Lash, 2018). Additionally, English only movements in the United States enforce otherization of speakers of other languages and because of the strong identity between the Latinx community and the Spanish language, these policies and prejudices fall hard on their shoulders. On the other hand, increasing immigration from Latin America and Asia have spotlighted efforts to strive for representation and equity among minority and marginalized ethnic groups.

In the wake of fears stoked by right wing media over the last 20 years, American “family values” politics have resulted in much publicized xenophobia among Americans (Dowland, 2009). Though this does not represent all the country, or even most of the popular vote for president in the last two elections, it does prove these values have bubbled to the surface. A Kunst, Dovidio, and Dotsch (2018) study showed that respondents were more likely to select a picture of an apparently white person than a picture of an Asian representation of the same person when the data the respondents were given showed that the person adopted mainstream American values. Mainstream in America means to be white, and this idea has permeated the national subconscious to a certain extent. Additionally, state-by-

state English only language policies in the United States, and their framing as patriotic, distinguish the white anglophone as the hegemon of the American mainstream (Linton, 2009). Understanding this distinction is tantamount to understanding reactions towards music performed in languages other than English.

In contrast, much of America is focusing on celebrating diversity and promoting it in schools. Once again, the governmental structure of America enables a space where only some schools in specific districts and jurisdictions will make attempts to bridge cultural gaps and incorporate immigrant communities, but even these efforts only go so far. A study showed that at a California school, made up by majority Asian and Latin student populations, teachers were well equipped to educate students on the nuances of St. Patrick's Day while celebrations of Cinco de Mayo lacked necessary context (Lash, 2018). In the same study, one teacher forced students to pick between celebrating Chinese and American New Year holidays in an essay. The distinctions from the study show that even in the process of promoting diversity, the black-white paradigm of race in America leaves little room for incorporating and celebrating other groups in the mainstream.

## **2.2. Latinx in America: A History of Otherness**

In the United States, Latinx immigrants have been othered based on their language. American constructs of race, both institutionally and in the minds of the public, are tied inextricably to language for Spanish speakers. Examinations of the US census over time, educational policy, and the American media landscape paint such a picture and further define English as the hegemonic normative language while confining Spanish to minoritized and racialized status.

### **2.2.1. Institutionalized Otherness and the Census**

Initially, and through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American public and institutions were not concerned about a national language. The history of the US census provides a backdrop that shows up until the post-civil war period race was not an inquiry (Leeman, 2004). A racialized society was prompted by the surge in immigration from what people in America deemed as non-white countries. White Americans filling out the census were additionally asked if they were native born to native parents, native born to foreign parents, or foreign born. A non-White person filling out the census was not asked these questions and, consequently, assumed to be foreign by the nature of their race (Leeman, 2004). According to the census, these consisted of most non-European nations and additionally included mixed-race as a category. Institutionally, America was othering any non-white person filling out the census.

The census also grouped unlike languages together based on hegemonic ideas of ethnicity and race (Leeman, 2004). For example, English and Celtic were grouped together as an example of languages spoken by white people. The census bureau left no room for nuance in differentiating based on cultural identity. A Spanish speaker's native country did not matter, just that Spanish was the speaker's heritage language. One Spanish speaker from Spain and one from Mexico were of equivalent language and racial status, institutionally. In asking these questions, the ignorance in recognizing the cultural identity of peoples was cemented by the census.

This is to say that, by governmental standards, Spanish speakers were non-whites even when they are American citizens. This is a complicated topic because a Spanish speaker can be European, white-Hispanic from Latin America, or mestizo. However, to hear the Spanish or to understand that it was someone's first language was to be of a different race.

### **2.2.2. Education**



There exists an inherent tension between English speakers and heritage Spanish speakers in the bilingual educational policies and Spanish language classrooms of the United States. Moreover, there is tension in the way the two groups are separated. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, American educational policymakers were split on the value of learning foreign languages. It could be instrumental for white Americans to learn foreign languages, Spanish included. Conversely, using Spanish as a tool to integrate Hispanic immigrants into the anglophone community was unpopular, largely due to racist undertones (García, 2014). Heritage Spanish speakers should be learning to use their Spanish less while, for heritage English speakers, Spanish is a means to a prosperous future, the two do not intersect (García, 2014). The double standard applied here can be seen as a tool to keep the foreign language community in check, maintain distance, and keep the Hispanic community out of earshot. Regardless of the side one chooses, the people left out of the discussion are the heritage Spanish speakers themselves. This manifests as neglect towards the community and results in animosity on an educational institutional level towards native speakers of Spanish. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish language education was entrusted to mostly anglophone instructors (García, 2014). Towards the end of the century, separating students with Spanish as a home language from anglophone students learning Spanish as a foreign language became more popular (Valdés, 1997; Valdés, Lozano & García Moya, 1981). Treating the two as separate forecasts a scenario in which it is high class to speak Spanish as a second language, but of lower status to be a heritage speaker.

Spanish study among white anglophones in the United States is rooted in the instrumental value of the language, as opposed to integrative, where instrumental and integrative are opposed motivational values (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Additionally, research has shown that anglophone students in the United States are motivated to learn Spanish because they feel it poses opportunities for their futures and careers (Pratt, Agnello

& Santos, 2009). In most situations, the Spanish taught in the classroom has little relation or resemblance to the Spanish of the United States and the simple act of labeling it a “foreign” language makes it the language of the “other” (García, 2014). An anglophone student is less likely to learn the language to interact with Spanish speaking and Latinx aspects of the surrounding culture than in improving their career prospects. It behooves the American educational institutions to keep Spanish and English separate. Effectively, Spanish speakers are forced to stay in their lanes while anglophones are allowed to reach over the line and pick and choose what they use, instrumentally.

### **2.2.3. Identity & Racialization of the Spanish Language in Public**

The Spanish language is a salient marker of identity within both the anglophone and Spanish speaking communities in America. Moreover, Spanish is racialized partially through a phenomenon called *Mock Spanish*. *Mock Spanish* is a vehicle that affords Americans liberties that are not afforded to Spanish speakers. This process results in fewer opportunities for Spanish speakers in the US as Spanish speaking first generation immigrants have reported being denied interviews once they arrived at a job site when they’ve spoken with an accent or in Spanglish (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). In the process of *linguaging*, opinions about the speaker and the language become inseparable. Since Spanish is a salient identity marker, its speakers are subjected to longer terms of insulation and exclusion than other immigrant communities may be. The following subsections will expand on these ideas and discuss previous research on the matters and how they pertain to the study at hand.

#### **2.2.3.1. Language Self-Identity Among Latin Americans**

Language maintenance has been recognized in previous studies as an important part of identity among immigrant communities (Milroy, 1982; Fishman, 1985, 1989). It is used by

Americans to racialize the Spanish speaking community. Additionally, it is an important aspect of identity to the members of the Latinx communities in America, themselves. Spanish speakers in the United States have a propensity to maintain language into the third generation and is a common way member of the community identify themselves and each other (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003).

The Spanish speaking community is deeply aware of the stigma that comes with being a member of the Spanish speaking community in the US. Terms used to describe how the Latinx community in the US thinks the dominant (white) culture feels about them contain, “uneducated, dirty, lazy, and stupid” (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). Imagine then, that the feeling of belonging to the community is so important as to reject community and home language reform. As a clear, prominent, and lasting marker of identity, music in the Spanish language is deeply connected to and embedded with the community. Additionally, an outsider would immediately associate the music with the community, regardless of if the singer is from Latin America or Spain.

#### **2.2.3.2. Mock Spanish**

Through institutional and educational efforts to paint Spanish speakers as the other, white Americans have accepted this as reality. Portrayals of Spanish speakers in media and in daily interactions have reinforced these notions. One such manifestation of these portrayals is *Mock Spanish*. As described by Hill (1998), *Mock Spanish* is the phenomenon which allows whites to use Spanish words and phrases in a way that accentuates their views of the language and its speaker community.

Hill examines examples like the blockbuster film Terminator 2 using “hasta la vista, baby” as a way of making a cold killing machine seem more human. When a young, white

American, Los Angeles (the character John Connor) native teaches the terminator this language, it is a metacommentary on what it means to fit in with the hegemonically dominant group in America. Connor also teaches the Terminator the Spanish phrase “no problemo” and the English insult “dickwad”. Including these together is a statement about the white-American relationship with the Spanish language (Hill, 1998). In the eyes of major media, the language is of a lower rank than English and its common phrases belong with casual vulgarity and insults and represent.

*Mock Spanish* goes beyond the words used and extends to the permissibility of dialect of Spanish and English speakers in the US. Puerto Ricans, for example, live with the understanding that if their English accent betrays an outwardly white appearance, they will other themselves just by speaking, and appear “disorderly” to white Americans (Hill, 1998; p. 682). On the other hand, white Americans permit themselves a large degree of freedom in saying Spanish words the way they want to, even when it distorts them beyond recognition.

Due to the nature of Spanish in the United States, Spanish speakers feel racialized by their use of the language and identify with the language itself (Davis & Moore, 2014). White anglophones unconsciously slip biases about the Spanish speaking community vis a vis the language into their everyday speech. Even in situations where an interlocutor is “white”, once they speak Spanish, they are subject to the same treatment as those Spanish speakers who are situated between whiteness and blackness in the racial stratification of the United States (Davis & Moore 2014). Spanish has been cast as a disease by white English-speaking Americans and positioned as a language of resistance by Spanish speaking communities in the United States (Davis & Moore 2014). These tight connections between the Spanish language and its speaker community leads white Americans hearing Spanish to infer several things from its use. The presence of these stereotypes has extended to popular media via

*Mock Spanish*. Applying this concept to music, once a white American listener hears the Spanish language on a song, the consumer is now listening to non-white music, and they may apply stereotypes present in other media.

### **2.2.3.3. Stereotyping Hispanic Women**

In addition to the standard suite of stereotypes that accompany Spanish speakers in the United States, Hispanic women are subject to additional, gender specific stereotypes. American media depictions of Latina women display a domestic portrait, where work experience is limited to being a maid, housekeeper, or nanny (Lopez, 2013). Lopez (2013) contends that perhaps derived from the Latinx cultural traits of “*marianismo*”, which favors a gentle, motherly, and docile reading of women, American media has extended this into the workplace and expanded the concept to include submissiveness, doing no favors to Hispanic women. Other common labels include that Latina women are overly emotional (Cochiara, Bell & Berry, 2006). Indeed, a 2019 study has showed that Latina and Black women rated lower than their White and Asian counterparts on hireability as postdoctoral candidates for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) positions (Eaton, et al.). The hegemon has decidedly seen it fit to incorporate these definitions into what an appropriate Latina woman would be, leaving room for opposites of these views to paint a more malicious picture of the inappropriate Latina.

When a Hispanic woman does not live up to the stereotype assigned them by white America, they are promiscuous, overly sexual, and at the furthest end of the spectrum, whores (Beltran, 2002; López, 2014). In a study, opinions on teen pregnancy among clinicians ranged depending on the nationality of the respective teen. On one hand, Hispanic teen mothers of Latin American origins were seen as acquiescing to the motherly stereotypes set before them. On the other hand, Hispanic teen mothers from the United States were viewed

as being raised wrong and falling into a cycle of bad decisions (López, 2014). Overall, Hispanic women figure into a very small funnel of stereotypes when they are being “good” and a separate, and equally narrow, description when they are being “bad”, as per hegemonic ideas of America. The extent to which these stereotypes have been repeated or rebuffed in music commentary will be a window into the industry’s ability to have nuanced conversations around gender and cultural identity.

