



**THE PRACTICE OF RACISM AND COLORISM
IN SOUTH KOREAN POPULAR MEDIA:
AN INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL RACE ANALYSIS**

BY

MR. ANTHONY THIEN PHAM

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2019
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ENTITLED

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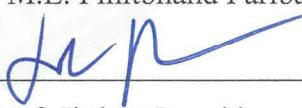
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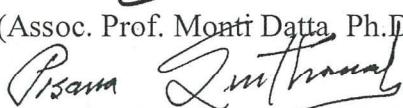
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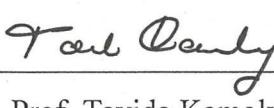
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ABSTRACT

The world has become significantly more interconnected with the rise of the internet and digital media. South Korea has taken advantage of such interconnectedness and has managed to popularize its cultural products on the global market. However, South Korean beliefs and practices of both racism and colorism are not isolated from the exported cultural products; in fact, the study argues that such ideology is intentionally constructed into the foundations of it. Therefore, the study applies critical race theory and the racial rationale for international power in order to analyze the unintentional impact that South Korean popular media has on a global community when it engages with ideologies of racism and colorism. This is noted particularly in the hypocritical demand for whiteness in juxtaposition to the appropriation of Blackness, as seen in South Korea's expansive beauty and music industries respectively. The study concludes that South Korea is responsible for the impact that its popular media produces due to its intentional export of them; as such, the need to develop critical consciousness around issues of race and color are necessary should they choose to empower peoples, rather than reinforce the oppressions of said peoples.

(2)

Keywords: South Korea, racism, colorism, popular media



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objective and significance

It can be said without much debate that the world has become significantly more interconnected than ever before in the history of humanity. The evolution of technology has allowed for a revolution regarding the movement of goods, ideas, and people. As communities and populations relocate across the world, intermingling in spaces and environments vastly different from ones that nurtured the development of their particular individual cultures, identity has increasingly become a critical issue of discussion. With regards to identity, race and color are some of the most easily recognizable markers of identity within both a community and an individual. In fact, these two markers of identity are noted to be core to the individual within today's society (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010).

Though it can be said that both race and color are merely social constructions that have no innate value in and of themselves, the impacts created by human beliefs in these social constructs are tangible and produce significant effects on the daily lives of individuals across the world (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Race conflicts are apparent throughout history and around the world: from the Haitian Revolution, to the American Civil Rights Movement, and even to the present-day crisis between the South African government and its white citizens (Augustyn, 2017; Carson, 2019; Topsfield, 2018). Issues of color are typically more prevalent in homogenous communities wherein skin color serves as a stronger basis for differentiation between individuals; examples can include the Rwandan Genocide, the inequality experienced by Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, and the increasing demand for skin lightening products all over Asia (Burns 2019; Karmali, 2018; McKenna, 2016).

South Korea, though largely homogenous in population (World Population Review, 2019), experiences and practices both racism and colorism (Hazzan, 2015; Lee, 2017). The study seeks to research and analyze what racism and colorism looks like in current-day South Korea. More specifically, the study seeks to understand how those beliefs are translated into South Korean popular media for both

domestic and international consumption. In the past few decades, South Korean popular media has taken the world by storm through what is known as the Hallyu Waves; consumption of Korean media has become an international phenomenon (Romano, 2018). Because South Korean media has such an expansive reach and high consumption rate around the world, the narrative that is perpetuated throughout their media incidentally bears significant consequence that ultimately impacts more than just their domestic community.

The objective of the study is thus to develop an understanding of the general interactions of Korean media with the concepts of whiteness and blackness. The significance of this understanding is that it will grant insight into how race politics operates on an international level. Many studies have contributed to this overall understanding, but often times they primarily focus on multi-racial or multi-ethnic nation-states. South Korea, as a homogenous state, will expand upon this understanding by illuminating the implications that ethnically or racially homogenous communities have on a multi-ethnic or multi-racial global society.

1.2 Research question and terminology

Therefore, the study asks: What does South Korean media say about South Korean understandings of and engagements with race and color, but more specifically with racism and colorism? What does this understanding and engagement implicate about race politics in a racially and ethnically homogenous nation-state that exists within a greater and more diverse global society?

In order to begin approaching this topic, there are a number of terminologies that require clear definitions for application:

- Race – This term references the categorization of humanity into various groups based on a number of phenotypical traits, such as skin color. Categories and their definitions are not consistent across cultures, but typically identities such as “white” or “black” (Thompson, 2017). Because of this inconsistency, this term is recognized to be a social construct, providing meaning only to the society that crafted the aspects to define it (Zevallos, 2017).

- Racism – There are a few general definitions for this term: first, it is the belief that people's characteristics or traits are inborn based on their phenotypical biology and that such characteristics can help to categorize superiority of certain people over others (Smedley, 2017); second, it is the discrimination or prejudice that results from a belief in the race and racism (Nittle, 2019b).
- Color – Color, specifically skin color, is made in reference to the variations of skin tones. In regards to discourses about racism, they often focus on whiteness and blackness, but in regards to discourses about colorism, they focus more on the various shades between lightness and darkness (Jones, 2013).
- Colorism – Also known as skin color stratification, colorism is the privileging of light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts in the various fields, such as income, housing, education, marriage, etc. Colorism doesn't focus on race or ethnicity, but rather with the color tone of skin and can thus occur within racial or ethnic groups, as well as between (Hunter, 2007).
- Whiteness – Whiteness is a social construction that encapsulates white culture, norms, and values and then normalizes them for society, which thus establishes a hierarchy of what is “normal” and what is “other.” The othering of anyone or anything non-white then allows a system to provide power and privilege to those within whiteness and deny it to those without whiteness (Shades of Noir, 2018)
- Blackness – Blackness, on the other hand, is not purely a social construction, but a political identity shaped out of a shared experience for oppression based on perceived racial identity. Blackness encapsulates Black culture, norms, and values, but also embodies the opposite of “colonial whiteness” (Criss-June, 2015).
- Appropriation – Appropriation, particularly cultural appropriation, is the taking of another's culture for oneself without explicit permission and/or genuine appreciation. This is recognized especially when those from positions of power and privilege take from those of marginalized

backgrounds, profiting from a practice that would otherwise be “othered” and ostracized (Nittle, 2019a).

The definitions provided above are simplifications that will be utilized throughout the study to better research a complex issue. However, they will be further elaborated upon in the following literature review.

1.3 Theoretical framework and hypothesis

This study will research popular media in South Korean society to inform how they are related to behaviors and practices that engage with ideologies of whiteness and blackness. This is important because South Korean media has a global demand and the narrative it pushes will have impact on its worldwide audience. In order to research this phenomenon, this study will utilize critical race theory through an international lens in conjunction with the racial rationale perspective.

1.3.1 Angela Harris’s critical race theory

The study of civil rights prior to critical race theory was dominated primarily by elite white scholars who were imperialist in ideology, often intentionally silencing the scholastic works of marginalized counterparts (Minda, 1995). This can be noted in how civil rights law, which drew from civil rights academia, viewed all people as equal. The central problem with this approach was that it ignored the fact that even if the law viewed all people as equal, not all people were being treated equally; Black communities still face significant racial discrimination to this day.

When broached with racial categorization, skin color or pigmentation is often the first indicator of race. However, racial identity is not limited solely to skin color; rather, racial identity connotes culture, heritage, tradition, as well as personal lived experiences (Minda, 1995). Often times, these variables are utilized as justifications for stigmatization or marginalization. Therefore, the emergence of a critical racial critique sought to address this fundamental problem in civil rights law. Such critiques pushed for a new way for law to approach the analysis of knowledge and race.

Race consciousness was introduced as a means to readdress the civil rights concerns that were apparent in the practice of law and development. Race consciousness sought to show how race was inextricably linked to other identifiable communities (Minda, 1995). Previously, the practice of color-blind law was promoted by both conservatives and liberals, as they believed it was the most equitable practice. However, colorblindness in the law did not acknowledge that these identifiable minority communities were not always treated equally in other aspects of their everyday lives. Leftist scholars argued against their conservative and liberal counterparts, demanding a need for race consciousness which would expose the use of the white majority as a cultural standard with which to operate the law. This practice ensured the maintenance of a racial hierarchy that privileged the white majority and oppressed the rest. This problem was not unique to the United States of America, where much of these studies were conducted. Attempts at development in international relations were ineffective because the same rationale produced and maintained an international hierarchy that utilized Eurocentric ideologies as the standard while oppressing all others (Carrasco, 1997).

Critical race theory was thus introduced as a potential solution, providing four primary components that drive it: opposition, justice, structuralism, and particularity (Carrasco, 1997). Opposition and justice illustrate critical race theory's emphasis on human resistance and the struggle for liberation. Structuralism highlights critical race theory's attempt to expose hierarchies that are operationalized to oppress. Particularity relies upon critical race theory's methodology, which centers a postmodern approach to epistemology. The application of critical race theory is meant to address how certain discourses produce images or identities, particularly about race (Minda, 1995).

Critical race theory, as introduced by Angela Harris, focuses on four themes throughout its study: first, it utilizes epistemological arguments that stem from the voice of the people that exist on the lower rungs of society; second, it expands beyond the belief that racism is always intentional and conscious, rather, focusing on the many ways in which implicit and unintentional bias can continue to perpetuate racism; third, it highlights the fact that the black and white dichotomy of race politics is limiting to the diverse population of humanity and attempts to define space for

those that are neither black nor white, such as those whom are Asian; and fourth, it prioritizes intersectionality of race alongside other factors to identify oppression (Harris, 2012). The second and fourth points are especially important for this study as it will look at the intersections of racism and colorism to understand oppressive narratives within South Korean popular media, taking into consideration the unique positionality of Asians within a Black-white dichotomy.

In 1991, Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in order to address the nuanced needs of Black women (Gopaldas, 2013). Crenshaw noted a disparity in community advocacy, citing how the Black movement focused on Black men and the feminist movement focused on white women. Intersectionality thus evolved as a means to addressing the particular needs of Black women, which, though particular to them, was also something that could be universally relatable. This relatability eventually led to the expansion of intersectionality to include other identity markers, granting nuanced analysis of oppression, as well as power and privilege. Therefore, intersectionality is essentially a study of various inequalities and their interactions, shaping the lived experiences of individuals and communities in regards to their relation to power, privilege, and oppression (Ferree, 2015). Because intersectionality pulls from so many different aspects of an individual, a community, and a society's experience, it is inherently an interdisciplinary study (Gopaldas, 2013).