### **2.3. The Latin Pop Boom**

Latin music has played a part in the United States musical landscape since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Schroeder, 1978; Party, 2008). Importantly, Latin pop music was featured at events like the Newport Jazz Festival in the 1970s and some of the biggest artists of the countercultural boom of that era, Carlos Santana, and Joan Baez, for example, trafficked in musical traditions of Latin American origins. An important factor that Schroeder (1978) calls out regarding Latin American music in America in the 1960s and 70s is that its roots were a collage. Influences from Caribbean countries like Cuba and Puerto Rico as well as South American countries like Argentina factored into the sounds that would eventually flood cities like New York in the US (Schroeder, 1978). New York eventually ceded this newfound centrality of Latin Pop music to Miami which was developing an identity as a hub for both arts and commerce from Latin America.

Located at a literal and figurative middle ground between Latin America, Spain, and North America, Miami proved a perfect spot for a confluence of live performance and record sales for Latin pop stars (Party, 2008). Party (2008) argues in the mid-90s a shift occurred in Latin pop music in Miami when record labels began supporting Latinx artists’ departures from the typical *baladas* of Latin pop music towards an image that represented the pace and passion of Miami and electronic production associated with dance music. This sound was a

decisive inflection point-of-no-return for Latin pop and broadened its appeal propelling it onto dance floors and into new radio formats. It also reenforced America's importance in carrying the genre.

Latin pop music is, today, experiencing a sort of second wave. The musical landscape has been radically changed by streaming services like Spotify and video streaming like YouTube. Latin pop has been a massive beneficiary of these platforms. This second wave coincides with the release of the remix to the 2017 song *Despacito* by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee. With Justin Bieber on the remix, the song became the most watched video in YouTube history and went on to receive Grammy nominations. Since then, Latin pop has exploded. Newer forms have combined genres, common in the streaming era, and at least one new Grammy category has been added to honor *La Música Urbana*. According to Viñuela (2020), the use of Spanish and code-switching as well as the mixture of genres confers a sort of "self-exoticization" on the Latinx recording artists. Indeed, the music has become a display of the languaging tools used by the Latinx population in the United States (Viñuela, 2020). In making use of these tools, Latin pop music takes on the stereotypes that they bring.

#### **2.4. Being Korean in America**

Between 1970 and 1990 the Korean immigrant community in the United States was one of the fastest growing at a rate of 140% per decade. Through this growth, Korean Americans have developed distinctive identities and been subjected to stereotypes imposed by white anglophones. These attitudes are created by hegemonic forces, imposed on the community, and reinforced through news and media consumption, much like attitudes towards the Hispanic communities in the United States.

Further, there are many ways in which Korean cultural export and media mirror the rise of Hispanic media while the Korean immigrant community and generations of Korean Americans contrast with the Hispanic community in the US. From movies like Korean Director Bong Joon-Ho's "Parasite" to booming cuisine promoted by entrepreneurs like American restaurateur David Chang, the United States, and the world, are experiencing a moment with all myriad Korean art and entertainment (Worthy, Blythe, et al., 2020). These mediums crossed over with American audiences earlier than music (Benson, 2007). The vector that is digital media, websites like YouTube for instance, led to the spread of K-pop music, too. Interactions in YouTube comments, which many times take place in English, a more commonly spoken language than many East Asian languages (excluding Mandarin), allowed proliferation of K-pop and other East Asian musical genres (Benson, 2007; Ng, 2015). Savviness of using new platforms, commands of the heritage language and English, as well as understanding of mainstream western pop music helped smaller language groups (e.g., Korean) grow their musical exports. With these new flows of media come new ways that stereotypes are parroted and filtered through the hegemonic prism to be reinforced for mass consumption.

#### **2.4.1. The "Model Minority" Stereotype**

A major part of white American attitudes toward the Asian immigrant and Asian American communities has been the persistence of the "model minority" stereotype (Varma, 2004; Tashiro & Conrad, 2009). Tashiro and Conrad (2009), reflect on the stereotype of Asian Americans as being better at math and computer sciences and with higher motivations towards technical abilities. Additionally, these opinions have been studied among white American students on a college campus wherein the students surveyed held positive or neutral opinions towards their Asian American peers in 9 out of 10 survey questions (Leong



& Schneller, 1997). These stereotypes can create false expectations and micro aggressive situations between communities in America. For example, Varma (2004) argues that in career advancement, Asians can be hindered by these stereotypes which force them to live up to insurmountably high expectations. In the long run, many from the Asian immigrant and Asian American community are resigned to taking technical roles, and steered away from management positions which require more advanced communication and emotional intelligence, resulting in a sort of glass ceiling (Varma, 2004). All of this is to say that stereotypes of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, even though some may be seen as positive, do not result in elevation to the status of the dominant socioeconomic class in the country because of the limited reach of the stereotypes.

These opinions are not created in a vacuum. Dominant media outlets in the United States have perpetuated stereotypes through portrayals of Asian Americans as the model for immigrant communities because of their relative economic successes and what the outlets deem as a more subdued nature towards the American political system (Varma, 2004). Consistent framing through media has permeated the white American subconscious. Consider actor Ke Huy Quan, who portrayed the Chinese American character “Data” in the 1985 movie “The Goonies” where he was displayed as the techie kid of the bunch, not to mention the nickname “Data” as a gesture towards the nerdy and *mathy* stereotype. Clearly, stereotypes of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans bleed into media, much like stereotypes of Spanish speakers. Importantly, examining how they have permeated music reviews can provide insights into their reinforcement in that industry, too.

#### **2.4.2. Family Dynamic and Math & Sciences**

Research has shown that an aspect of Asian American culture which extends through generations is the focus on excellence in math and sciences as school subjects. A study by

Hanson and Gilbert (2012) found that respondents felt their parents focused on these subjects because they are the same across languages. This is to say that one salient marker of Asian culture in the US is that students feel the pressure to succeed in these subjects which are more calculated or calculable by nature. Additionally, students felt that studying the sciences was “forced” on them because parents had degrees in sciences and stable careers as a result (Hanson & Gilbert, 2012). Importantly, the recognition within the Asian American community that there is a collective identity surrounding these subjects connotes the absence of language as a salient identity marker.

#### **2.4.3. Language Self-Identity Among Korean Americans**

According to a study by Lee and Ahn (2001), 50% of surveyed Korean Americans found Korean to be an important factor in their future success in the United States. The same survey saw 58.8% say that English was a more casual language than Korean, and 85% thought Korean was more polite. Contrast this with the identification by Spanish speaking immigrants wherein there was an understanding in the community that Americans stereotyped speakers negatively (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). Outside pressures should not be overlooked in determining the way speakers identify with their own home language. In the case of the two communities, it is clear those pressures have led to a positive view among half of the Korean Americans surveyed. However, this leaves another half who do not feel that way, and dropping their heritage language, for that half, seems a viable option.

Additional research has shown Korean parents tend towards a reason for their children learning English to be cultural assimilation (Shin & Kim, 1998). Again, contrast with the fact that Spanish speaking families maintain the language into the third generation in the United States. Certainly, there had always been a separate and thriving market of Spanish media in America including sports broadcast in Spanish and channel packages that included all

Spanish language programming. Even so, the difference between the two communities is noteworthy. Language is not as salient a marker of identity for the Korean American community as it is for the Latinx community. In the hegemonic sense, a commentary on K-pop may not differentiate as much between artists or songs that use code-switching as a part of the form and those that do not. For the critic, these two may appear to be similar and other aspects of the music may evoke more stereotypes associated with the speaker community.

#### **2.4.4. Stereotyping Asian Women**

In a trend common within American opinions about immigrant and non-white women, Asian women are exoticized and sexualized in media, stemming from wartime exploits of American GIs abroad (Uchida, 1998; Azhar, et al., 2021). According to one study, opinions specific to Asian and Pacific Islander women tend to run counter to the model minority position discussed previously (Azhar, et al., 2021). Extending these opinions to music, an additional focus would restrict all female K-pop groups as being sexual by nature, potentially making commentary on their appearance in music videos.

In contrast, it has been noted that female K-pop acts were faster to uptake English in music in the early aughts and used it to assert their identities more strongly (Benson, 2007). This can be seen as opposed to research around opinions on Asian women in American because, though this practice might have resonated in Southeast Asia, it is either being more slowly realized in the United States, or not at all. A closer look at music reviews of female K-pop acts could provide insights into the which ways stereotypes have been internalized in a specific cultural industry.

#### **2.4.5. Education**

Unlike Spanish foreign language students in the United States, who tend to learn the language for what they see as instrumental values in society, Korean as a foreign language learners describe reasons for learning the language as integrative (Jeong, 2012; Lee, 2018). Additionally, teachers use Korean pop cultural references as motivating factors for students to continue to study and learn the language (Lee, 2018). These techniques differ from those of Spanish foreign language learning where future job achievement is seen as a primary motivating factor.

New research shows a deeper resonance of Korean cultural exports, like music, food, and cinema, with mainstream America. Korean language programs have grown considerably as immigration from Korea to the US has increased. Take, for example, the University of Hawaii at Manoa where, according to the Modern Language Association, there were 8511 students enrolled in Korean language courses in 2011 compared with just 168 in 1960. One study showed 79% of respondents studying Korean as a foreign language cited culture as the main reason they were studying the language, and the study partially attributes this to the fact that many more non-heritage Korean speakers are studying the language (Jeong, 2012). Again, the integrative value of foreign language learning, the idea that interacting with a culture is paramount in the study of its language, is the driving force. Demonstrably, Korean culture has grown enough to support new ventures into teaching and education.

## **2.5. The K-pop Boom**

In 1997, South Korea underwent an economic crisis, one of the global answers to this crisis was an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mandate for neoliberal economic reforms in the country (Jonghoe, 2007; Um, 2013; Kim, 2017). By no means was this the start of what is today a burgeoning global arts scene, but it certainly helped direct the trajectory of film, food, and music exports from South Korea. Specifically, South Korea mirrors the American music

industry in the sense that it is made up of major labels grooming tomorrow's pop stars for success early in their careers by supporting them financially and facilitating art direction (Um, 2013; Kim, 2017). Not only have business cues been taken from the American record industry in South Korea, but some of the sounds have, too.

In conjunction with the influx of economic neoliberalism arrived shifts in South Korean music towards the occasional use of English. While this may seem like an attempt to expedite a crossover to the west, Benson (2007) notes that because of its limited initial success, this can only tell part of the story. A larger part may have been the desire for artists to assert their identities as western focused pop stars and to stand out in the crowded market of Southeast Asian pop music (Benson, 2007). Interestingly, this is read as an admission by artists that some part of their identity is tied to western mainstream pop music. Furthermore, the South Korean government sought to help bolster the fortunes of its country's record labels by providing additional investment (Messerlin & Shin, 2017). This action should be read not only as a shrewd business maneuver by the government, but also an acceptance of the values that K-pop artists project and the representation it imbues of the country. One ingredient missing from the mixture for success was the vector that would carry these artists toward the western and global mainstream. YouTube helped round out this formula.

In 2012, a Korean rapper and comedian called Psy went viral on YouTube with his song "Gangnam Style", breaking viewership records on the platform and bringing K-Pop to a much wider anglophone audience. However, it has been said not only that YouTube affirmed Psy, but that by turning a Korean language song into a global hit, Psy also affirmed YouTube as a platform where people from around the globe could gather and participate in cultural moments together (Ng, 2015; Messerlin & Shin, 2017). The breakthrough of the song inextricably tied visual performance to the genre, and it is now tantamount that K-pop acts

use the medium effectively and maintain western style large scale production in their live shows, complete with intricate choreography. When “Gangnam Style” broke, it did not conform to either American or Korean stereotypes and was instead situated somewhere between (Ng, 2015). A fine caveat to the conversation around the song is that the country with the most views of the “Gangnam Style” video is the United States.

Since Psy’s hit more than a decade ago, a new crop of K-pop artists has crossed over in the United States. According to a study on the genre, a few things uniting these artists are “aspiration” as a theme of the music, the importance of visualization in the final product, and the influence of anglophone pop production with a confluence of traditionally American pop genres (Kloet & Kooijman, 2016; Messerlin & Shin, 2017). To add to the shared contemporary story between K-Pop and anglophone pop music, in some instances American producers have helped craft songs for South Korean artists, with lyrics then written in Korean, and sometimes translated back again to English for an American version, as in the SNSD song “The Boys” produced by Teddy Riley, complete with music video.

## **2.6. American Hegemony in Popular Music**

America has long held its post as the epicenter of popular music. Beginning in at least the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, musicians from outside the United States strived for popularity in America. Trudgill (1997) examined the decision by British rock musicians, such as The Beatles, to change their accents to appeal to American audiences, promoters, and venues. The tradition stretched to British pop acts from the modern day, like Adele, who has been observed making similar dialect changes for similar reasons (Konert-Pannek, 2017). Even today, Britons are observed using Americanized slang in their music (Skerritt, 2019). However, these artists already share a common language, English, and so it may come as

more of a surprise that non-anglophone artists are still striving to breakout with American audiences.

Consider the rise of global music and musical forms. America is still seen as the hegemonic entity controlling the flow of popularity. This is attributable to the country's role in propagating the neoliberal system which has given rise to global music culture (Stokes, 2004; Kroier, 2012; Um, 2013; Kim, 2017). According to Skerritt (2019), there are no levels of hegemonic domination and hegemony is a binary. Therefore, even amongst claims of hegemonic decline, the United States maintains this role in the realm of popular music. The K-pop boom is an example of the hold America maintains. South Korean artists and labels understand the power of American pop music and set out to recreate its most generic possible imitation (Kloet & Kooijman, 2016). This is not to comment on the quality of the music, rather to state that the proclivities of K-pop are to explore the distilled forms of American pop music. K-pop can assume the mantle of mainstream pop for non-Anglophone artists. Contrast this with Latin pop music which fuses elements of local sounds with American pop sensibilities.

For proof that these artists target the American audiences, look to tour dates, festival lineups, and Spotify streaming playlists (Kloet & Kooijman, 2016). In 2023, Coachella, a yearly music and arts festival across two consecutive weekends in Southern California, chose Latin pop star Bad Bunny to headline the first night of the festival and K-pop girl group Blackpink to headline night two of the three-night festival. The same artists headlined in the same slot both weekends. Spotify's carefully curated *New Music Friday* playlist, which has over four million likes, commonly features new music from both Latin pop and K-pop among other popular anglophone artists from traditionally mainstream and countercultural musical genres.

## 2.7. Cultural Appropriation in Art

Primarily, cultural appropriation happens when an artist of a hegemonically dominant background within their cultural context borrows from the traditions of a marginalized culture within the same cultural context (Heyd, 2003; Young, 2005 & 2006; Matthews 2016). Hip-hop music has been cited as a hotbed of appropriation in music because of its longstanding history as a traditionally black artform, which was subsequently borrowed by white artists for commercial appeal (Heyd, 2003; p. 38). The white rapper Eminem has been discussed as one such artist appropriating hip hop music (Cutler, 2003). It is inarguable that in the United States white artists like Eminem brought rap music to white American audiences.

Even in situations where the intent appears to be an homage and not an outright appropriation, there are limitations to the degree by which this should be allowed. One thing that should be taken into consideration is “credibility excess” (Matthes, 2016; p. 351). Credibility excess can be simplified into white privilege. This sometimes manifests as the ability for the dominant group, white anglophones in the United States, to achieve a wider platform chiefly due to their race or cultural origins. In popular music today, where the hegemonically dominant country is still the United States but the musical forms are increasingly global, questions of when an artist is appropriating and when they are authentic are met with mixed and inconsistent responses.

Aside from origin and culture, time and place are determining factors of appropriative acts, too. The argument Young (2005) makes to this effect is that depending on the moment in history an act that is appropriative may be offensive but not necessarily wrong. This distinction drawn by Young is interesting as it acts as an escape clause of sorts for artists appropriating. Indeed, Matthes (2016) takes exception to the fact that something can be



wildly offensive and not wrong based on its “time and place” and argues that offensive acts are wrong regardless of these conditions.

## **2.8. Mainstream Pop Music**

The definition of what is mainstream pop music is pervasive. It includes music that is specifically popular in a given moment, music that reflects the cultural mainstream, music that is charting, selling, and streaming well, and can define a genre that would otherwise not be categorized as something more specific. (Jost, 2019; Sanneh, 2021; Steinbrecher, 2022). Alternatively, music might be mainstream pop when it has commercial appeal and is driven, at least partially, by the pursuit of revenue (Steinbrecher, 2021). Broadly speaking, mainstream pop music has been defined in nearly every conceivable way, as demonstrated in Steinbrecher’s (2022) literature review. To that end, it represents a mixture and conglomeration of different ideas whose aesthetic sensibilities change era by era. One study, focusing on pop music between 1985 and 2015, found that by 2015 there was a clear rise in relaxed vibes, sadder coded songs, and an increase in the “danceability” of popular music based on chart data (Interiano, et al., 2018; p. 14). Alternatively, the most successful songs seemed to defy the sadness trend in the same study and were categorized as both happier and more “party-like” (p. 8). Interiano et al. (2018) also found that the presence of male singers in high charting pop music was on a downward trajectory. This reiterates that contemporary pop music includes a mix of different genres and moods and that it is subject to change frequently and quickly.

Additionally, Steinbrecher (2021) focused on the production techniques that define popular music today, stating that with digitalization, producers can construct songs more deliberately and carefully. The study showed that building a “hook” in the music and creating an earworm, so to speak, is tantamount to having it played in a low attention span streaming

culture where the next song is only a click away (p. 138). Making music that is catchy, addictive, and has high replay value affects both the artist's ability to gain popularity and the label's ability to capitalize on revenue. In the streaming era, the necessity to shift sound can change quickly and even looking back on the studies referenced in this section might prove outdated soon.

## **2.9. Counterculture & Music**

A countercultural scene arises from tensions between the hegemon and a subcultural group (Yinger, 1960). Many times, a burgeoning arts scene accompanies the subculture as the tensions bubble under the surface before boiling over. For instance, in the 1960s folk music was an important aspect of the countercultural scene fighting for civil rights and in the 1990s hip-hop exploded as a response to anti-Black biases in law enforcement. These artists become pillars of the movements with which they are associated and are held in esteem by members of the subcultural community they represent (Lund & Denisoff, 1971). Roughly stated, a musician who makes music that represents a subculture is making countercultural music, regardless of the popularity it achieves.

Though many definitions of countercultural movements appear to describe specific moments in time, it is also their ability to persist across generations which, in part, defines them (Roberts, 1978). In the mentioned examples of folk music and hip-hop, both were loudly protesting the abuses of human rights they viewed as immoral in America. Further, a countercultural movement can run counter to just some, but not all, of the mainstream cultural themes of the time (Roberts, 1978). This allows a portion of mainstream society to interact with the music of the movement and help it gain steam. As observed by Fox (1987) part of the punk music scene was the varying levels of commitment of the members. Some people who attended shows were not punks necessarily but there as what would be termed

“observers” (p. 366). In this way, the hegemon and its extensions can comment on the music of countercultural movements as part of the outer ring of membership.

## **2.10. Rolling Stone & The New York Times**

Every so often, Rolling Stone magazine invites who it deems to be the important voices in music, from record label executives, to journalists, and popular artists, to take part in polls determining the top 500 albums of all time or the top 100 songs of the decade. This is to say that although Rolling Stone is not the only publication to compile lists it is certainly the one that gets the most traffic and residual discussion about these lists. Rolling Stone started as a countercultural music magazine broadcasting rock music to eager, coming-of-age, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century readers. As those readers grew up, so did Rolling Stone. In 2017, the majority stake in Rolling Stone was purchased by Penske Media Corporation ending any question of whether Rolling Stone had finally become the hegemonic voice in music publication.

As one of the most widely circulated newspapers in the world, the New York Times sets news agendas globally. Indeed, Encyclopedia Britannica refers to it as “the newspaper of record” in the United States. As such, the New York Times is part of the hegemonic establishment in the country, and this extends to its editorializing of reviews on music.

## **3. Methodology**

In the subsequent section and subsections, several methodologies will be explained. First, data collection will be discussed. This will include both the collection of data sources as well as the harvesting method(s) used. Additionally, the methods of deducing and presenting results will be conferred.

The basis of the methodology for this paper was designed after careful research of previous methods of thematic analyses (e.g., Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Smith & Osborn, 2008) as compiled by Saldaña (2016). Specifically, analyzing segments of a corpus, in this case music reviews, that are, at times, larger than single words or small phrases and can be as long as multiple sentences. They are, however, shorter than coding full paragraphs. Additionally, the present study based the methodology of interpreting these themes in reviews on beliefs that exist in a specific moment in time and within a wider context and discourse. These judgements are based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a practice and presented by Statham (2022) to apply judgements based on a critic's word choice in their review. Further, critical discourse analysis allows for the interpretation of textual data within the wider context of the power structures existent in each time and place, here the music industry in the United States (Gee, 2004). One of the techniques employed in this paper is the Appraisal system which analyzes a writer's stance via their speech, or writing, in this case, and specifically the Appreciation dimension of Appraisal. While Martin (2000) and Martin and White (2005) break down their Appreciation in positive and negative, the opinions expressed by critics in this paper were evaluated in continua between two, or more, themes being analyzed. This is appropriate because the present evaluation is between the reviews of albums of two different speaker communities' music forms, and not for one community's form with evaluations of the positive and negative ends of a spectrum.

Additionally, particular words were analyzed within the context of the total quotation and the larger reviews considered, as per previous discourse analysis (Hakam, 2009). This strategy allowed for understanding the wider context of a given quotation, and below, in the qualitative results, some of these contexts will be described to better explain the quotations and themes analyzed.

### 3.1. Positionality

The author of this paper has additional context surrounding the topics investigated. Growing up in the United States as an avid music listener, including to the top 40 radio format, has shaped a lot of the intent behind this study. Noticing the changes in genres that have been incorporated into radio airplay, festival lineups, Spotify playlists, and music reviews has been an influence on the hypotheses of this study. Chiefly, that stereotypes of the Spanish speaking and Korean speaking communities in the United States have permeated the way hegemonic entities comment on music, and this has resulted in Latin pop as a countercultural form with K-pop as a mainstream musical form.

### 3.2. Data Collection

The data consists mostly of album reviews of Latin and Korean pop music. To find artists and albums appropriate for the study, monthly streaming data from Spotify available directly on the artists' pages, festival lineups, and review aggregations from the website *Album of the Year (AOTY)* were used. It was ensured that most of an album's songs were conducted in Spanish for the Latin pop albums and Korean for the K-pop albums.

Spotify and festival lineup data were important to ensure comparability between artists. Granted, an artist or album being reviewed by *Rolling Stone* filters out a lot of underground content by nature, it is still important that comparisons are not made between artists of vastly different popularity levels.

In two cases, for the Latin pop producer Bizarrap and the K-pop group Balming Tiger, no album review exists. In these cases, it was sufficient to use *Rolling Stone* reviews of the artists themselves. The contents of the review were similar in nature to the album reviews.

The mentioned reviews were also critical pieces that discussed the music and the feel of the artists.