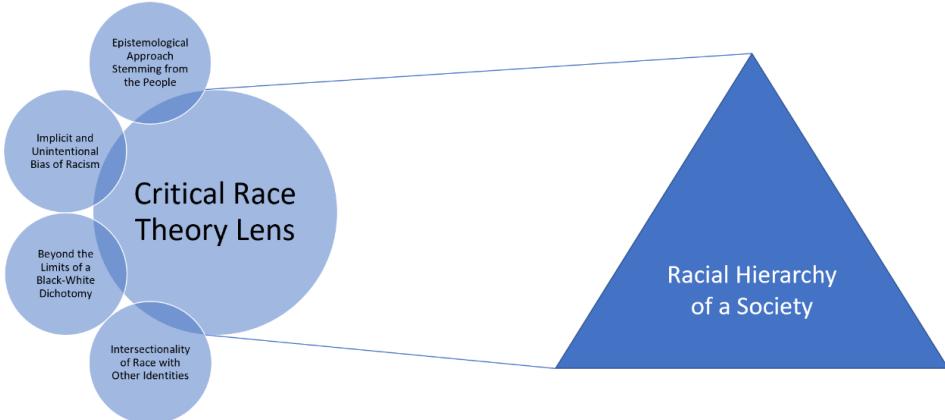
Though, not all applications of the term intersectionality are correctly applied. In some instances, intersectionality is utilized to identify a marginalized identity, then expecting those of the marginalized community to educate and explain to others the details of their lived experiences (Ferree, 2015). However, this does not appropriately apply the core intention of intersectionality. It is not to simply acknowledge differences that establish an “us” and “them” categorization. Intersectionality demands a critical analysis of the institutions of power and privilege in order to address the oppression of peoples. Furthermore, the purpose of intersectionality is not to “give voice” to the marginalized communities because their voice is not something that the oppressors can give (Ferree, 2015). It is not simply a study of oppression, but also a study of power and privilege in the establishment of such oppression in order to propose a challenge to it. Instead, intersectionality

critically examines the relationship between knowledge and power, prompting for social, political, economic, and cultural change.

With that being said, Gopaldas (2013) establishes a clear image that juxtaposes what intersectionality contributes to the field of academia when compared to its more traditional counterpart. From an ontological approach, the traditional perspective looks at variables as separate entities that impact one another; however, the intersectional perspective looks at how variables are mutually constitutive of one another, studying their interaction and interdependency instead. From the methodological approach, the traditional means are experimental, qualitative approaches to stark binaries and how they oppose one another; yet, the intersectional approach gathers primary and secondary data of epistemological origin in order to accumulate multiple perspectives. Lastly, the axiological approach of traditional methods attempts to identify the single variable that serves as a causal factor in the studied relationship, ignoring minority narratives. However, intersectional methods seek to uncover historical and structural mechanisms of oppression by including narratives of the minority and oppressed communities. The application of intersectionality can occur on an individual level as well as a societal level; this allows an analysis of the individual's positionality with their relationship to power and oppression, while also analyzing the interaction between social identities in a society.

Figure 1.1

Angela Harris's Critical Race Theory

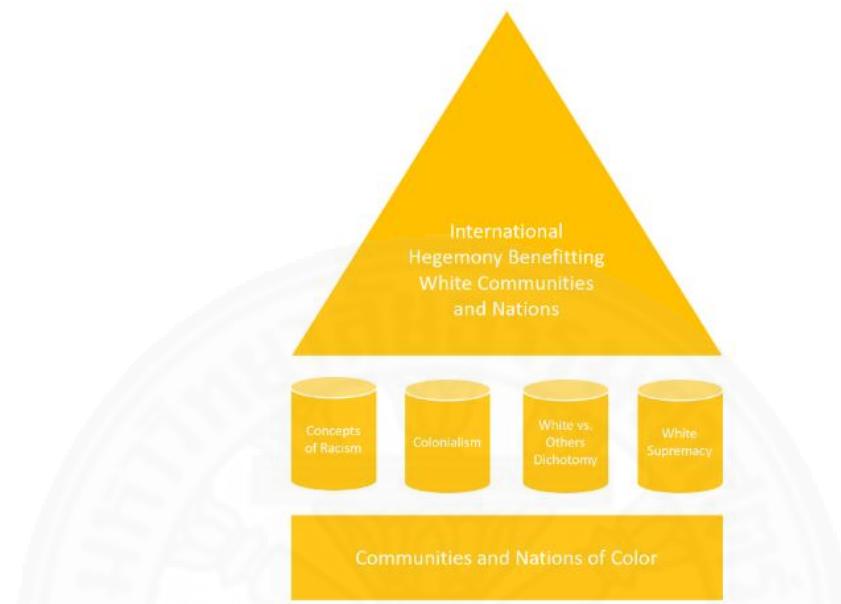


1.3.2 Beau Grosscup's racial rationale for international power

The racial rationale makes the argument that race is at the core of the international power structure (Grosscup, 1978). Admittedly, race in and of itself holds no value, but political significance is given to it in order to construct hierarchical systems of oppression on a global scale. The racial rationale acknowledges that racism was spread around the world with intention through acts of colonialism. Although explicit forms of colonialism, in the traditional definition of the term, are not particularly visible in today's world, similar practices of are continued through acts of neo-colonialism or economic colonialism. As newly independent nation-states seek to rid themselves of their colonial past, they must struggle to undo systems of race and color that were built into the foundations of their modern society. It is only through the elimination of such oppressive structures built around concepts of race and color that these newly independent nation-states will be able to fully come into their own, rather than appearing on the global stage as a simply a victim of past indiscretions through labels such as "third world" or "global south." Though, this is a much more daunting task than can be expected as many of these newly independent states still rely upon major world powers for support, and those powers continue to benefit from the existence of a clearly defined racial hierarchy. Even if newly independent nation-states had significant interest in decolonizing themselves politically and economically, as well as socially and culturally, there is little to no international support for such efforts as the major world powers who benefit most from the continued existence of such a system influence, if not directly control, much of all global resources.

Figure 1.2

Beau Grosscup's Racial Rational for International Power

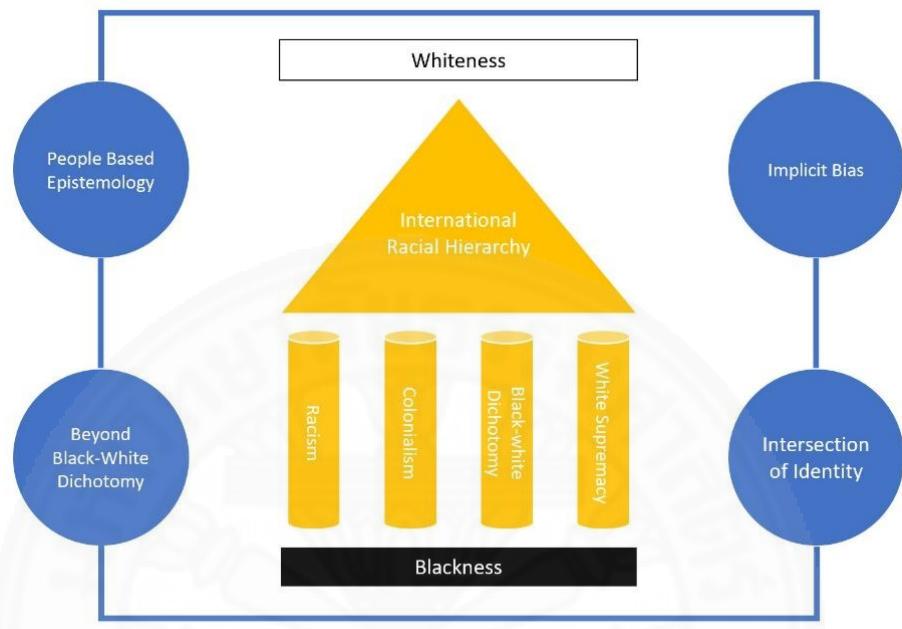


1.3.3 Theory for critical analysis of an international racial hegemony

The two theories, utilized in concert with one another, will allow this study to acknowledge significant aspects of South Korean history: the origination of colorism, the experience of colonialism and westernization, the introduction of racism, and the sudden success of South Korean popular media in a global market. Furthermore, these theories help to situate South Korean practices of racism and colorism in both a temporally modern time and a geographically global stage. Whereas the critical race theory grants nuance to analyze institutional structures of racism, the racial rationale enables an analysis of the internationalization of racism. Simply put, these two theories allow for an analysis of institutional racism through an international lens. The same lens will be applied similarly to the topic of color and colorism as well.

Figure 1.3

Theory for Critical Analysis of an International Racial Hegemony



1.4 Scope and methodology

In application of these theories, this study will look at South Korean popular media and attempt to deconstruct the significance of any racism and colorism that may be present. Popular media forms that will be analyzed include advertisements, game shows, interviews, social media posts, and music videos. The media analysis will look at tropes, trends, patterns, and reactions, as well as responses to the initial reactions. The time range for this analysis will span between the years of 2007 to the present day, focusing on a period of time defined as Hallyu 2.0.

Through these theories, this study would hypothesize that South Korean beliefs of racism and colorism continue to inform the production of popular media; any positive response would reinforce this behavior and any negative response would elicit the same defensive mechanisms that were and continue to be utilized by major white powers around the world. It might even be said that South Korea currently inhabits what could be identified as a global version of the “honorary white” category, and detailed analysis of South Korean popular media could confirm this hypothesis.

Furthermore, it is important to note that many of the cases that will be analyzed will be utilizing primarily, but not exclusively, the Korean language. This study will focus on imagery, aesthetics, and presentation as well as available interpretations or translations. As such, knowledge of the Korean language itself is not necessary for analysis of South Korean popular media. This does not pose a significant obstacle to the study because many of these South Korean entertainment productions are readily consumed internationally regardless of accessibility to the Korean language. Therefore, the impact created by South Korean popular media is relevant regardless of varying levels of accessibility to language.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 In regards to race and racism

2.1.1 Defining racism

It is critical for one to understand the definitions and boundaries of the term “race” and “racism” before undergoing any attempt to analyze their impacts on political and social spheres of society. However, the definitions are constantly shifting as “race” and “racism” takes on new meaning with different social atmospheres, cultural domains, political applications, and historical significances.

It is widely acknowledged that the concept of “race” and thus “racism” had its birthplace in Europe and quickly spread to the United States of America, where it found its footing and was able to expand to a global environment (Dirlik, 2008). The making of race was a critical tool that was utilized by European nation-states to justify the hierarchical structuring of peoples for the formation of empires through colonialism and imperialism. Race categories were created by categorizing people based on arbitrary phenotypical traits that were given biological significance after the fact (Dirlik, 2008). The resulting effect allowed for quick and easy categorization of members of the human race by essentially removing their individual identities and any in-group diversities.

The uplifting of specifically the European narrative through white supremacy was a crucial core component to the making of race. When the United States of America established itself as an independent nation-state, claimed new territories, and expanded its spheres of influence, it too utilized the notion of race to justify the hierarchical status quo previously introduced by its predecessors, the European imperial powers (Dirlik, 2008). With its modern-day role as the leader of a largely unipolar global society, the United States of America has essentially globalized the notion of race along with white supremacy by expanding its influence and maintaining the international status quo.