Once an artist and/or their album was considered for research, a search was run on the *Rolling Stone* magazine online edition to see that the review for the album existed in their archive. In one instance, an album review was not available in *Rolling Stone* and was sourced from the *New York Times* music reviews. Twenty reviews were selected for the project. Nine reviews were for albums by K-pop artists and nine reviews were for albums Latin pop artists. As mentioned, two reviews were of artists and not albums, one for K-pop and one of a Latin pop artist. Five of the Latin pop reviews were of artists who identify as female and five were of artists who identify as male. Five of the K-pop reviews were of artists, or groups, who identify as, or are made up entirely of, female artists. Four of the K-pop reviews were of artists, or groups, who identify as, or are made up entirely of, male artists. One K-pop review was of a group with members of mixed genders. This was done intentionally for further analysis and breakdown by gender. The contents of the music review were then copied to a separate word document and prepared for upload to the data analysis software platform, *ATLAS.ti*.

### **3.3. Data Coding**

Documents were uploaded one by one to the software program *ATLAS.ti* version 23. After uploading the documents, they were read once without any action. On the second read through, themes were applied to the documents. Themes were applied on a word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph basis. More than one theme might be applied to a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph at a time.

Themes were determined after appropriate research, reviewing relevant literature, and reading the reviews multiple times. Themes were drawn from specific stereotypes which previous studies and researchers had presented regarding speaker communities of both Spanish and Korean. Additionally, themes were pulled directly from the reviews themselves should a term or word(s) have repeatedly appeared across the reviews analyzed in this paper or read outside the present research, per literature and research recommendations (e.g., Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Smith & Osborn, 2008). For example, the theme “sophisticated” was derived from literature review as well as the reviews themselves and the theme “sophisticated” may be applied to the word “sophisticated”, or its variations as it appeared in a review, or to any judgement made by the music critic authoring the review wherein an artist was judged to have successfully combined genres and/or techniques. Overall, 69 codes were created and used for the project.

Whenever the reviewer was passing a judgement of the artist’s execution on an idea or of the art itself, that was worthy of coding as a theme and turned into a quotation. When the lyrics of a song were simply restated those were not worthy of coding as a theme, even when they contained language that would have fit into a specific code. This is because the data being analyzed was specific to the way critics talk about the music and not the content of the music itself. Additionally, the reviewer’s opinion on whether the idea was executed to positive or negative effect changed the theme used in each quotation. This is because it expressed different sentiments on how the artist’s work should or should not have been presented.

Three rounds of theme coding were conducted to ensure consistency across theme application, for additional coding to be added, and for extraneous or erroneous coding to be removed. In further rounds of theme coding, any themes that needed to be merged into a

single theme were, and the appropriate name for the new merged theme was created. Groups were created for the documents by genre and gender and genre for later analysis.

### **3.4. Data Processing**

*ATLAS.ti* was used to analyze data in a few ways. The tool allows for viewing themes by document or by document group. These viewers and the discretion of the researcher based on previous studies, were used to determine the best themes to pose against, or with, one another to best serve the present paper. *ATLAS.ti* also shows co-occurrences of themes in tabular form. Once the co-occurrences are viewed, the specific quotations from the data in which these themes co-occur can also be viewed. This tool allowed for better processing of themes to determine which would function best with or against others to serve the analysis.

### **3.5. Qualitative Results Presentation**

In the qualitative results section, some of the themes created for this research are presented. Their presentations in the section are defined before examples of the themes are given and contextualized. Quotations were selected using Google's random number generator. The min was set to 1 and the max was set to the total number of quotations for the theme being discussed. Where multiple themes are being simultaneously discussed, if the number of quotations for a given theme was 15 or greater, one quotation was selected from each of the discussed themes. When the number of quotations in a theme was below 15, the total number of quotations in those like-themes were added, and the random number generator was used to select from the larger pool of quotations. In the qualitative results, themes are presented in opposition to highlight contrasts in their representations across the music reviews.

### **3.6. Quantitative Results Presentation & Data Visualization**



For data presented in tabular form, *ATLAS.ti* has an analysis tool that allows for export to excel. Each table presented in this paper was created this way. Numbers of occurrences were presented for each individual review and, additionally, for groups when informative. In some cases, numbers were presented by genre and in other cases by gender and genre when those groupings aligned with research on the subject.

For data presented in plot form, python was used to create scatter plots. Data tables were downloaded from *ATLAS.ti*, as in the case with tables, and then saved as csv files. Python code was written to read those csv files. Files were then transposed using a separate Python code to order the data appropriate for scatter plots. Using the pandas, matplotlib, and numpy libraries, Python code was written to show scatter plots of the data, color-code the points, and write in the notation for average values in each of the genres. These scatter plots were then saved as photos and edited where necessary for improved visualization.

## **4. Results**

The results of this study will be reported qualitatively and quantitatively. This allows for a showcase of the content being analyzed and adds dimensionality through realizing the differentials in themes between K-pop and Latin pop.

### **4.1. Qualitative Results**

In this section, quotations from music reviews which were themed for the present research will be presented and the decisions on why to theme these quotations as such will be explained. In most subsections, themes are presented in opposition to a theme or multiple themes. Interpretations will be reserved for the discussion section following the results section of the research.

#### 4.1.1. Intracultural vs Intercultural

For the purposes of this paper, intercultural has been defined as times when the reviewer references an artist's attempt to use musical forms outside of their own language group. Intracultural has been defined as times when the reviewer references using musical forms commonly linked to the same language group. Below is an example quotation from the review of Latin pop star Shakira's album *El Dorado*,

The turning point came last year as Shakira revisited her Colombian roots (Pareles, 2017).

Here, the critic makes the claim that what allowed Shakira to make a return to form was revisiting her own cultural history and background.

Intercultural interpretations by music critics allow readers to understand the music through the lens of the artist reaching outside of what would be considered their language community. Below is an example quotation from a review of K-pop girl group Aespa's album *Girls*,

"Lingo" is a bit more experimental by meshing pop with country, a genre rarely featured in K-pop (Kwak, 2022).

The key portion of this quotation is that the reviewer recognizes that there are a wide range of genres typically featured in K-pop, and that it is instrumental to understanding the larger context of the music. That country is a rarity in this stylistic norm is of little consequence beyond that it is an additional intercultural tool in the toolbox of K-pop.

#### 4.1.2. Sophisticated vs Simple

In the present study, a quotation was coded as simple for several reasons. If the art was described as straightforward or when the reviewer found it especially surprising that something created by a particular artist contained more than superficial depth. Additionally, if the reviewer used the word simple or a synonym of the word, those quotations were themed as simple. An example of this is presented below from a review of Latin pop star Rauw Alejandro's album *Saturno*,

One of the best examples might be “Punto 40,” a revival of a Nineties hit by Puerto Rican duo Baby Rasta Y Gringo (Lopez, 2022).

This quote directly follows a passage in the review commenting on how Alejandro pieces together aspects of visual art and choreography. Seemingly, this would make the art sophisticated. The critic undercuts this by using a cover/revival of a ninety's song as the best example from the album.

A quotation was coded as sophisticated when a part, or all, of the album was considered by the critic to have successfully melded multiple ideas, genres or art forms on the same song or album. Below is an example from the review of K-pop rapper RM's album *Indigo*,

RM synthesizes his appreciation for Korean contemporary art with Nineties American golden-age hip-hop and R&B, paying respect to their innovations and creating a sonic meeting ground for these two legends to meet. (Kim, 2022)

In this quote, the reviewer grants the artist the agency to meld not only genres of American music, but also contemporary art. It is considered by the reviewer to have been a successful endeavor in the final portion of the sentence.

#### 4.1.3. Calculated vs Emotional and Uncalculated

For the purposes of this paper, a quotation was coded as calculated when the reviewer determined that an action was undertaken intentionally by an artist or group to construct the final product, be it album or art otherwise. An example below is provided from the review of K-pop star Jimin's album *Face*,

“Dive,” the interlude that follows, provides an immediate respite (Johnston, 2023).

This passage from the review occurs directly following a passage where the critic discusses the anger felt in a separate track. It grants that with the song “Dive”, Jimin makes a calculated decision to release from emotion and pull back from it.

A quotation was coded as uncalculated/DIY/disorganized if, for example, the reviewer questioned the purpose of certain arrangements or referenced the less “pro” nature of the art. Below is an example quotation from the review of Latin pop star Maluma's album *Papi Juancho*,

The inadvertently telling single “Hawái” reveals an unattractive side to Papi Juancho (Suarez, 2020).

The operative word in this quotation is “inadvertently”, which removes agency from Maluma regarding the way the reviewer feels this song is revelatory.

The theme emotional was used when a reviewer noted the emotional palette of a song or album as core to its production. Below is an example quotation from the review of Latin pop star J Balvin's album *Colores*,

But he succumbs to sentimentality in the atmospheric ballad “Rojo,” (Exposito, 2020).

Not only is the critic’s view that Balvin operates with sentimentality part of the emotional coding of this sentence, but also that the reviewer believes Balvin succumbs to it.

#### **4.1.4. Ambitious & Bold vs Cool & Laid Back**

For the purposes of this research, the distinction between ambitious and bold was necessary as the former references the way a critic felt about the ideas taken on by the artist and the latter references the way the reviewers judged the feeling artists were expressing in a song or the album entirely. Below is an example quotation themed as ambitious from the review of K-pop girl group Twice’s album *Ready to Be*,

The K-pop group blows up tired stereotypes and smashes through barriers with a seven-song set that's as brash and compelling as anything in pop music today (Chan, 2023).

This example was themed as ambitious because the critic feels that the group can go above and beyond what is typical even with a small sample size of songs, which is specifically denoted in the passage.

The quotation below was coded as bold and comes from a review of K-pop girl group Blackpink’s album *The Album*,

If you still think all K-pop groups are soft-spoken and demure, it’s time to check your stereotypes (Chan, 2020).

This was coded as bold because the reviewer is opining that the album stands in opposition to stereotypes that the reviewer themselves feels exist.

The decision to split the themes cool and laid-back was made because cool defines the critic's read on the mood expressed by the song or album while laid-back could also refer to the critic's idea of the creation of the work. Below is an example of a quotation coded as cool from a review of Latin pop star Maluma's album *Papi Juancho*,

“Salida De Escape” luxuriates in the illicitness of an affair (Suarez, 2020).

The focus in this quotation is the word luxuriates, which connotes a sense of coolness to the way the reviewer feels about the mood being expressed in the song “Salida De Escape”.

The quotation below was coded as laid-back and comes from the review of Latin pop star Karol G's album *Mañana Sera Bonito*,

Auto-Tuned or not, Karol's voice is open and warm, blessed with a laid-back purity that is rare in the raucous urbano field (Lechner, 2023).

Here, the term itself is used and therefore coded as such. It is noteworthy that the reviewer finds this to be a feature that helps the artist stand out among her peers.

#### **4.1.5. Articulate & Aspirational vs Provocative and other like-themes**

In this paper a quotation was coded as articulate if the word appeared or if, for example, the reviewer found the way an artist expressed themselves to be clear or if they mentioned something about the artist that alluded to their ability to saliently expressed ideas. A quotation was coded aspirational if, for example, the critic described a part of the album or artist's work as something one should aspire to. There are 9 instances of the theme articulate

so this theme has been combined with the 22 instances of aspirational in picking an example. The below example was coded as aspirational in the review of K-pop girl group Aespa's album *Girls*,

The girls...spoke at the United Nations' High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Kwak, 2022).

The critic chooses to focus on a moment outside the realm of the arts and discuss the fact that the artists from the K-pop group Aespa took part in a serious discussion in the realm of global politics. This gives the impression that the reviewer finds something about this to be aspirational.

The theme provocative was applied to quotations when the reviewer described the artist or their work as provoking an emotion or feeling, or they specifically used the term. Similarly, the themes abrasive, destructive/disruptive, and sacrilegious were applied when they were deemed more appropriate than provocative. Cooccurrences of these themes will be reviewed in the quantitative analysis section. There are enough occurrences of the theme provocative for it to be analyzed singularly, the other themes will be combined, and an example will be chosen from that group. Below is a quotation coded as provocative from the review of Latin pop star Shakira's album *El Dorado*,

The album features a song that is already a megahit: "Chantajé" ("Blackmail"), a teasing duet with the Colombian singer Maluma (Pareles, 2017).

The idea used by the critic that tips this to be coded is provocative is describing a song as, "teasing".

The below quotation was coded as destructive/disruptive and appears in the review of Latin pop star Karol G's album *Mañana Será Bonito*,

“Ojos Ferrari,” is reckless and addictive (Lechner, 2023).

This was coded accordingly because of the word reckless, used by the critic to describe a specific song on the album.

#### **4.1.6. Mainstream vs Counterculture**

For this paper, a quotation was coded as mainstream if the critic writing the review judged the music to maintain a pop sensibility or incorporate and reflect mainstream popular culture. The reviewer may also have used the word mainstream in the article in reference to an aspect of a song, the artist, or the album. In total, 35 quotations across all reviews were themed mainstream. The below quotation is an example of one themed mainstream from the review of K-pop star CL's album *Alpha*,

2NE1's album “Crush” on its Best Pop Albums list, calling out CL's solo track “MTBD” as a centerpiece (Kwak, 2021).

Though this part of the review is referencing an earlier release by the artist in question, it harkens the artist's pedigree as a central pop artist.

In the present research, a quotation was coded as counterculture if the reviewer reacted to an aspect of a song, the album, or the artist that was in some way alternative or displayed characteristics that were deemed counter to contemporary mainstream cultural values. These values could be mainstream in either the United States or in the culture of the artist. During research, 37 quotations were themed counterculture. Below is a quotation that



was themed counterculture from the review of the new K-pop mixed gender group Balming Tiger,

The inclusion of punk rock into their music and live shows certainly sets them apart from K-pop's more R&B-centric sound (Pharms, 2023).

Here, the reviewer makes a clear decision that there is a specific sound Balming Tiger incorporate which sets them apart both from mainstream music and from typical sounds of their own genre.

#### **4.1.7. Appropriating, Stay in Your Lane & Unoriginal vs Global & Original**

For this paper, a quotation was themed appropriating if the reviewer judged that an artist was unfavorably copying from a genre or used the word appropriating to describe a song or album. The below quotation is an example of the theme appropriating and comes from the review of Latin pop star Maluma's album *Papi Juancho*,

the Colombian star has cosplayed both inamorato and lothario (Suarez, 2020).

In referring to Maluma's works as "cosplay" the critic is making a judgement that it is simply an act and not truly a part of the artist's own being.

The theme stay in your lane was used when the critic was judging an artist to be reaching too far outside of their own skill set or genre unsuccessfully. A quotation was themed as unoriginal if the word itself was used to describe the music or it was determined that the critic found an element to be unoriginal. The theme stay in your lane has been combined with unoriginal since there are just 12 occurrences of the theme stay in your lane and 11 occurrences of the theme unoriginal in the analysis. The below quotation was coded as

unoriginal and comes from the review of Latin pop star Kali Uchis' album *Red Moon in Venus*,

“Love Between ...” is a bedroom-pop update of the glimmering 1970s bedroom cut “Endlessly,” (Johnston, 2023).

That Johnston refers to the song as an update of an existing track is a demonstration of the lack of originality on the artist's part.

The theme global was used in this research if the word itself was used by the critic to describe an aspect of the music, album, or artist being reviewed. Additionally, this theme was applied in situations where the artist may have been otherwise described as genre-hopping outside the musical forms typically associated with their own language community. The theme original was used when the term was written specifically by the reviewer to describe a song or the album. There are 15 instances of the theme global in the research compared to 8 instances of the theme original. The two have been combined for the purposes of this qualitative analysis section. The below quotation was coded as original from the review of the K-pop boy band BTS album *Map of the Soul 7*,

BTS have proven all the conventional wisdom wrong, blowing up into a whole new kind of global pop phenomenon, triumphing by doing it their own way (Sheffield, 2020).

In this passage, the critic passes a judgement of originality by determining that the K-pop group are blazing a trail all their own.

#### **4.1.8. Sensuality & Lush vs Playful, Emotionless & Slick**

In this research the theme sensuality was used when the reviewer used the word specifically or referred to the sensual or sexual nature of a song, the album, or the artist being reviewed. A quotation was themed as lush if the word itself, or a synonym of it, was used by a critic to describe the sound of a song or album being reviewed. As the theme lush did not reach the minimum threshold to be evaluated on its own, it has been combined with sensuality for the purposes of this analysis. The below quotation was themed as lush from the review of the Laitn pop producer Bizarrap,

Bizarrap wouldn't have the following he does if the music didn't transcend the gimmicky aspect of the videos. His tracks are funky and lush (Lechner, 2022).

Here, the reviewer is noting that without a lushness in Bizarrap's music, the artist's output would be of a lesser quality. The judgement the reviewer is making is that this lushness augments the final form of the music.

In this research a quotation was themed as playful if the word itself was used in the review or a synonym of playful was used as a descriptor. The theme emotionless was used when the critic judged an aspect of a song, album, or the artist to be devoid of emotions. The theme slick was used when the word slick itself was used or a synonym of the word was used to describe an aspect of the music being reviewed. These three themes have been combined in this section as none of them alone meets the minimum threshold. The quotation presented below was themed as playful from the review of the K-pop girl group Blackpink's album *Born Pink*,

Born Pink is their comeback after a period of growth, when Rosé, Lisa, and Jennie have all done solo material. But it's faster, shinier, and way more fun than *The Album* (Sheffield, 2022).

In this quotation, the critic positions this sense of fun as representative of the K-pop group's growth. It shows that what separates a good K-pop production from a better version of it is, in part, that the artist is generating sounds that are more playful than their previous work.

#### **4.1.9. Visual Performance, Club Ready & Addictive**

The themes visual performance, club ready, and addictive are presented here together and not in opposition to one another. It was deemed important to give the results of these three themes because of research carried out for the purpose of the present study. Visual performance was the theme used for quotations where the critic alluded to visual aspects of an artist's work, like music videos or stage performance. Club ready was the theme used for quotations where the author of the review referred to the work in question as being appropriate for a club setting. The theme addictive was used when the word itself was used or a synonym of the word was used. As none of these three themes meets the minimum threshold of 15 quotations, they have been combined to meet that minimum. The below quotation was themed visual performance and comes from the review of Latin pop star Rauw Alejandro's album *Saturno*,

The Puerto Rican star, recognized for his quick-footed, anti-gravity choreography (Lopez, 2023).

The theme was applied here as the critic is making the judgement that one of the things Alejandro is specifically known for is choreography, an aspect of the art that is seen, rather than heard.

## **4.2. Quantitative Results**

Presented in the subsequent sections are the quantitative results of the themes previously presented qualitatively. This presentation is vital in understanding the breakdown of the themes across genre and gender lines.

#### 4.2.1. Intracultural vs Intercultural

In total, 49 instances of the theme intercultural were used while 45 instances of the theme intracultural were used. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of the uses of these themes across each of the two groups of reviews.

Table 1

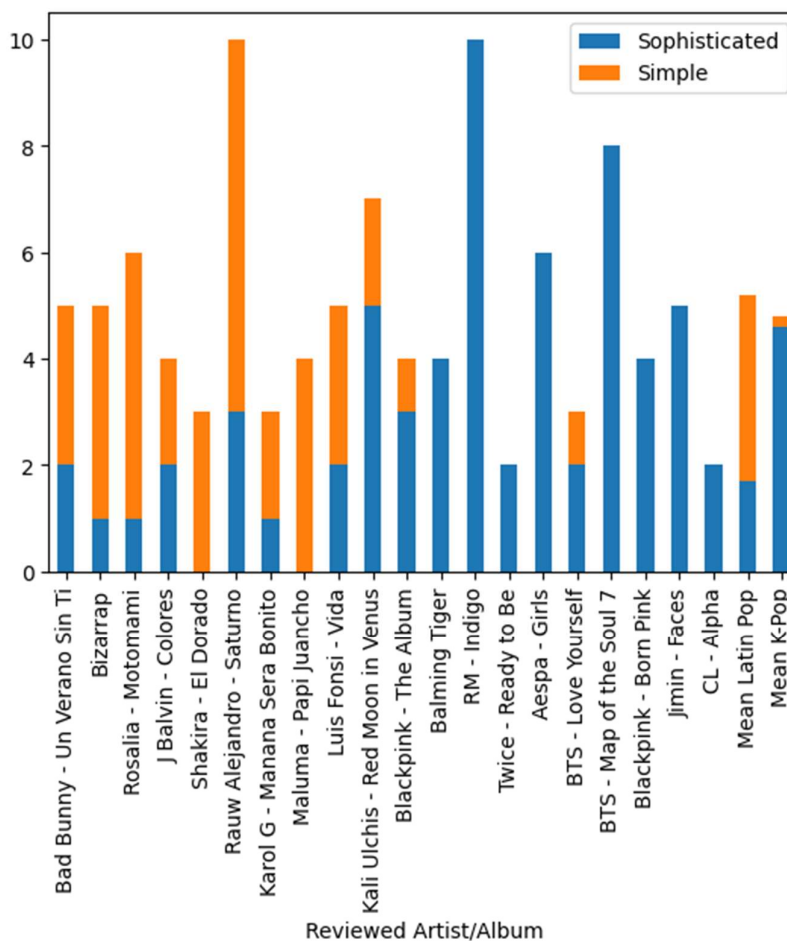
Theme	K-pop Reviews	Latin pop Reviews
Intercultural	39	10
Intracultural	6	39

A K-pop review was 3.9 times more likely to be described in intercultural terms than a Latin pop review. Conversely, Latin pop reviews were 6.5 times more likely to be themed as intracultural than reviews of K-pop albums, songs, or artists.

#### 4.2.2. Sophisticated vs Simple

Figure 1 displays the divide across genre lines between the themes sophisticated and simple. The figure shows the number of each of the two themes existing in each review. The albums are listed on the x axis along with the mean values for each of the two themes at the rightmost end of the chart. The first ten listed on the x axis are Latin pop and the next ten are K-pop. Their averages are labeled and listed directly after.

Figure 1



The average K-pop review contains over 4 references to its sophistication compared to Latin pop reviews averaging just under 2. In contrast, Latin pop is described as simple between 3 and 4 times per article while K-pop is almost never described as simple, at just over 0 on average.