One of the earliest explicit designations of “race hatred” or “racism” as an applicable tool for the categorical division between members of humanity appeared in

the early 1900's with the rise of Nazi Germany (Balibar, 2008). Jewish people were identified as a race separate from and less than the rest of the German population, justifying their discrimination, oppression, and eventual genocide. In this sense, racism is not simply the separation and hierarchical designations of groups of people over arbitrary phenotypical traits, but the active exclusion of some and uplifting of others, typically at the expense of the excluded; it did not simply focus on being superior than others, but also on highlighting the inferiority of others and thus the need to ostracize them.

Some scholars have come to agree that the creation of race categories has no real, biological basis, but the impacts of racism are unyielding and apparent in the hierarchical and arbitrary structuring of today's social, political, economic, and cultural status quo. This can be noted in the shift of academic focus in the field of anthropology from studying racial diversity and inequalities to studying racism or the belief in these differences (Balibar, 2008).

The United Nations, in a 1948 conference following the conclusion of World War II, defined "racism" in three different forms with three different outcomes (Balibar, 2008). The first form of racism is anti-Semitism, or hatred of the Jewish people. The second form of racism is colonial racism. The last form of racism is color prejudice. The outcomes of these forms of racism include white supremacy, fears of biological hybridization, and an unending marathon to the top of a global hierarchy of race. It was in this period after World War II that nation-states and the global community institutionalized the term "racism" for the use in addressing issues of colonial liberation from the former imperial powers as well as civil rights movements in segregated communities.

Though, as stated prior, definitions of "racism" can differ and vary across social, cultural, and political spheres. Some scholars have come to define "racism" as an ideological or mythical assumption of an innate difference within human communities, undermining both individualistic diversity and species-wide unity (Balibar, 2008). Other scholars have defined "racism" as discriminatory behavior and unequal relations enacted through power structures that stem from negative beliefs of others (Flew, 1993). However, there have been significant criticism of these definitions of racism. Often times, the definitions focus on white people as sole

perpetrators of racism while ignoring the possibility that other minority communities could also be engaging in racism. Also, these definitions institutionalize racism and therefore removes the responsibility of individuals from combatting the institutional issue. Additionally, these definitions of racism place heavy emphasis on outcomes and impacts with little to no effort placed on understanding intentions.

Though it is common to view racism as producing very explicit and palpable harms, racism has been noted to evolve and morph to the needs of the oppressors in their current era (Balibar, 2008). Sometimes, racism calls upon the use of violence to empower those at the top of the hierarchy, but other times, it calls on subtlety and passivity to undermine and oppress the minority communities. To overcome racism and achieve equality and justice in any society, representation and treatment of all individuals within such a society must be just and fair (Flew, 1993). That is to say, all spheres of engagement (political, economic, social, cultural, religious, etc.) must be able to produce somewhat comparable results for all participating members of the society.

2.1.2 Evolution and outcomes of racism

The human species is not racially diverse, but rather, is capable of creating artificial race categories with which it can enact racism (Balibar, 2008). The use of race in racism thus allows for the favoring of some communities and disfavoring of others based on traits that would otherwise have no real-world significance (Flew, 1993). Outside of these advantages and benefits that are afforded the selected community members, there is no significant or relevant difference between the artificially established communities.

The considerable emphasis placed on race and racism within any society created pressure on the members of those societies to self-racialize in order to accommodate to the demands for racial classification (Dirlik, 2008). The utilization of race as a categorical separation between people also established new distinctions between socio-economic classes that would have otherwise united under any oppressive regime (Dirlik, 2008). This further reinforced the stability of the status quo in a colonial, imperialistic regime by ensuring that the oppressed classes were divided

amongst themselves. This was a useful strategic tactic that was often employed by imperial powers, including but not limited to the United States of America.

Both European and American imperialism justified their dominion over other peoples and territories by employing racism through the arguments of nationalism and social Darwinism (Dirlik, 2008). Arguments of social Darwinism and nationalism allowed for those at the top of the hierarchy to rationalize discriminatory policies that enacted cultural genocide and the globalization of racism as an ideology. Furthermore, the argument of a unified national image meant that those who deviated from the particular image were not of the nation, once again justifying their ostracization and discrimination. Because of the significant influence that European and American imperialism has had on the world, most, if not all, existing nation-states today exist upon the racial spectrum because they have had historical experiences with race and racial conflicts (Balibar, 2008). However, that is not to say that racism continues to exist unaddressed; there exists formal and legal institutions that seek to punish or ban the practice of racism within their societies.

These institutions introduce a new challenge to racism, albeit indirectly; they enforce a punishment on those who perpetuate racism. More precisely, the punishable ideology is not racism itself, but the holding of false beliefs (Flew, 1993). As explicit and overt forms of racism are increasingly viewed as false beliefs, their flexibility to operate openly in modern-day society has lessened significantly. This can be noticed in the increasing representation of minority communities in public spaces, government offices, and major media forms (Dirlik, 2008). However, because the challenge made against racism is not entirely direct, it cannot be as successful as one would hope it would be.

As these institutions are often products of the hierarchy, their ability to truly challenge racism and thus the establishment of the hierarchy itself is timid, at best. Therefore, racism and its insidious ability to adapt to changing environments, as well as the needs of the oppressor, allow it to not only continue on living but thrive in the modern era. For example, the development of technology and increasing level of globalization has given renewed energy to racism (Dirlik, 2008). Globalization is the expansion of a global capitalist modernity to include as many nation-states as possible in as many aspects as possible (i.e. social, cultural, economic, political). Increasing

mobility of peoples, communities, languages, cultures, religions, and the like provide racism with more platforms to work with; the clear divide between black and white become more blurred as greys are introduced. Not only does globalization provide new life to old institutions, such as racism, but empower them to grow with greater ferocity and intensity. It becomes clear that racism no longer exists in its initial form but has evolved and adapted to the demands of the new globalized world. This can be witnessed in the continued social, economic, and political exclusion of certain communities within the state, with the only recognizable differences being target communities, justifications, and sometimes objectives (Balibar, 2008).

Racism now operates implicitly and covertly, avoiding the public denouncement while also maintaining the status quo for those on top of the hierarchy of power (Dirlik, 2008). Strict bans against racism often do little to address the significant historical implications of racism; being unable to engage in discourse or research that explores the history and application of racism in public domains stunts the growth of understanding for such a nuanced issue (Balibar, 2008). Activists who attempt to address the issue of race and racism have come to acknowledge that they are not innate facts of nature, but rather social constructions that are a result of the histories and collective experiences of societies.

Activists within the field have thus taken on a few different stances when approaching the issues of race and racism. One response is to push the envelope and become as socially conscious as possible in an attempt to resolve historical implications of institutionalized racism (Flew, 1993). The shared experience of ostracization often serves as a unifying factor for minority communities, allowing them to establish coalitions through community-building efforts. Thus, one can observe the formation of new communities in racialized societies based on shared experiences of oppression. These newly formed coalitions can then draw on their unified capacities in order to challenge the oppressive hierarchies placed above them.

Another response of activists is to completely ignore the history of race and racism and attempt to move on without addressing it (Flew, 1993); this is known as colorblind racism. Colorblind racism has become a new approach to racism that continues to operate in modern day, maintaining previous hegemonies of oppression while adapting to the demands of contemporary societies. Code words, such as

“diversity” and “multiculturalism,” are utilized by those in power (i.e. white people) in order to manage and manipulate those beneath them on the hierarchy (i.e. non-white people) (Dirlik, 2008). As such, those who ascend to significant roles in society or receive accolades from renowned institutions must be critical of their personal achievements and recognize how they may have individually benefited from institutionalized racism or from the attempt to compensate in response to institutionalized racism (Flew, 1993).

2.2 In regards to race and racism in international relations

As had been discussed in the previous section, race isn’t a tangible or measurable element of humanity; rather, it is a set of ideologies and norms that society provides for us in order to conceptualize the identity of another individual (Thompson, 2015). In this sense, it is not a physical or stagnant marker of identity, but is a socially constructed one that is constantly redefining its own social significance based on the needs of society and the precedence of history. In being produced by the society, race identity is utilized to reinforce the identity of the nation or the primary group by clearly establishing the bounds of an in-group and an out-group and ensuring that the two remain mutually exclusive of one another (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018).

Because race as an identity is socially constructed, it in of itself is not real; that is to say that race itself is only real in that it produces and is produced by social structures (Vucetic, 2015). Furthermore, these social structures are not merely theorized ideas, but very real social constructions that are notable throughout history and recognized on a global scale (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Earlier, it was stated that race itself is not tangible; however, its influence is both tangible and visible. Race, when operationalized, becomes racism.

The purpose of operationalizing race was to create and enforce a categorization of humanity alongside the establishment of a hierarchy for said categorization of humanity. This process of racialization allowed for the rationalizing of an argument for some humans to be valued inherently more than others (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). Incidentally, this also served as a justification for the

violent European oppression, exploitation, and slaughter of others as a “causal and ethical necessity.”

Racism is thereby the application of these artificial categorizations of humanity, particularly for the use of establishing power dynamics in the context of state power (Henderson, 2013). Because of its application in such manner, race and racism have a deeply rooted history in governance that spans several hundred years (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). With that in mind, it becomes recognizable that the system of race and racism is not a neutral, natural, nor objective one; rather, it is a system that serves as a source for significant socio-political conflict through humanity’s global history (Thompson, 2015). Additionally, the application of race and racism can and has been used as a means to justify the exclusion of certain race identities from accessing certain protections, privileges, profits, and properties (Thompson, 2015). This become most obvious when looking at the transnational history of the world, specifically European history. Race and racism was born and bred to become a norm in order to justify the existence of empires, the expansion of capitalism, and the defining of modernity (Thompson, 2015). It is used as a basis for establishing a global hierarchy that would then become the international economic order.

2.2.1 Whiteness, imperialism, and the establishing of the "other"

There are several types of race and racism that can be identified: biological, scientific, and cultural (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Biological race, and thus biological racism, was tied closely to human phenotypical traits; the visible attributes of the human body were used as justification for classification and thus separation of certain communities. “Privileged metonymy” meant that these physical differences allowed for white Europeans to justify their colonization and subsequent exploitation over all other communities (Thompson, 2015). Scientific race, and thus scientific racism, was the formal attempt of European scholars to operationalize their understanding of race, seeking scientific means to support their claim for racial superiority.

Thus, race and racism saw its birth in the first waves of European expansion into the rest of the world (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). However, the continued existence of race and racism in modernity, beyond the era of colonialism and imperialism, shows that race as an identity does not rely on solely on biology but is also defined by the relation between groups of people as defined by the state power and pre-established global hierarchy.

Cultural race, and thus cultural racism, was linked to the belief that non-European culture was inferior. By the end of the second world war, the understanding of race had shifted to a cultural perspective (Thompson, 2015). This can be noted in the attempt of Europeans to “civilize” non-European societies by “teaching” them (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). An example of this could be seen in orientalism, wherein Asian peoples and cultures were viewed as different from Europeans and thus less than (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). It can be more explicitly cited in the Canadian Residential Schools that sought to commit cultural genocide against indigenous communities by kidnapping and westernizing their children.