#### 4.2.3. Calculated vs Emotional & Uncalculated

Table 2 shows the instances of calculated, uncalculated/DIY/disorganized, and emotional across K-pop and Latin pop genres. The theme calculated was used to describe K-pop albums, songs, or artists 68 times as compared to only 17 times for Latin pop

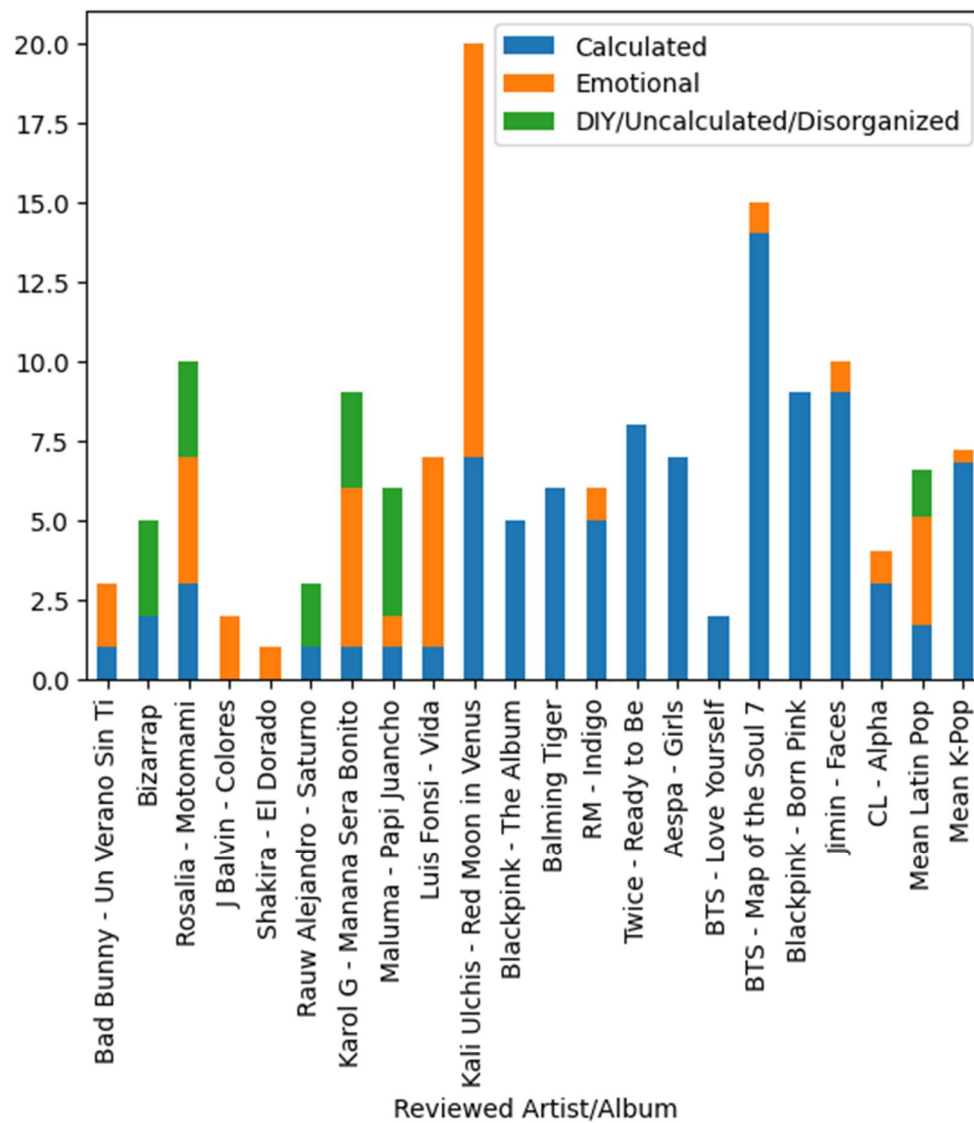
counterparts. Conversely, Latin Pop albums, songs, or artists were described as DIY/uncalculated/disorganized 15 times to their K-pop counterparts' 0 times. Latin Pop reviews had quotations coded as emotional 34 times compared with 4 times for K-pop reviews.

Table 2

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Calculated</b>	68	17
<b>DIY/Uncalculated/Disorganized</b>	0	15
<b>Emotional</b>	4	34

The data is also displayed in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2



As with Figure 1, the first ten listings in the x axis are the Latin pop reviews while the next ten are for K-pop. The final two listings are averages by genre. By observing the amount of blue concentrated to the right side of Figure 2 and the orange and green concentrated to the left side of the figure, calculated is used more to describe K-pop while emotional and DIY/uncalculated/disorganized is used more to describe Latin pop.



Below table 3 shows a tabular breakdown of the theme emotional across gender within the Latin pop genre.

Table 3

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Emotional</b>	23	11

Per table 3, female Latin pop artists were more than twice as likely to be reviewed as emotional compared to their male counterparts in the same genre.

#### 4.2.4. Ambitious & Bold vs Cool & Laid Back

In this research, ideas that were considered bold or ambitious by a critic were analyzed against those that were coded as cool or laid-back. Table 4 displays the breakdown of the uses of these themes across the genre, while table 5 examines the themes across the gender spectrum for each of the genres.

Table 4

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Ambitious</b>	31	2
<b>Bold</b>	17	0
<b>Cool</b>	3	13
<b>Laid-back</b>	1	19

K-pop artists and albums were reviewed as ambitious and/or bold 48 times compared to just 2 times total for Latin Pop. Latin Pop albums and artists were characterized as cool or laid back 32 times compared to just 4 times for K-pop. In table 5, the breakdown is illustrated across genre and gender.

Table 5

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Female Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male K- pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Mixed Gender K- pop Reviews</b>
<b>Ambitious</b>	9	2	21	0	1
<b>Bold</b>	13	0	4	0	0
<b>Cool</b>	2	3	1	10	0
<b>Laid-back</b>	1	6	0	13	0

Of the groups presented in Table 5, reviewers used language coded as ambitious most when reviewing male K-pop albums and groups at 21 times. Reviewers used language coded as bold when most when describing works by female K-pop artists at 13 times. Male Latin pop artists were the group most likely to be referenced as cool or laid-back at 10 and 13 times respectively.

Table 6 shows cooccurrences of the themes ambitious and bold. It is important to distinguish that although these two can describe similar sentiments, they were used to code different reviewer judgements and moods.

Table 6

<b>Code</b>	<b>Ambitious (33)</b>
<b>Bold (17)</b>	2

As shown in Table 6, there are just 2 cooccurrences of the themes ambitious and bold.

#### 4.2.5. Articulate & Aspirational vs Provocative and other like-themes

In Tables 7 and 9 articulate, aspirational, and provocative, along with like-themes for provocative, are expressed. Table 8 breaks down the cooccurrences of provocative with its like-themes. Table 8 looks wholistically at the genres while Table 9 breaks these down across genre and gender lines.

Table 7

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Articulate</b>	7	2
<b>Aspirational</b>	20	2
<b>Abrasive</b>	0	8
<b>Destructive/Disruptive</b>	2	11
<b>Provocative</b>	2	19
<b>Sacrilegious</b>	0	3

Table 7 shows that K-pop reviewers were more likely than Latin Pop reviewers to use terms that recalled the articulate or aspirational nature of the artistry by a breakdown of 27 to 4, respectively. Latin Pop reviewers were more likely to relate content to being abrasive,

destructive/disruptive, provocative, or sacrilegious than K-pop reviewers by a count of 41 to 4.

Displaying that though they do overlap, the themes for provocative and the like-themes grouped with provocative were not redundant, an additional table of the cooccurrences between provocative and the other three themes grouped with it is displayed below in table 8.

Table 8

<b>Like-Themes</b>	<b>Provocative (21)</b>
<b>Abrasive (8)</b>	3
<b>Destructive/Disruptive (13)</b>	4
<b>Sacrilegious (3)</b>	1

Included in the cooccurrence data from table 9 are the totals of each quotation throughout the research in parentheses next to the name of the theme. As seen in the above table, the highest percentage of overlap between a theme and provocative is with the theme abrasive. Still, the two themes do not cooccur in 62.5% of instances. It was deemed for the purpose of this research that these themes exist in addition to provocative because they describe additional circumstances not covered by the overarching theme analyzed in this section, provocative. However, because of the lower number of occurrences of these three themes, they were grouped with provocative as they express a similar sentiment on the side of the reviewer.

Below, table 9 presents the breakdown of these themes across gender and genre.

Table 9

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Female Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male K- pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Mixed Gender K- pop Reviews</b>
<b>Articulate</b>	5	1	2	1	0
<b>Aspirational</b>	10	0	8	2	2
<b>Abrasive</b>	0	5	0	3	0
<b>Destructive/Disruptive</b>	1	6	0	5	1
<b>Provocative</b>	2	11	0	8	0
<b>Sacrilegious</b>	0	3	0	0	0

Female K-pop artists outnumber their male counterparts in being reviewed as articulate or aspirational by a count of 15 to 10, with the mix gendered group being described as aspirational 2 times. Female Latin pop artists' reviews used language coded with the bottom four themes in table 5 a total of 25 times compared with reviews of male Latin pop artists 16 times.

#### 4.2.6. Mainstream vs Counterculture

In tables 10 and 11 the themes mainstream and counterculture are broken down. First, in table 10, they are broken down by genre. In table 11 the themes are broken down both by gender and genre.

Table 10

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
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<b>Counterculture</b>	10	27
<b>Mainstream</b>	30	5

Table 10 shows that the theme counterculture was applied a total of 37 times across all 20 reviews analyzed. Reviewers were more likely to judge a Latin pop song, album, or artist as containing an element of counterculture by a breakdown of 27 to K-pop reviews' 10. Alternatively, K-pop songs, albums, or artists were more likely to be judged as containing elements of mainstream by critics by a factor of 6 at 30 to 5.

Below, table 11 illustrates the breakdown of counterculture and mainstream across gender and genre.

Table 11

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Female Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male K- pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Mixed Gender K-pop Reviews</b>
<b>Counterculture</b>	3	12	1	15	6
<b>Mainstream</b>	20	2	9	3	1

For the theme counterculture, the difference between the proclivity of critics to review works by Latin pop artists as containing an element of counterculture is slim. Female Latin pop artists were judged in this way 12 times compared to 15 times for their male counterparts. On the other hand, the difference across gender lines for the theme mainstream among K-pop artists was much larger. Female K-pop artists were judged to be using an element of the mainstream 20 times compared to just 9 for their male counterparts and once for the mixed gender K-pop group.

#### **4.2.7. Appropriating, Stay in Your Lane & Unoriginal vs Global & Original**

In table 12, the themes appropriating, stay in your lane, and unoriginal are measured against the themes global and original. The table breaks these down across each of the two genres, K-pop and Latin pop.

Table 12

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Appropriating</b>	1	14
<b>Stay in your lane</b>	1	11
<b>Unoriginal</b>	0	11
<b>Global</b>	8	7
<b>Original</b>	7	1

The themes appropriating, stay in your lane, and unoriginal were used for quotations 38 times across all reviews in the research. Out of those 38 times, they were used for reviews of Latin pop works or artists all but 2 times. The themes global and original were used a total of 23 times. The theme global was applied to K-pop reviews and Latin pop reviews nearly evenly at 8 and 7 times, respectively. Contrast this with the theme original, which was applied more unevenly at 7 times for K-pop reviews to just once for Latin pop reviews. Overall, the two themes combined were applied 15 times to K-pop reviews and 8 times to Latin pop reviews.

#### **4.2.8. Sensuality & Lush vs Playful, Emotionless & Slick**

In tables 13 and 14, the themes sensuality and lush are measured against the themes playful, emotionless, and slick. In table 13, these themes are broken down across the two genres. In table 14 the themes are further broken down across gender and genre.

Table 13

<b>Theme</b>	<b>K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Latin pop Reviews</b>
<b>Sensuality</b>	1	17
<b>Lush</b>	4	7
<b>Playful</b>	7	3
<b>Emotionless</b>	3	0
<b>Slick</b>	3	0

In reviews, the themes sensuality and lush were used for 29 total quotations. Those quotations were divided by genre lines at 24 times in favor of reviews of Latin pop songs, albums, or artists and 5 times for K-pop reviews. The themes playful, emotionless, and slick were used in reviews to describe aspects of K-pop songs, albums, or artists 13 times compared with 3 times in reviews of Latin pop materials.

Table 14 below illustrates the breakdown of these themes across gender and genre.