Figure 2.1

An Indigenous Boy Before and After Entering a Canadian Residential School



Note. From *Attempts in “Civilizing” Indigenous People: Residential School* (2013, December 6). <https://journeytowardhealing.wordpress.com/2013/11/21/attempts-in-civilizing-indigenous-people-residential-schools-and-cultural-genocide/>. Copyright 2013 by A Journey Toward Healing.

It has now become apparent that race and racism has its roots deeply nestled within the origins of imperialism, which itself was founded upon ideologies of white supremacy (Henderson, 2013). White supremacy can be said, then, to take on a central role in the study of international relations. In the study of international relations, white supremacy helps to define the meaning of “anarchy” and thus shapes a significant number of international relations theories. Before continuing on to understand what kind of role white supremacy has in the field of international relations, it is necessary to understand what exactly white supremacy is.

In short, white supremacy is the global institution of racism, supported by the stringent demand for positivism and empiricism in the study of international relations (Thompson, 2015). White supremacy, for example, believes in a color tone scale of black to white and correlates that with a scale of barbarism to civility (Henderson, 2013). With this reasoning, it then became the duty, if not the right, for the white civilized peoples to educate their black barbarian counterparts in hopes of delivering them from their society of barbarism into a world of civility. In other words, it was the “white man’s burden” to uplift the rest of humanity from the uncultured societies by teaching them to be more like him.

Another example that illustrates the inherent racism of the study of international relations could be seen in how it shapes narratives of imperialism: imperialism is often described as a progressive and natural step taken by developing nations-states to become the global powers they are today (Hobson, 2015). The only purpose that this narrative serves is to essentially ease the guilty conscious of the European colonizers for their racist and imperialistic past.

As the era of imperialism ends and communities around the world seek to overthrow their European colonizers, international relations theory focuses on narratives of “race wars.” These narratives focused on how non-European communities were causing conflict around race lines, rather than how European colonizers had established these race lines in order to oppress and exploit those whom now sought liberation (Henderson, 2013). This in turn led to a series of westerners to voice their concern for the rising threat to the survival of their culture and identity (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). It appeared to them that a non-western world was rising up to usurp their position at the peak of an international hegemony.

The hypocrisy of a western fear for the loss of their identity and culture at the hands of a non-western world was not unacknowledged though. W.E.B. Du Bois, a prominent Black scholar, openly criticized western states for their hypocrisy, citing their denouncement of Nazi atrocities when they themselves have engaged in much the same behavior around the world against peoples of color (Henderson, 2013).

Another response that the study of international relations has taken in regards to issues of race and racism is to not discuss it at all. However, as illustrated above, race, and thus racism, is embedded in the very foundations of international relations. To ignore the significance of race and racism is to ignore a critical factor with significant contributions in the field. This sort of colorblind study, therefore, allows for the perpetuation of white supremacy, both in theory and in practice (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). The ignoring of such a critical factor in international relations inadvertently leads to the rationalization of an international racial hierarchy that was established due to racist paradigms established during the era of imperialism (Henderson, 2013).

In 1950, British economist Harry Hodson claimed that he believed race relations to be the most significant issue within world politics (Hobson, 2015). Furthermore, the United Nations has more resolutions addressing the topic of race than any other topic, with several countries agreeing that race is one of the most important issues that they face (Henderson, 2013). Words in and of themselves have power and impact on the lived experiences of people around the world (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Language has the ability to create and perpetuate social constructions, such as race and racism. Therefore, it is crucial that language be used to engage in the deconstruction and destruction of race and racism. The use of language has allowed humanity to create separations that become unconsciously and implicitly perpetuated throughout societies. The implicit belief in these systems allows for the process of racialization to occur, which in turn permits for the existence of implicit bias. As race and racism are realized through implicit bias, hierarchies are established that allow for unequal distribution of power, privilege, authority, wealth, worth, and opportunity. This invariably shows that issues of race cannot simply be ignored or swept away with the past, as if it were an artifact of past histories rather than a modern lived reality.

Another reaction to the issue of race and racism in international relations is to simplify it; either racism exists in the form of scientific racism or it doesn't exist at all, allowing for cultural pluralism and racial tolerance (Hobson, 2015). However, this binary distinction is problematic in that it doesn't take into consideration that fact that race and racism have another option: to transform itself and continue existing into modernity. In place of an explicitly enforced scientific racism, the world now experiences Eurocentrism fueled by implicit biases. In order to properly address issues of race, one must be able to break from this binary mold and acknowledge that issues of race are not binary: they do not simply juxtapose black and white, barbaric and civilized (Knox, 2015). Nuance is necessary in order to combat the insidious nature of race and racism in international relations.

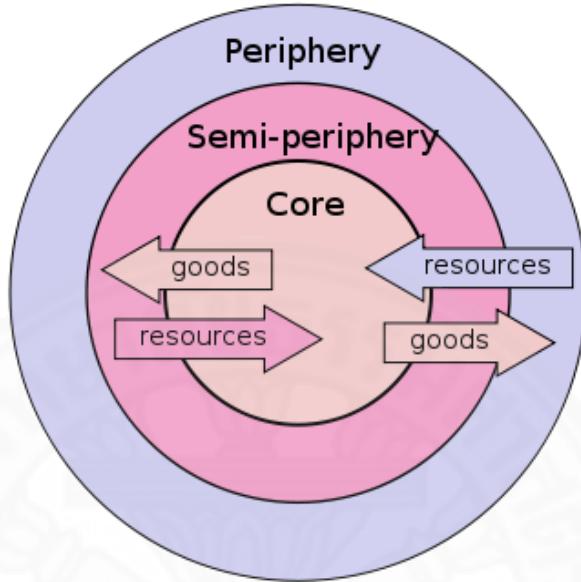
Another notable evolution of the practice of racism can be seen in the global practice of capitalism. As imperialistic practices led European nation-states to establish colonies around the world, it enabled a number of other practices, such as theft of resources and displacement of local peoples for the purposes of political domination and economic benefits (Thompson, 2015). Because of this history, the issue of race invariably becomes an issue of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism as well.

2.2.2 History of war and capitalism

Prior to the second world war, race was largely analyzed on a basis of phenotypical biology; one's race was determined by visible physical characteristics (Hobson, 2015). However, after 1945, the discourse of race made a significant shift. Gone was the language of biological essentialism. In its place, Eurocentric culturalism evolved as the new institution with which to measure race categories. In this era, discourses of barbarism and civility were no longer gauged based on the physical characters of a peoples, but rather of how closely they aligned with European ideologies. European cultures were viewed as "modern," whereas all others were viewed as "traditional." Academic studies focused on Europe as the "core," whereas all others were viewed as the "periphery."

Figure 2.2

Wallerstein's World Systems Theory Addressing Core-Periphery Relations



Note. From “Main criticism that proponents of world-systems analysis raise about the relationship between “center” and “periphery” countries,” by A. Hughes, 2016.

<https://medium.com/@hughesam/prompt-discuss-some-of-the-main-criticisms-that-proponents-of-world-systems-analysis-raise-about-14d78b61c12a>. Copyright 2016 by Medium

Though it is important to understand the autonomy of various nation-states, this history of imperialism and racism has shown that nation-states are not truly independent from one another. Especially after the era of imperialism, nation-states are often understood in the context of “colonizer” or “colonized,” “developed” or “un/under-developed” (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). Even the process of decolonization was viewed from this perspective: colonized territories were congratulated for finally embracing western ideologies of freedom when they fought for their independence (Hobson, 2015). This type of narrative undermines the autonomy and agency of indigenous peoples, instead claiming that their independence is only possible thanks to western colonization and the Eurocentric ideologies that it introduced to them.

As stated, the decolonization of major western empires did not lead to the downfall of race and racism discourse. In fact, decolonization merely changed local politics; at this point in time, power and privilege had already been consolidated and international institutions had already been established to maintain the global status quo (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Institutions like global capitalism and cultural Eurocentrism ensure that western states continue to reside at the top of an international hegemony with all other inhabiting the lower rungs of the status quo. Organizations that sought to prioritize peace in the form of silence either inadvertently or intentionally refuse to acknowledge a lack of and need for peace in the form of justice; peace meant maintaining the status quo rather than risking turmoil by challenging it. The focus on race studies only gained significant prevalence as non-western communities began to challenge the status quo (Henderson, 2013).

One of the means with which to address issues of racism being supported by capitalism and other modern institutions is to mark pre-market history as being largely irrelevant or inconsequential; the dismissal of history prior to the establishment of global capitalism allows for the disconnection of capitalism to issues of race (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). How capitalism came to be the preeminent economic system of the world does not matter. It does not matter if capitalism needed to exploit whole nations through systems of imperialism. All of this is made inconsequential in the dismissal of pre-market history. As capitalism is defended by this argument, it defends the continuation of economic inequality which began and was enabled by the era of imperialism and its artifacts, such as race discourse and racist ideologies. Race-based polices established by imperial empires during the colonial era continue to impact independent nation-states today (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Therefore, understanding of racialization during the colonial era is necessary in order to understand the international hierarchy, whether it be political, economic, or any other category. Thus, critical analysis of the establishment of global capitalism is required before beginning to address the continuation of the significance of race in modern-day discourse; the labeling of pre-market history as inconsequential stifles such efforts.

As is shown above, capitalism has a crucial role to play on the global stage. It is an insidious institution that demands its own continued spread around the

globe, destroying any and all pre-capitalistic practices in its wake (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). Capitalism is marketed to the general population as a system that allows for true freedom and equality in that it focuses on the merit of the individual; however, capitalism still organizes the population into separate classes. On top of that, capitalism allows for the exploitation of the lower classes for the benefit of the upper class. However, this exploitation is once again argued to be temporary as capitalism paves the way for truer equality and freedom further down the road. The understanding of low, middle, and high-class socioeconomic status in the local life within capitalism mirrors that periphery, semi-periphery, and core that is established within Immanuel Wallerstein's World-Systems Approach, which was discussed earlier.

The problem with this capitalistic narrative is that it largely ignores social, economic, and political history (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). This narrative ignores the violence enacted by capitalistic upper classes upon those beneath them in the establishment of the global capitalist institution. It assumes that these histories, which are out of control of the individual, are inconsequential and that merit alone will allow for social, economic, and political mobility for the individual. Capitalism assumes the world exists in a perpetual state of poverty and only through capitalistic merit is any progress possible, but doesn't acknowledge that capitalism itself establishes poverty as the global standard prior to empowering the few to exploit the rest.

Furthermore, it places the onus of responsibility upon the individual to improve their lot in life, rather than acknowledging and addressing larger institutional problems that serve as obstacles to said individuals. This absolves the system of capitalism from holding itself accountable for centuries of violence enacted upon middle and lower classes of the world for the benefit of the highest tiers of its upper class. Concurrently, it allows for the reallocation of blame towards the lower classes, claiming their inability to be the cause of their poverty by ignoring institutional problems that actively prevent their success.

Should the capitalistic institution truly seek to empower fairness, freedom, equality, and other such lofty ideals, it must empower all whom are unable to access the markets in the same manner as the upper classes (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2018). Only by evening out the playing field by addressing the history of social, political,

and economic injustice and inequality will capitalism be able to live out the mantra with which it prides itself upon – a highly unlikely outcome as capitalism is especially self-interested.

2.2.3 Academia's approach to race and racism

Even in the field of academia, it is impossible to separate the racial discourse from the study of international relations. The study of “international relations” began as the study of “race development,” attempting to understand the way in which various races interact with one another in a global environment (Henderson, 2013). Originally, this sort of study was meant to protect the power and privilege of the dominant group, i.e. westerners, ultimately enabling and perpetuating white supremacy (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). However, with shifting perspectives on how to address the issue of race, the field of academia made a shift away from explicitly addressing the issue. *The Journal of Race Development*, for example, renamed itself *The Journal of International Relations*, indicating a shift in the way in which academia would approach the topic of race and racism.

Because of the history of international relations studies being based in race development, many, if not all, international relations theories stem from racist ideologies (Henderson, 2013). Realism and liberalism, two of the most popular international relations theories, both look to the western civilized world to develop and uplift the rest of the world, giving them the gift of civilization and freeing them from their barbaric conditions. Ultimately, the study of international relations grew to exclude explicit race discourses, instead only mentioning it in abstract theory building or theorizing exercises (Henderson, 2013). This norm of side-lining race discourses ignores the significant role that race and racism plays in establishing the field of international relations study and centers Eurocentric narratives as the norm for the global stage.

With that being said, this is not to say that the field of international relations does not address race discourses at all. Post-colonial studies of race and racism extend as far back as the Black scholar W.E.B. Du Bois (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). Franz Boas challenged the centering of European narratives and white supremacy within academia by introducing the concept of cultural relativism into

social sciences (Henderson, 2013). This argument posited that each race behaved in accordance to the influences from their cultures and environments and are therefore valid, not less than. Alain Locke furthered this argument by challenging the anthropological notion of race, instead arguing that race is a sociological construct manufactured by humanity and given significance by society (Henderson, 2013). In addition to that, Marxist scholars have emphasized the imperialist tendencies of the capitalist institution (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018), allowing for critiques of capitalism to also be critiques of racism, and vice versa.

Though there is some discourse regarding race in international relations, the mainstream field of study has largely ignored issues of racism, viewing it as an issue that is apolitical and only significant at the domestic level (Thompson, 2015). This intentional and purposeful disregard for the impact of race in international relations is known as racial aphasia. Academic scholars tend to focus their study on the social contract, but fail to acknowledge the racial contract and the fact that it encompasses the social contract (Henderson, 2013). The normalization of racial aphasia throughout academia incidentally results in the perpetuation of white supremacy via the normalizing of Eurocentric narratives. Crucial race critiques cannot be lobbied against major international institutions or paradigms; white racism is largely ignored. When instances of white racism are addressed, it is often juxtaposed with instances of self-subjugation of non-white peoples, equaling the two cases to one another. This racial aphasia allows for the erasure of challenges against colonialism and imperialism to the benefit of western societies, which have built their power on those very same practices.

To challenge imperialism would inadvertently address the issue of race and racism (Knox, 2015). Critically analyzing military interventions and empire-building practices of western states allows for the possibility to understand these issues from a racialized perspective. For example, critical analysis would allow for a better perspective of international relations, identifying who tends to be the “intervener” in major issues around the world while also identifying who tends to be the “intervened” in these same instances. Recognition of this dynamic could give insight to a racialized analysis of international relations.

While it has become clear that race is a truly transnational phenomenon, its practice at a national or domestic level is also of critical consideration. Race began as a transnational institution, but many of its goals and methods are operated at a national level (Thompson, 2015). Race is brought to the domestic level where it is matched with local institutions and systems in order to maximize its efficiency and efficacy. In order to understand domestic operations of race, it is necessary to understand how race blends with the local institutions (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). When looking at a nation-state's policies regarding race, it can be noted that many practices began during the colonial era and have maintained their legacy since. These domestic practices of race are thus constituted by their respective culture and society, which in turn is shaped by these constructions of race (Vucetic & Persaud, 2018). The domestic policies and practices of race are translated into the international sphere via transnational relations and impact global understandings of race relations at various levels. The United States of America is recognized to be one of the most influential nation-states in contributing to and influencing global construction of race narratives (Thompson, 2015).

2.3 In Regards to color and colorism

2.3.1 Defining colorism

Colorism is the ideological practice of differentiating people based on the shade of their skin tone. However, it simply is not the differentiation by skin tone, but the privileging of certain skin tones (i.e. lighter or whiter skin tones) over others (i.e. darker skin tones) (Hunter, 2007). In this sense, colorism often operates in alignment with or concurrent to racism (Chanbonpin, 2015). Colorism is often viewed as a subset of racism; though both ideologies do have similarities, it is important to recognize that the nuances and complexities of colorism cannot all be attributed to racism (Jones, 2013). Though racism and colorism may look like fraternal twins, they are, in fact, two separate beasts altogether.

As previously discussed, racism is an institutionalized ideology that has real-world consequences. Racial discrimination can stem from one of two options: race or color (Hunter, 2007). Though race and color are inextricably linked to one

another, they are distinct and separate at the same time. Racial discrimination that stems from race relies on racialized features, which include skin tone. Other phenotypical traits that are utilized to identify an individual's race can also include hair color, hair texture, eye color, eye shape, body build, etc. However, racial discrimination that originates from color utilizes skin tone as a source of segregation and can therefore also be connected to race. Though skin tone and race are not the same thing, certain attributes can inform the use of either, such as hair texture, hair color, eye color, and skin tone (Jones, 2013). For example, the phenotypical trait of red hair is often paired with the phenotypical trait for light skin tones whereas the phenotypical trait for highly textured hair is often identified with dark skin tones. The two are so intertwined that they continue to shape the lived experiences of individuals in all areas of life: social, cultural, economic, political, etc.

Furthermore, one may note that the categories of race and color can also include other phenotypical traits aside from skin tone or skin color (Chanbonpin, 2015). These traits can include, but are not limited to, hair color, hair texture, nose shape, eye color, eye shape, and various other facial features. This can be identified in the widespread stereotype that claims individuals of Asian heritage have small, slanted eyes. Whereas race is often used as an identifier for the greater human population, color is often most applicable within specific race communities (Jones, 2013). For example, light-skin Black people are not treated the same as dark-skin Black people. Racism is thus most prevalent between race groups while colorism often thrives within a race group.

This is obviously evidenced in the treatment of Black communities within the United States of America. The intersection of any one individual's identity across the markers of race and color can significantly impact the experiences that said individual may experience within their lifetime. Individuals who are not only Black American, but also identified with the darkest skin tones report experiences of racial discrimination at higher rates than individuals who are Black American, but identified with the lighter skin tones (Smith, 2019). This study lays plain the fact that the identity marker of race alone does not explain the frequency or magnitude of racial discrimination or racism that is experienced by any one individual. In fact, the study clearly highlights color and colorism as another critical aspect of identity that must be

taken into consideration to understand how any individual may experience their daily life in the United States of America. Not only does it point to negative practices of racial discrimination, the study pointedly notes that Black Americans acknowledge that the lighter one's skin tone is, the more likely one will be represented in other aspects of life, such as politics or entertainment. Therefore, it can be argued that color or skin tone variations negatively impact those of darker complexion while promoting those of lighter complexion, in concert with race rather than because of it.

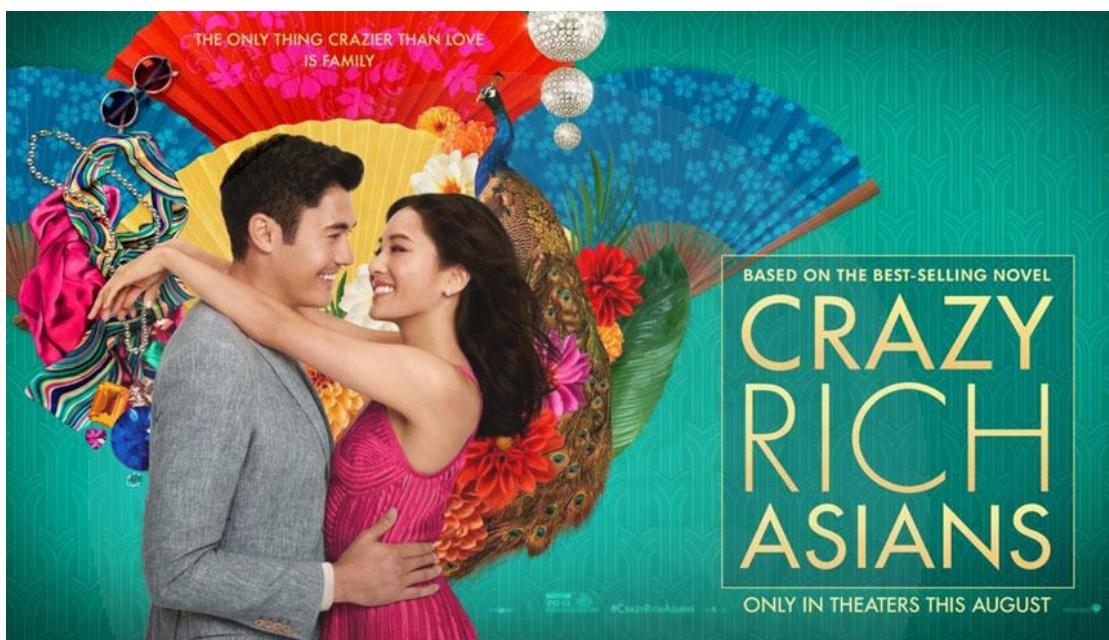
Though, this is not to say that colorism does not exist within race groups. Depending on the history or culture of a specific community, colorism takes on different forms and varying levels of intensity across the world (Jones, 2013). This can be noted in the way that East Asians and South or Southeast Asians are differentiated from each other in a predominantly white America. The slight variation in skin color tones allows for others to quickly produce assumptions of social and cultural distinctions between individuals at a glance (Li et al., 2008). In this regard, lighter-skinned people of any community are often afforded more respect than their darker-skinned counterparts by both members of the community and outsiders alike.