Table 14

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Female K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Female Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male K-pop Reviews</b>	<b>Male Latin pop Reviews</b>	<b>Mixed Gender K-pop Reviews</b>
<b>Sensuality</b>	1	7	0	10	0
<b>Lush</b>	2	4	2	3	0
<b>Playful</b>	6	1	1	2	0
<b>Emotionless</b>	2	0	1	0	0
<b>Slick</b>	3	0	0	0	0



The gap of quotations which were themed sensuality and lust across gender among Latin pop artists is not large, with the female Latin pop artists or their work being described in these terms 11 times compared with 13 times for their male counterparts. The themes playful, emotionless, and slick were used to describe female K-pop artists or their work 11 times as compared to 2 times for their male and mixed gender counterparts combined.

#### 4.2.9. Visual Performance, Club Ready & Addictive

In table 15 the themes visual performance, club ready, and addictive are broken down across genre lines.

Table 15

Theme	K-pop Reviews	Latin pop Reviews
<b>Visual Performance</b>	5	8
<b>Club ready</b>	6	2
<b>Addictive</b>	3	1

Among reviews, the theme visual performance was used by critics to describe K-pop songs, albums, or artists 5 times as compared with 8 in Latin pop reviews. The theme club ready was used to in K-pop reviews 6 times and 2 times in Latin pop reviews. Critics judged the K-pop songs to be addictive 3 times as compared with 1 time for Latin pop.

## 5. Discussion

Intracultural and intercultural were presented opposite each other because they exist on opposite sides of a spectrum. There are several reasons why Shakira, a major Latin pop star, would have her music described by critics as intracultural, or referencing aesthetics from within her own language and geographic community. First, Spanish in the classroom has

been segregated wherein Americans are learning it as a foreign language while Spanish speakers are generally kept separate and taught in methods that closer resemble home language maintenance (Valdés, 1997; Valdés, Lozano & García Moya, 1981). Perhaps this desire to keep Spanish speakers associated with their own language is entrenched in critical observations of their musical composition. The critic's judgement that this return to roots constitutes a type of artistic turning point shows a level of approval in Shakira exploring where she came from. Additionally, institutionalized lack of desire to separate Spanish speakers based on their geographic origin and instead grouping Spanish speakers together as one ethnicity may result in its extension music writing (Leeman, 2004). The continuation of this idea from the overarching hegemon, the US government, to another, The New York Times, is a possible explanation of its appearance. To further explain why this theme lopsidedly was used to describe reviews of Latin pop, as shown in table 1, contrasted with K-pop, it may be a case of the proclivity of Spanish speakers to maintain language identity into future generations and commune together in the face of rejection by white, anglophone America (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). It is possible that Latin pop artists have acquiesced to this notion in the development of their music careers, resulting in critics readily describing their works as such.

In contrast, there are several points of discussion in theming the quotation from the review of Aespa's *Girls* as intercultural. For starters, looking towards western genres, like pop and country in this case, is a fundamental aspect of modern K-pop music (Benson, 2007; Kloet & Kooijman, 2016; Messerlin & Shin, 2017). As the music blends western genre, it seems appropriate that a critic would internalize that as intercultural. Additionally, the model minority stereotype shows, at some level, Americans believe Asian Americans assimilate effectively to American culture (Varma, 2004; Tashiro & Conrad, 2009). The critic writing the review, consciously or not, is praising the K-pop girl group for blending western genres

into their music, as opposed to performing something authentically Korean, as if K-pop is not. These reasons also reflect why the breakdown of the theme across the two genres, shown in table 1, skews heavily towards K-pop being described as intercultural compared with Latin pop.

The themes simple and sophisticated were presented opposite each other because they bookend two sides of a spectrum. In judging Rauw Alejandro's *Saturno* to contain simple elements, the critic is espousing historically hegemonic ideas about Spanish speakers, even in praising the execution. The instrumental value of learning Spanish, as opposed to integrative, can provide an explanation (Pratt, Agnello & Santos, 2009). It may recycle this idea that the reasons for interacting with the Spanish language are straightforward, instead of learning the language for cultural interaction. Additionally, the phenomenon of *Mock Spanish* gives us insights into this opinion (Hill, 1998). Americans' use of Spanish in such a way ascribes to it a lower and simpler status than English. These may also explain why the number of times the theme was used on more times in Latin pop reviews on average in contrast with the counterpart theme sophisticated. However, the ratio of the two themes for Latin pop reviews, shown in figure 1, was closer than expected based on background research. Perhaps the renewed search for middle ground between cultures present in American society, as demonstrated by Lash (2018) has deepened understandings of the Hispanic community and provides insights to its sophisticated nature.

Alternatively, K-pop music was seldom described as simple and, instead, was twice as likely as Latin pop to be described as sophisticated. The example quotation from RM's *Indigo* shows that the critic validates the complex blend of genres making the composition sophisticated. This could be a result of the integrative opinion Americans hold of learning Korean, for example (Jeong, 2012; Lee, 2018). In this model, the desire to interact with Korean culture drives most Korean language study. It shows that Americans see something

sophisticated about the culture beyond simply learning the language for a specific reason. Additionally, K-pop music has, by design, fused many elements of traditionally American genres together successfully (Benson, 2007; Kloet & Kooijman, 2016; Messerlin & Shin, 2017). Perhaps, observing a foreigner interacting with American culture is deemed sophisticated, as opposed to the way critics feel Latin pop stars draw from their own cultural backgrounds.

The theme calculated was presented opposite the themes uncalculated and emotional because they represent opposite ends of a spectrum. For the divide between calculated and emotional and uncalculated, the critic made a demarcation in describing the calculated choice of K-pop star Jimin to resist emotions in composing the track list. This may be related to stereotypes of Asian Americans as tending towards math and sciences in school subjects (Tashiro & Conrad, 2009). Additionally, the portrayal of Asian persons in popular media as *mathy* might entrench this opinion among reviewers. Although the quotation here presented this as a positive, it could also be construed as negative. As Varma (2004) showed, there is a ceiling in career advancement opportunities for Asian Americans because they are kept in more technical roles and away from roles that require people management skills. In some instances, being calculated, instead of operating on feel and emotion, could be a negative in making music.

Contrast this with the way Latin pop was described as uncalculated/DIY/disorganized. In reviewing Maluma's *Papi Juancho*, the critic disregarded a decision made by the Latin pop star as inadvertent. This level of disorganization may come from hegemonic representations of Spanish speakers as disorderly and lazy (Hill, 1998; Roth-Gordon, 2011). This may also explain why the numbers on the theme stray towards Latin pop. It should be noted that the Latin pop Kali Uchis album *Red Moon in Venus*, contains a high number of quotations themed calculated. This album contains the most English of all the analyzed

albums. Even this album did not do much to change the average per Latin pop album, as seen in the column labeled “Mean Latin pop” in figure 2.

The theme emotional was posed as a negative for the review of Latin pop star J Balvin’s *Colores*. In stating that the artist succumbed to emotion, the critic is perhaps espousing Hill’s (1998) observations about hegemonic portrayals of Spanish speakers as disorderly. Additionally, as shown in table 3, reviews of female Latin pop artists contained more than twice as many quotations themed emotional. This may be a conduit of the notion that Latina women are stereotyped as emotional in the United States and represented as such in media (Cochiara, Bell & Berry, 2006).

The themes ambitious and bold were presented opposite cool and laid-back because they represent opposing ends of a spectrum where, on one end, the themes ambitious and bold represent an aggressive approach, while cool and laid-back represent the opposite. The representative quotations for the themes ambitious and bold came from the reviews of K-pop girl groups Twice’s album *Ready to Be* and Blackpink’s *The Album*. The description of *Ready to Be* as ambitious could come from the idea that because of the relative economic success of Asian immigrants in America, they may be stereotyped as having higher ambitions (Varma, 2004). For the theme bold, the critic’s opinion that Blackpink are making a bold and that this boldness runs counter to stereotypes of K-pop appears to be true. Among Asian women, this would run counter to stereotypes hegemonically entrenched in the United States which depict Asian women as exotic and temptresses (Uchida, 1998; Azhar, et al., 2021). It does, however, conform to the K-pop standard that female artists were quicker to uptake new ideas to make the crossover to western audiences (Benson, 2007). This would be considered a bold move, commercially, and is in line with courting mainstream audiences. The breakdown across genders in table 4 shows that male K-pop artists are more than twice as likely to be judged as ambitious. This may be explained by stereotypes Americans form about Asian

women, which were shown to run counter to the model minority stereotypes in at least one study (Azhar, et al., 2021). The trend of K-pop being judged as more ambitious than Latin pop, which is more commonly categorized as cool and laid-back, does conform to stereotypes between the two groups which, as mentioned, can depict the Spanish speaking community as lazy.

Quotation examples from cool and laid-back themes came from reviews of Latin pop albums. Possibly, the critic writing the review of Maluma's *Papi Juancho* was extending stereotypes of laziness to the album, not necessarily to its detriment. This is important to note as, again, the use of these stereotypes does not necessarily mean the critic's opinion of the album is lower. However, the word "luxuriate" harkens to that previously mentioned stereotype of Spanish speakers as lazy, as represented in American media (Hill, 1998; Roth-Gordon, 2011). The quotation coded as cool also makes use of this stereotype. Additionally, as the quotation comes from a review of a female Latin pop artist and remarks about the warmth of the artist's voice, it also perpetuates stereotypes that Latina women are caring and motherly, as derived from "marianismo" (Lopez, 2013). Coincidentally, the data from table 4 displaying how much more frequently Latin pop is reviewed as being cool or laid-back compared with K-pop, would place Latin pop in the vibe of mid-2010s mainstream music (Interiano, et al., 2018).

The themes articulate and aspirational were presented opposite provocative and its like-themes because, through research, they represent opposing ways hegemony has commented on the two language groups. The quotation presented as aspirational from the review of K-pop girl group Aespa's album *Girls* can be interpreted in a few ways. First, mentioning that the artist spoke at the UN in a music review could be an extension of the model minority stereotype (Varma, 2004; Tashiro & Conrad, 2009). This part of the review is presented as a point of pride for the artists and is mentioned in the review because it should

influence the way you feel about the group, even though it is not necessarily related to the music. This can also be interpreted as a cap on the ceiling of Asian Americans as it relates to their presentation by the hegemon (Varma, 2004). Additionally, the UN as a global entity be seen as an extension of the dominance of economically neoliberal countries, a group which now includes South Korea (Stokes, 2004; Kroier, 2012; Um, 2013; Kim, 2017). This, in turn, is an extension of the mainstream since it is also an extension of American hegemony. That these themes heavily favored K-pop, as per table 7, makes sense per the mentioned research. Additionally, that they are relatively absent from Latin pop reviews is important. The way the Spanish language community is represented alongside other vulgar idioms in hegemonic media could hardly be described as articulate (Hill, 1998).

Meanwhile, the theme provocative can be explained in the review of one of Latin pop star Shakira's songs as the promiscuity of Latina women in the United States (Beltran, 2002; López, 2014). The same goes for the theme destructive/disruptive, which was used on a quotation from the review of Latin pop singer Karol G's album *Mañana Será Bonito*. In this way, Latina women who do not conform to the motherly stereotype, which appears to be the case in these songs, are seen as a disruptive force of provocation and sexuality. Table 9 supports these findings further, with reviews of work by female Latin pop stars being themed as provocative, abrasive, disruptive/destructive, or sacrilegious 25 times to their male counterparts' 16 times. The nonconformity to hegemonic description of Latina women to be can also be viewed as countercultural, since it is going both against the wants of the hegemon in society and against a trait from its own culture, "marianismo" (Lopez, 2013). This latter definition of counterculture refers to the idea that an aspect of art can be counter to the hegemonic norm or one's own culture to be considered countercultural (Roberts, 1978).