This divide between the lighter skin tone East Asian communities and their darker skin tone counterparts from South and Southeast Asia is identifiable in Hollywood entertainment media. East Asian individuals of lighter skin tone are often portrayed as intelligent, good-looking, successful, and desirable, as can be seen in the highly successful 2018 romantic-comedy, *Crazy Rich Asians* (Fang, 2018). However, in the exact same film that served as a watershed moment for “Asian American” representation within Hollywood entertainment, a significant portion of the Asian American community was abandoned and left behind by the movement. Roles of darker skin tone Asians were relegated to that of servants and guards, serving hand-and-foot to the lighter skin tone Asians who were the center of the narrative. Through *Crazy Rich Asians*, the predominantly white Hollywood entertainment industry was willing to take a risk by highlighting light skin East Asians and East Asian Americans in lead roles while concurrently maintaining their disdain for the darker skin South and Southeast Asian counterparts (Makalintal, 2019). Though East Asian and East Asian Americans have lauded this film as a triumphant moment for “Asian Americans” representation, they fail to recognize who they exclude or ostracize.

Once again, it is shown that race and racism alone does not explain the discrimination that is presented within and between differing identity groups; color and colorism are as much a critical component to these discriminatory behaviors.

Figure 2.3

Promotional Poster for film Crazy Rich Asians



Note. From “Crazy rich Asian, a game changer for Asians in Hollywood,” by M. Yuan, 2018. <https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/Crazy-Rich-Asians-a-Game-Changer-for-Asians-in-Hollywood>. Photo credit by Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

When questioned about the prevalence for lightness or whiteness, some ethnic communities have voiced their identification of moral goodness and positive values with whiteness; individuals who are lighter-skinned are hard-working and morally good (Chanbonpin, 2015). Part of this argument stems from the belief that flawless skin is natural state of all skin; therefore, light skin tone is a sign of self-discipline, self-control, and strong power of will (Li et al., 2008). Light-skinned people are believed to be more intelligent, more attractive, and more trustworthy (Glenn, 2008; Jones, 2013). Because of this social belief, those with whiter or paler complexions were also more likely to be successful and to hold more social capital in the marriage market. Any deviation from flawlessness, thus, equated to the exact

opposite: lack of discipline, lack of control, lack of will power. Those with darker skin tones or blemishes were then believed to be of lower status due to their inability to maintain good morals and values.

Often times, those who performed hard labor (i.e. farmers and laborers) would be exposed to more sunlight, thereby darkening their “natural” skin complexion. This led to the general understanding that laborers were darker than their high-class, aristocratic counterparts (Jones, 2013). As a foil to all the positive remarks and beliefs regarding people with lighter skin, darker-skin people were believed to be untrustworthy, unintelligent, and unattractive (Glenn, 2008). Needless to say, sentiments of classism are intimately woven into these arguments as well; this study, however, will not focus specifically on issues of socioeconomic class. Ultimately, those who are perceived to have darker-skin tones tended to have experiences that were opposite of their lighter-skin counterparts; they experienced difficulty in the job market and are often rejected in the marriage market. In such cases, the darker one’s skin tone was, the more likely one was to experience greater intensity and higher frequency of colorism (Hunter, 2007); this has been shown in the earlier study regarding Black Americans of varying skin tones and in the discussion surrounding the film *Crazy Rich Asians*.

As previously noted, there are some cases in which colorism was introduced into a society alongside westernization and racism. However, some cultures independently developed colorism prior to the coming of western imperial powers. The clearest examples of colorism prior to westernization exists within East Asian nation-states, such as Japan and South Korea (Glenn, 2008). In such cases, the desire for lightness and whiteness was not to aspire toward Eurocentric whiteness but to aspire towards purity and flawlessness that is often more readily accessible to upper class aristocrats. These arguments mirror the ones made in the previous paragraphs and harkens to arguments of classism as well.

For example, in early Japanese culture, both men and women powdered their faces with white-lead powders to indicate their high socioeconomic class status and subsequent superiority (Jones, 2013). In early Korean Shamanism, there were stories of the first superhuman being born with literal white skin, leading to the widespread belief that whiteness equated to perfection and nobility (Li et al., 2008).

Children of nobles, and particularly women, were seen as having individual agency and control over their own bodies by attempting to whiten or lighten their skins. However, they were all still generally confined by the same ideological beauty standards that demanded paleness, lightness, or whiteness.

Figure 2.4

A Geisha with Japanese White-Lead Face Powder



Note. From “Why do Geishas paint their faces with white makeup?,” 2019.

<https://jpninfo.com/28311>. Copyright 2019 by Japan Info.

Though the origins of colorism in India are still unsure, some have speculated that it began with the early establishment of class systems; the wealthy classes were of noticeably paler skin tones while laborers were of noticeably darker skin tones due to their exposure to sunlight (Glenn, 2008). These sorts of belief were also noted in early Korean and Japanese cultures, as well as number of many other cultures throughout Southeast and East Asia. Therefore, it becomes important for one to understand how these cultures and societies have managed to reconcile the native colorist ideologies with the introduction of foreign racist ideologies in the

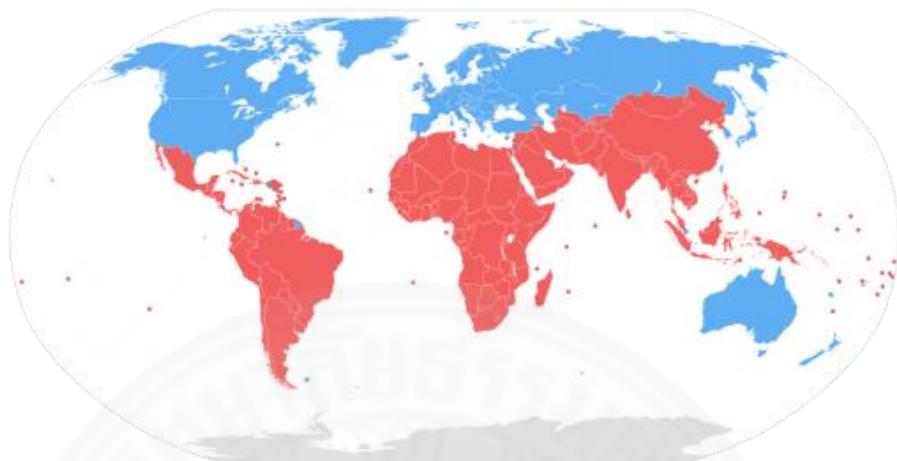
contemporary world (Jones, 2013). Only after that can we begin to understand the complex relationship between racism, colorism, power, and privilege in modern-day societies.

2.3.2 Evolutions and outcomes of colorism

In much of the world, racism and colorism are a result of European colonialism and imperialistic structuring of international hegemonies. Their ideologies of white supremacy were disseminated throughout the colonies in order to justify a hierarchy that prioritized European whiteness over indigenous brownness or blackness (Chanbonpin, 2015). The narratives that they perpetrated often held up white Europeans as saviors of a barbaric, uncivilized, and primitive world (Glenn, 2008). This eventually led to a deep-rooted belief that whiteness and westernization were somehow innately superior to all others; this can still be identified in modern-day discourse regarding global politics, i.e. in the application of the terms “Global North” and “Global South.” Western ideologies of white supremacy had been internalized by the subjugated peoples of European colonies. These insidious ideologies continued to spread and take deeper roots with the following era of American imperialism and chattel slavery (Hunter, 2007). Imperialism, colonialism, and slavery would eventually serve to reinforce socio-economic class inequalities along lines of race and color.

Figure 2.5

Map of the Global North (Blue) and the Global South (Red)



Note. From “World map showing a traditional definition of the North-South divide” by Kingj123, 2007. <http://powershiftmalaysia.org.my/coy-the-global-north-and-south-divide/>.

Through the age of imperialism, white colonizers would maintain their empires by calling upon members of the local populations to govern and police their own communities (Hunter, 2007). Through this practice, they chose the indigenous peoples that most resembled the ideal European image phenotypically; this practice worked in alignment with the insidious ideology of white supremacy and further reinforced the justification for their application in the colonies. Among many traits, skin color and tone were factors utilized for the selection process; this resulted in lighter-skinned indigenous peoples ultimately ruling over their darker-skinned counterparts (Li et al., 2008). The clear juxtaposition between and reinforcement of the black and white dichotomy quickly became internalized by colonized territories; whiteness was correlated with power, privilege, and wealth while blackness was correlated with poverty and inability.

A clear example of this can be noted in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Belgian colonizers claimed the territory that would be known as modern-day Rwanda in 1916. Understanding that they would not be able to fully administer a territory so vast, foreign, and far from their own home, the Belgian imperialists sought out a group of individuals with whom they could identify with most – the Tutsi aristocracy. Not only were the Tutsi aristocracy of greater socioeconomic means than their Hutu

neighbors, they were cited to share more European features as well, such as relatively lighter skin tones. In this sense, the Tutsi were utilized as a local resource to reinforce Belgian supremacy and, in extension, white supremacy. The resultant genocide was a direct result of animosity between the lighter-skinned Tutsi and the darker-skinned Hutu that was established by Belgian colonial powers in order to establish a hierarchy that centered white supremacy above all else (Beauchamp, 2014).

Despite the end of most imperial empires in the world, the legacies of the western empires continue to exist and impact post-colonial nation-states. The elite classes of many of these nation-states remain largely lighter skinned than the rest of their societies (Glenn, 2008). This fact has allowed for lightness to be closely associated with the elite classes, further cementing the idea that lightness or whiteness will afford an individual more success, wealth, power, and privilege. A secondary outcome of such a belief is the justification for the ridicule and oppression of darker-skinned people in these societies, continuing even into modern-day society. An example of this could be the Philippines which had experienced colonization by both the Spanish and American empires (Glenn, 2008). Business and political elites of the Philippines remain considerably lighter skinned and more European-looking than the majority of the population. The general population has remained conscious of skin darkness while subsequently being fascinated and longing for lightness, whiteness, and the western or European aesthetic (Batonbakal, 2019).

Figure 2.6*GlutaMAX Whitening Ad featuring Celebrity Jinky Oda*

Note. From “From ebony to ivory: Colorism in the Philippines,” by J. Shin, 2014.

<https://japansociology.com/2014/05/27/from-ebon-to-ivory-colorism-in-the-philippines/>.

In fact, this is common in any country that has experienced chattel slavery or policies that policed miscegenation (Glenn, 2008). The populations of these nation-states tend to be more conscious of the color of their skin as well as the shades of their skin tones, developing an elaborate language to discuss various shades and hues (AP, 2014). Though, there are exceptions to this trend as discussed earlier; Asian nations have held beliefs in colorism long before the coming of European imperial powers and westernization (Li et al., 2008). However, these locally derived understandings and practices of colorism have shifted from their historic definitions with the introduction of contemporary meanings and significances. With the development of mass media and capitalistic consumerism, Asian understandings of colorism have shifted to blend traditional values with contemporary practices – most explicitly acknowledged in South Korean entertainment industry. As the world becomes more

interconnected due to globalization, colorism adapts, much like racism, to its new environment. The insidious ideology of white supremacy and whiteness has continued to thrive and can now sell itself on a capitalistic market. This can be noted in the increasing demand for skin lightening products around the world (Glenn, 2008). The globalized internet has made access to information and ease of purchase for lightening products much more convenient. Advertisement for skin lightening products can thus be argued to both cater to the demand of an international audience but also to uphold the international idealization for whiteness or lightness of skin color.

Some advertisements make clear distinctions between socially constructed race categories and ethnic groups. The use of stark contrasts allows the advertisers to establish a spectrum of skin tones and highlight which ones are favored over which ones are not (Li et al., 2008). Advertisements will emphasize the agency of the individual as well in order to create the argument that anything less than flawless skin would be the fault of the individual for lack of care and responsibility. Once again, this argument pulls from the belief that flawlessness is the natural state of all skin, being defined as spotlessness, brightness, firmness, and lightness. The use of beauty pageants further emphasizes this notion as well, emphasizing on the flawlessness of contestants' skin in order to push more and more skin lightening products (Glenn, 2008).

In Europe and North America, mass media often focus on the beauty of Anglo-Saxon features (Glenn, 2008). Though, the products of mass media rarely remain within European or North American communities; these advertisements are spread widely and are exported to other regions of the world, purposefully marketing the images of a good western, white life in juxtaposition to a criminalistic, brown or black life (Hunter, 2007). Furthermore, mass media forms meant for global distribution often prioritize the hiring of white models or light-skin indigenous peoples over all others (Li et al., 2008). This practice further reinforces the notion that lightness and whiteness is superior to blackness or brownness. Though Asian advertisements feature significantly more Asian models, the occasional white model is still given relevance within the region. Often times, the use of colors and shades are paired with the models to remind consumers that white can be associated with

auspiciousness, righteousness, and purity while black can be associated with wickedness, depravity, and villainy.

Figure 2.7

Ad for Seoul Secret's Snowz Product



Note. From “‘Racist’ ad for Seoul secret skin whitening pulled in Thailand,” 2016. Branding in Asia. <https://brandinginasia.com/racist-ad-for-seoul-secret/>.

A sudden explosion of wealth in Asia led to a rapidly developed market for skin lightening products with mass media and fashion reinforcing the demand for such products (Li et al., 2008). Asian celebrities have been noted to attribute their fame and success to their lightness or whiteness, claiming that the paleness of their skin has provided them with the cultural capital necessary to succeed in society. The desire for lightness or whiteness of skin has thus been understood to be signs of modernity, social mobility, and success (Glenn, 2008). In Japanese culture, the desire isn’t even to be similar to white Europeans but to be even more white than them. The deep desire to achieve such extreme levels of lightness or whiteness has made both Japan and South Korea the ideal beauty standards for many Asian cultures, especially since their products are claimed to be of greater quality, producing more apparent results (Glenn, 2008).

Though much of the demand for and production of skin lightening goods exist outside of majority white societies, it is ironic to note that these products are often produced by companies run by European or American business owners (Glenn, 2008). Even though South Korean and Japanese companies are known to produce products of greatest quality to sell to communities of Asians, these companies have significant ties to European or white business owners and entities; this ultimately speaks on the control that European and western powers continue to have over the Asian beauty industry and its narratives of white-praise and, essentially, white supremacy. The considerable increase in demand for skin lightening products in the global market is a result of the history of colonialism, but also of the globalization of capitalist consumerism (Glenn, 2008). As such, white imperial powers no longer need to exploit their former colonies through imperialism but can continue to oppress them by perpetuating the ideology that claims superiority of whiteness, utilizing their resources to produce the skin lightening products, and then profiting off of their demand for said products. As images of whiteness continues to propagate around the world and the rewards for lightness continue to be apparent, the demand for skin lightening products and procedures will continue to grow (Hunter, 2007); European or white involvement in ownership or management of these industries only further ensures that the wealth generated by such industries benefit the former colonial powers that established the ideologies that fuel these demands in the first place. It is important to also note that this is not the only ideology western imperial empires have established in order to oppress and exploit other nation-states beyond the end of the era of imperialism.

Through the understanding the origins and history of colorism, one is able to gain a better understanding of how it operates in collaboration with racism (Hunter, 2007). The nuance of navigating between both racism and colorism can be seen through the history and behavior of Asian Americans. The United States operates off of a black and white binary dichotomy that creates a hierarchy of color and race, privileging white people the most while punishing Black people the most (Chanbonpin, 2015). As neither white nor black, Asian Americans are thus trapped in the middle and are forced to attempt to navigate and find their place in an American racial and color hierarchy. Having to choose between the black or white ends of the

spectrum, Asian Americans are often incentivized to appeal toward the white end in order to maximize the benefits they can gain access to, such as social, cultural, political, or economic advantages. Asian Americans thus reinforce the oppressive structures of racism and colorism against those whom already suffer from it.

As previously discussed, the use of racism and colorism can cause schisms in socio-economic classes which prevents the coalition development of the oppressed to take action against the larger institutional system. This is apparent in the appeal to whiteness by Asian Americans, particularly. As Asian Americans are clearly not white themselves, they invariably fail at their attempts to fully attain privileges that are afforded to white individuals in their society (Chanbonpin, 2015). However, the very decision to make the appeal toward whiteness already distances them from their brown and black counterparts. Therefore, not only are they outrightly refused access to whiteness, but they are further rejected by brown and black communities for their betrayal by even appealing to whiteness in the first place.

Asian Americans, though, are not completely without a rung on the ladder of the black and white hierarchy. The race politics of the United States has shown that the binary dichotomy of black and white has developed a third option: honorary white (Jones, 2013). The newest category of “honorary white” still utilizes race and color as indicators for acceptance. The development of this new identifier serves many purposes, one of which is to provide the opportunity for non-white communities to make attempts at gaining access to the power and privileges experienced by white communities (Chanbonpin, 2015). However, any attempt made merely reinforces the current status quo, as Asian American attempts have proven. Asian Americans now act as a buffer community between the black and white communities, serving as an example to say that social mobility is possible while concurrently proving that white communities will never allow for true equality or equity. In saying that social mobility is possible, the Asian American community justifies the white community’s status at the top through an argument of merit while consequently relegating blame and fault for ostracization on the oppressed communities of color themselves. As more and more communities appeal to whiteness and attempt to enter the category of “honorary white,” the likelihood for unity to challenge the status quo significantly decreases (Jones, 2013).

2.4 The significance of South Korea

2.4.1 Defining and preserving the Korean identity

In the context of South Korea, race politics are intrinsically tied to narratives about nationalism and the construction of the nation. The national identity of Koreans is based on their distinct definition of what it means to be Korean and how that definition ties their community together (Chung & Choe, 2008). In this context, the nation is a multi-dimensional aspect that encompasses the economy, culture, language, tradition, myths, heritage, legal systems, political systems, memories, etc. In the age of globalization, some scholars argue for the diminishing significance of nationalism, but its continued prevalence can be noted in South Korea.

In addition to bolstering the nation by providing a narrative of shared community, nationalism also has the by-product of xenophobia (Chung & Choe, 2008). Nationalism is not the only causal factor for the development of this fear of outsiders, though. It is noted that nationalism in one's culture will lead to fear for its destruction at the hands of outsiders, but nationalism in one's political system will actually reduce xenophobia. However, the nationalism employed specifically in South Korea has led many scholars to analyzing racism and xenophobia as central tenants of modern South Korean society (Phillips et al., 2016). There are several theories citing the origin of racism and xenophobia in South Korean society, from Chinese Confucian inequality, Japanese imperialism, and American racial stereotyping. Though Korean diasporic scholars attempt to parse out the nuance of their cultural experience of racism and xenophobia, South Korea-based Korean scholars generally avoid challenging the predominant ethno-narratives.

Part of the consideration for South Korea's engagement with racism and xenophobia can be traced throughout its history. Ethno-nationalist narratives were developed in order to cope with the encroaching foreign powers, such as during World War II and the coming of the Japanese imperial army (Phillips et al., 2016). The development of the ethno-narrative allowed for Koreans to emphasize a need for the protection of their own culture and bloodlines, resisting the attempt of foreign powers from usurping the right to govern local territories and communities. However, with the removal of the Japanese Imperial Army from the Korean peninsula, the

ethno-narrative was repurposed to unite the Korean people in legitimizing their right for self-governance, as well as asserting independence from the developing North Korean state (Chung & Choe, 2008).

Korean elites utilized the ethno-narrative to argue that their unique homogeneity through blood purity meant moral superiority (Phillips et al., 2016). The notion of blood purity quickly became integrated into the narratives of Korean ethno-nationalism and posited their superiority over all others. In this sense, Korean pride is established firmly in the ideology of “one pure blood” (Nugroho). Therefore, Korean pride stems not from political or social pride, but from cultural pride (Chung & Choe, 2008). This sense of Korean pride created pressure to maintain blood purity, inadvertently resulting in social anxiety around the arrival of non-Korean migrants in the country (Phillips et al., 2016). Despite having a single Korean parent, children of multiracial or multiethnic parents were often not considered to be truly Korean. This belief caused parents to disapprove of their children engaging in significant relationships with anyone considered not Korean, in order to preserve the nation and its narrative of blood purity.

The ethno-narrative did not simply revolve around blood purity, though. It also provided commentary on history and politics; it painted Koreans as perpetual victims of foreign powers (Phillips et al., 2016). Japan and China were painted as aggressors that constantly sought to consume the Korean peninsula, but were consistently unsuccessful due to the strength of Korean homogeneity and superiority. Additionally, as victims, Koreans were entitled to demand for reparations for the history of exploitation they faced at the hands of foreign powers, specifically Japan and China. Though there are some concerns about the application of ethno-narratives in South Korea, the demand for reparations is one that is least often criticized.

On top of promoting the belief of blood purity and superiority despite an extended history of victimhood, the ethno-narrative also erases any wrongdoing of the Korean nation itself (Phillips et al., 2016). For example, the South Korean military was sent to Viet Nam in order to assist the American and South Viet Nam forces during the American War in Viet Nam. Since then, a number of Vietnamese women have come forth to claim that they were victims of sexual assault at the hands of South Korean military men. Anyone who spoke of these women, supported these

women, or attempted to give them spotlight in South Korean media was labeled as anti-Korean traitors. The narrative of South Korean men assaulting Vietnamese women undermined the perpetual victim argument of the ethno-narrative and has largely gone unacknowledged and unaddressed.

Alongside the ethno-narrative, the rise of the South Korean economy has also served as another platform to bolster South Korean nationalism (Chung & Choe, 2008). Just as the economy began to develop, the ethno-narrative was utilized to unify the South Korean workforce to emphasize economic modernization while challenge the growing communism to the north and any internal disputes (Phillips et al., 2016). However, as the financial crisis of 1997 struck Korea, the economy-based argument for nationalism began to fail.

During this period, Korea experience a significant increase in immigration of migrant workers and immigrant wives (Lee et al., 2006). The influx of non-Korean immigrants further challenged the ethno-narrative by slowly shifting the South Korean population away from homogeneity. As the South Korean nation becomes more and more heterogenous, the ethno-narrative increasingly fails to enforce itself (Chung & Choe, 2008). The increasing diversity in South Korea can be noted through the increasing number of multicultural centers in the country: from 21 in 2006 to 208 in 2013, from an annual budget of 0.91 billion Korean won to an annual budget of 43.6 billion Korean won (Phillips et al., 2016).