The themes mainstream and counterculture were positioned opposite each other for this research because they represent opposite ends of a spectrum. The theme mainstream, as it

was applied to a quotation to the review of K-pop artist CL's album *Alpha* can be explained through the lens of mainstream pop music. The term pop refers either to a sensibility that is targeting a mainstream artist, or the word popular, referring to the artist (Jost, 2019; Sanneh, 2021; Steinbrecher, 2021; 2022). Additionally, because K-pop has specifically targeted and courted western audiences, theming the quotation as mainstream simply upon seeing the word pop in a K-pop review is appropriate (Benson, 2007). It is then unsurprising that K-pop was themed as mainstream at a rate of 6 times that of Latin pop, because the musical forms traditionally blended in the genre, which are in turn reviewed in music criticism, are more mainstream western forms. Additionally, reviews of female K-pop artists had quotations themed as mainstream twice as many times as their male and mixed gender group counterparts. This could be explained by the fact that, female artists were quicker to focus their attention on western audiences than male K-pop artists (Benson, 2007). Perhaps, by being quicker to the draw, female K-pop artists have stayed ahead of the curve in setting the mainstream as it changes era to era.

The quotation representative of the theme counterculture can be explained as such through definitions of countercultural musical forms and movements. Even though it was drawn from a K-pop act, the use of any punk rock sets the group Balming Tiger apart from the rest of their genre, and that is baked into the quotation. As previously mentioned, beyond associating with a countercultural musical form like punk rock, being counter to one's own musical movement is also grounds for being considered countercultural (Roberts, 1978). Moreover, the fact that the group is comprised of men and women, when most K-pop groups are either homogenous groups of all men or all women, might influence the writing. The breakdown of counterculture as a theme across genre lines in table 10 shows that the theme was used for Latin pop articles more consistently. As mentioned, Latin pop music is made up of an amalgam of genres that come from the global south and situates those sounds outside of



mainstream pop. There was no substantial difference between female and male Latin pop artists in the breakdown of the theme counterculture. Potentially, the lack of differentiation is because language is a salient marker of identity in the Hispanic community both hegemonically, from the outside, and within itself. The language is also the basis of othering Spanish speakers as non-mainstream in America, racializing them as non-White (Davis & Moore, 2014). Because of that salience and its resulting stereotypes, there is no differentiation between genders.

The theme appropriating, as it was applied in the review of Latin pop star Maluma's album *Papi Juancho* can be described by some of the rules of appropriation in art. In the review, one of Maluma's songs is judged by the critic to be an act by the artist, pretending to be something he is not. The critic makes use of two Spanish terms to critique the song, which can be taken to mean that Maluma is appropriating something within Hispanic culture. Notably, appropriation is commonly thought as they act of someone acting inauthentically and borrowing from within their own cultural context for commercial appeal (Heyd, 2003; Young, 2005 & 2006; Matthews 2016). Consequently, this theme makes sense when we take the critic at their word and understand that what Maluma is doing constitutes an appropriative act, a Latin pop star borrowing within the Hispanic cultural context. In a similar vein, the example of the theme unoriginal showed that in some of Latin pop artist Kali Uchis' best moments, the singer is performing a new version to an existing work in English. This might be explained by ideas that Spanish speakers should learn English for elevated status in America (Linton, 2009). This presents a complicated struggle between classifying this as mainstream or counterculture. On the one hand, that the song in English is specifically mentioned might push this to mainstream. On the other hand, that it stands out at all means there are other elements that evade the mainstream as defined hegemonically. The themes appropriating, stay in your lane, and unoriginal were used overwhelmingly to define works

by Latin pop artists. As mentioned, this reiterates the idea that appropriation happens within one's own cultural context. Latin pop artists are typically judged as creating intracultural works. Thus, it would be more likely for critics to review their works as appropriating or unoriginal. As for asking them to stay in their lane, this tracks back to the idea that Spanish speakers should be in a community with each other and out of sight and earshot from the anglophone community in America (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003; Leeman, 2004).

The themes global and original were presented in contrast with appropriating, stay in your lane, and unoriginal. While original is simply the opposite of unoriginal, global was presented in opposition to appropriating and stay in your lane based on previous research that showed global theme incorporation in music is typically not construed as appropriative (Linton, 2009). The presented quotation for original was from the review of the K-pop boy band, BTS, and presents their originality as unconventional in the context of the genre. The quotation was also coded as global, coincidentally. The idea that K-pop is global derives from its incorporation of genres outside of its own cultural context. In demonstrating that the originality of the group defies convention and brings them to a new level, perhaps the reviewer is nodding to the ceiling which exists for Asian immigrants and Asian Americans professionally because of stereotypes that Asian Americans do not have the intangible qualities for the highest-level career roles (Varma, 2004). Surprisingly, K-pop and Latin pop reviews were themed as global at 8 and 7, respectively. This narrow gap might be explained by the fact that even though Latin pop is intracultural, and Spanish speakers make up an increasingly larger portion of the US populous, they are still considered outsiders and foreigners, much like Asian Americans. This was studied in the way schoolteachers attempting to bridge cultural gaps are underequipped to give context regarding both groups (Lash, 2018).

The determination to group sensuality and lush together was made because, in certain definitions, lush can also refer to a sexual or sensual vibe. The quotation for this section was from the profile of Latin pop producer Bizarrap and was themed lush. In saying the sound of the music created by the producer makes up for the gimmicky videos, the critic is perhaps extending stereotypes that it would be best to hear the production, as opposed to seeing and hearing the Spanish language (Davis & Moore, 2014). While the theme lush was used 7 times in reviews of Latin pop and 4 times in reviews of K-pop, the theme sensuality was much more lopsidedly applied for quotations from Latin pop reviews, at 17 to K-pop's 1. Sensuality was applied somewhat evenly across gender, but with reviews of works by male Latin pop artists having 10 to their female counterparts' 7. Perhaps the view of Spanish speakers as dirty (Hill, 1998) where Asians are stereotyped in America as a model minority (Varma, 2004; Tashiro & Conrad, 2009) results in the disparity presented. Especially considering the rise of "family values" as a pillar of hegemonic American culture over the last decade, perhaps sensuality is not a part of being that model minority (Downland, 2009).

The codes playful, emotionless, and slick were juxtaposed against sensuality and lush. Playful and emotionless because they capture an opposing vibe to sensuality, in the sense that they are lighter, and slick because it can be considered a production sound opposing lush. The quotation selected was themed as playful from a review of the K-pop girl group Blackpink's album *Born Pink*. The quotation reveals that the critic responds positively to the group performing something decidedly less serious and lighter and more fun. This runs counter to narratives about early stereotypes of Asian women but conforms to the notion of pointing music towards the mainstream, where happier, danceable songs have become chart successes (Interiano, et al., 2018). As K-pop courts the mainstream intentionally, recall that K-pop girl groups were seen as pioneering this movement first (Benson, 2007). Additionally, as Americans have seemed to stereotype the Asian community as adopting mainstream values,

perhaps the reviewer is reenforcing some of these stereotypes (Leong & Schneller, 1997; Varma, 2004). This may also explain the breakdown of these themes skewing heavily towards K-pop groups, and specifically female K-pop artists.

The themes visual performance, club ready, and addictive were combined for analysis because they all represent aspects of mainstream popular music culture. It was important to analyze them, but they are not opposed to each other and were combined so that a selection could be made for analysis. That selection came from the review of Latin pop artist Rauw Alejandro's *Saturno*, where the artist's choreography was specifically mentioned and constitutes a reference to an aspect of visual performance, dancing, an aspect of contemporary mainstream pop (Interiano, et al., 2018). Referencing this as part of the review demonstrates that the critic recognizes the mainstream appeal of the album. As mentioned, this could be interpreted as the reviewer saying that Rauw Alejandro is recognized for his choreography, as opposed to voice, because American audiences are opposed to hearing the Spanish language and would rather see the dancing to engage with the music (Garcia-Bedolla, 2003; Leeman, 2004). In the breakdown of these codes across genres, K-pop reviews narrowly edge out Latin pop reviews. This might show a proclivity of reviewers to tend towards K-pop as the mainstream entity with Latin pop being subcultural. Latin pop's roots in Miami clubs and dance floors could play a role in its continued assessment as a club ready genre, too (Party, 2008). The closeness does indicate that either some convergence and nuance is being reached or, as in studies, that there is lacking nuance from understanding both language communities and as such the differentiation is small (Lash, 2018).

## **6. Conclusion**

As demonstrated in this paper, the opinions of American hegemony towards the Spanish speaking world and Asian communities have permeated the mainstream publications

of music writing. Consciously or not, these stereotypes have been internalized by the dominant entities in music writing and affect the way music commentary is constructed around two fast growing, massively popular genres, K-pop and Latin pop. Additionally, the research shows that these two communities, at times, stand on opposite ends of certain spectrums. Moreover, it demonstrates that hegemonic opinions of the two communities still lack certain nuances which are absent in discussions being held across America outside of music, too. Furthermore, stereotypes about the Latina and Asian women have been regurgitated to some extent, in music reviews of artists who identify as female, while in other reviews the rejection of these stereotypes reflects a country that is progressing in some areas and regressing in others.

As far as the debate around mainstream and counterculture is concerned, the moving target and dynamic definition of what constitutes a contemporary mainstream set of values and musical movement makes a definitive conclusion evasive. On one hand, some of the stereotypical views of the speaker communities necessarily confine them to the one side or the other. Perhaps the Latinx community in the United States will always be subcultural because of the dominance of anglophone identity in the country. Those opinions, having bled into the commentary of Latin pop music, may present the genre as countercultural. However, certainly some of the conclusions of the presented research show that not only has Latin pop crossed over to mainstream audiences, some of the opinions of it reflect more mainstream American values. One thing that is true is, as per this research, they constitute a lesser percentage of the discussion around Latin pop than those same opinions do around K-pop. While some stereotypes about Asian immigrants and the Asian American community may seem to incorporate mainstream American values, it is clear there is a long way to go before those communities achieve equal status. The existence of hegemony implies the existence of a bottom group or groups. Now, because of the popularity of the two musical forms, the way

these stereotypes are a part of American life is on full display. Moreover, aspects of K-pop are considered by music critics to be countercultural. In striving for more nuanced opinions, representation, and new publications in music criticism, we may yet achieve an equilibrium wherein we evaluate each genre on the same level. Whether or not this would be appropriate would be dictated by the treatment of out groups and language communities in the United States. To paper over these discussions with candy coated language in music reviews would be inappropriate.

## **7. Limitations and Future Research**

A limitation of this study was a lack of available data. In one instance, an article was used from the New York Times instead of Rolling Stone magazine because Rolling Stone did not review the album, which was relevant to the study. Additionally, because Rolling Stone magazine did not review an album for as many K-pop artists as they did Latin pop artists, two albums were used for two of the K-pop groups. In these cases, it was ensured that the same critic did not review multiple albums from the same artist. Additionally, because all but one of the reviews were selected from *Rolling Stone*, six different writers wrote reviews for Latin pop and seven wrote K-pop reviews. Without unlimited staff, it was not possible to have a different critic for each review and an attempt was made to keep these numbers as even as possible by choosing specific artists and albums.

Further research on this subject may include a deeper look into the music industry. The ways entities like record labels, music festivals, and streaming services promote artists of varying genres would be an important way to further understand this topic. With each genre still growing, there are sure to be more artists across the mainstream-counterculture spectrum. How critics respond to these expanding genres as time goes on should be an area of further research.

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