Aside from becoming more and more multiethnic and multiracial in its population, South Korea is also unique for its adherence to liberal democracy alongside its continued practice of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity (Phillips et al., 2016). Despite this significant increase in diversity, it was rated as one of the most racially intolerant countries in the world (Nugroho). This can be noted in the lack of enthusiastic nationalism in its minority communities; minority communities often face discrimination in Korea and thus are less likely to have a strong sense of nationalism (Chung & Choe, 2008). Some forms of discrimination include hatred toward multiracial or multiethnic children, verbal abuse, exploitation, racial discrimination, and increasing rates of deportation for undocumented migrants (Nugroho). As the nation continually rejects minority communities in Korea, they in turn reject ethno-nationalist narratives.

These behaviors are enforced by the ethno-narrative through various forms of socialization, such as media. Native Koreans are often painted as virtuous people while foreigners are seen as either mischievous menaces or ignorant simpletons (Phillips et al., 2016). In comics and animations, Africans are portrayed stereotypically with obscenely large lips with ape-like qualities, a practice that mirrors Black minstrelsy in the United States of America. Media thus provides an avenue with which to introduce and reinforce stereotypes to the South Korean nation (Nugroho).

Additionally, the ethno-narrative not only proposes Koreans as perpetual victims, but also as moral superiors. This was shown earlier in the example of their relations with both the Japanese and Vietnamese people. It even became a popular practice to criticize American corruption in order to boost the Korean ego by claiming to be morally superior to the white westerners (Phillips et al., 2016).

Many challenges made against the ethno-narrative focus on addressing how they address the “other.” For example, some argue that the ethno-narrative should not paint foreigners as either evil or dim-witted; rather, Koreans should view foreigners in other ways, such as helpless people that Koreans can help or independent actors that Koreans shouldn’t have to worry about (Phillips et al., 2016). There are challenges made against the ethno-narrative, but they rarely challenge Korean superiority. In fact, Korean superiority is taken as the given whereas their relation to the rest of the world is what needs to be questioned and reformed.

2.4.2 The rise of South Korean popular media

Over the past century, the Korean people have been subject to much foreign intervention. In the early 1910’s, the Japanese imperial forces held power and authority on the peninsula for over thirty years. Only through the end of the second world war was Japanese control over the territory forfeited. However, following a short period of self-governance, the Korean people suffered through the Cold War, wherein their war served as a proxy for the two world powers: the United States and the Soviet Union. This conflict irreparably divided the Korean people, politically, economically, socially, and even geographically. It is through such turmoil that the new nation-state of South Korea sought to consolidate its legitimacy through uniting the populace and pushing for development (Jin, 2014).

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the South Korean people found themselves newly divided. In order to move forward, the government and the people decided to intentionally take what they could from other nation-states. Korean culture had already learned a number of Chinese traditions, including Confucianism and Buddhism, and sought to blend them with what they had learned from Japanese imperialists. However, with the coming of American military interventionists and the western world, South Korean culture was able to further adopt practices of modernity, democracy, and capitalism ("The Korean Wave," 2011). The strategy for South Korea to rise beyond its history of conflict was to combine both eastern and western ideology.

During the 1960's, South Korea largely focused on importing cultural products, specifically from the United States ("The Korean Wave," 2011). British and American celebrities dominated South Korean media, leaving little room for the cultivation of domestic talent. This was similarly noted in Japan as well, whose media markets were flooded with British and American productions. Recognizing that a culture that relied heavily on import would not succeed, the South Korean government began its long-term plan to shift the society towards an export-oriented model (Lie, 2012). Thirty years later, South Korean media productions began to take up a larger portion of the global market, beginning with television dramas and movies (Jin, 2014).

Western nation-states had taken a few centuries in order to develop themselves, colonizing the rest of the world in order to exploit resources for their own benefit. Japan had begun to do the same in the early 1990's before the end of its own imperial era at the conclusion of the second world war. South Korea, however, managed to achieve a similar level of development in a few decades without the need to engage in the colonial experiences of its predecessors (Han, 2015). South Korean productions were even able to enter and dominate the Japanese markets ("The Korean Wave," 2011). The sudden and successful development of the South Korean nation-state led to a deep and profound sense of national and cultural pride; this sense of nationalism inadvertently bolstered the South Korean sense of xenophobia as well.

Because South Korea had so heavily imported cultural productions prior to its own global success, the products that would be export were a conglomeration of

several cultures ("The Korean Wave," 2011). In the same way that the Korean nation-state combined eastern and western ideology in order to develop itself, South Korean media combined aspects of eastern and western production and styles in order to become successful around the world (Jin, 2014). Not only were South Korean productions becomingly widely popular around the world, they had also reclaimed a majority of their domestic market, a feat that exceptionally few countries in the world can achieve due to the tremendous reach of the American Hollywood industry ("The Korean Wave," 2011).

As the 1990's came to a close, South Korean productions continued to grow in quantity and quality. The South Korean music industry turned its focus on developing multi-sensory productions by including music videos with music scores while providing more opportunities for artists to engage with their fans (Um, 2013). Though Japan had long been the champion of Asian pop music, South Korea's innovations and unique approach allowed it to quickly dominate the Asian market towards the end of the century ("The Korean Wave," 2011).

On top of that, a few other factors contributed to the growing success of South Korean media exports. First, South Korea lowered its protectionist policies, allowing for import and export of media productions to flow more easily (Lie, 2012). Though this meant Japanese productions were allowed to enter the South Korean market, it also meant that South Korean productions could enter the global market. These policies contributed to and allowed for South Korea's entertainment industry to gain larger global attraction over its much more economically powerful neighbor, Japan, who continued to practice protectionist policies in regards to its productions. By maintaining strong control over its entertainment productions, Japan inadvertently creates obstacles for foreign markets to access those very same productions.

Furthermore, the sudden political and economic development of South Korea allowed for significant technological developments to quickly follow (Jin, 2014). These technological developments were used to the advantage of the South Korean media industry, bolstering both its quality and quantity for global consumption. By 2011, the three largest consumers of South Korean productions were Japan, Thailand, and the United States, respectively ("The Korean Wave," 2011). Lastly, Asian peoples had been colonized by western imperial powers, leaving a taste

of anti-colonial sentiment in their collective memories. As such, Asian nations often had a strong preference for more locally curated products and productions (Kim, 2011). The South Korean media industry was uniquely able to fill this demand due to its blending of both eastern and western styles, providing locally made products that still embodied the unique aspects found only in western products.

This phenomenon of South Korean media success on a global level is known as the South Korean *한류* (read as “*Hallyu*”) or Korean Wave. The first *Hallyu* Wave from South Korea is considered to have begun in 1997 and lasted until 2007, focusing mostly on South Korean television dramas that targeted women in the Asian market. The second *Hallyu* Wave, known as *Hallyu* 2.0, is considered to have begun in late 2007 and continues onto present day, focusing more on South Korean pop music while targeting a much larger global audience (Jin, 2014; Lie, 2012).

2.4.3 Defining the K-Pop genre

As stated prior, the Korean Wave is an intentional strategy employed by the South Korean nation-state, which supports the industry through significant investment in order to help build the South Korean economy, shape the South Korean image, and improve the South Korean soft power in global politics ("The Korean Wave," 2011). Because the South Korean media industry intentionally blended its traditional culture with western practices, it was able to enter the global market as a modern challenger from the east to the monopoly of western Hollywood entertainment. For example, western television dramas were viewed to be of greater quality, but eastern television dramas better captured the Asian cultural foundation, such as family and respect. South Korean television dramas captured both aspects, allowing them to quickly establish themselves as the dominant media industry in Asia.

Transnational pop music is a means with which youth culture is envisioned as a global community (Yoon, 2018). European and American pop music had been dominated the global stage for some time, but the coming of South Korean pop music has caused a considerable shift. Because the image that South Korea curates in order to export is especially particular, the narrative of the global pop music has shifted respectively. Despite being called “Korean” pop music and being

comprised of almost exclusively South Korean artists, there is nothing inherently Korean about the productions that come out of South Korea aside from language (Lie, 2012). Though most artists are either South Korean or Korean diaspora, South Korean management companies intentionally open up their talent search to a global audience. This has allowed for a number of non-Korean artists to enter the genre of K-Pop and contribute to the global aspect of the industry.

K-Pop purposefully removes explicitly Korean aspects from its productions. Outside of the country of origin and dominant language of use, there is little to no Korean symbolism in the K-Pop industry. This is due to the industry's attempts to learn and re-appropriate from western industries (Yoon, 2018). This explicit emulation is what allows K-Pop to become such a popular genre around the world. The lack of Korean symbolism in music videos, for example, makes the K-Pop brand much more easy to market to a global audience (Lie, 2012); when a product does not explicitly belong to someone, it can easily belong to everyone. This sentiment has been voiced by a number of fans who view K-Pop artists as belonging to a global community of fans, and not just South Korean fans (Yoon, 2018). A clear example of the attempt to appeal to western tastes is the inclusion of English lyrics in nearly all K-Pop songs; language accessibility, though limited, is a critical component that continues to draw foreign audiences back to the genre.

Beyond just marketability, some view the hybrid use of language as a means of self-expression (Um, 2013). Because the fan base is international, the language-use must also be international. The direct reflection of the fan base, in this context, allows for acknowledgement of both a domestic and international audience; the use of both Korean and English is a representation of both the domestic market and the global market (Yoon, 2018). Either way, K-Pop still builds itself around a core of commercialism, prioritizing capitalist gains and profitability above all else (Lie, 2012).

In fact, when developing its neoliberal policies for political and economic development, the South Korean government saw its cultural development as a subset of its economic development; cultural works were subsidized and supported by the government. Therefore, the success of cultural development was measured in economic terms (Jin, 2014). When addressing the cultural industry, the South Korean

government promoted what they called “Han Style,” emphasizing six products: food, paper, house, clothing, language, and music (Um, 2013). While the productivity of the industry was measured in economics, the government recognized that there were other outcomes that were possible through a successful cultural industry: the development of Korean soft power (Lie, 2012).

The South Korean government saw the media industry as a means to empower itself and expand its influence. As such, they deregulated the industry while concurrently funding its enterprises in accordance with neoliberal ideologies (Jin, 2014). Although the South Korean media is said to be representative of the people, it is, in fact, tied to corporate interests first and foremost. Though some say that the age of globalization has led to greater transnationalism and blurring of distinct divides between individualistic nation-states, the South Korean media industry is evidence of otherwise; South Korean media has flourished in the global market, but is propped up by domestic policies with domestic interests (Um, 2013). While bolstering the South Korean economy, South Korean media helps to fortify local and national identity for the South Korean people (Jin, 2014).

The success of South Korean media, more specifically South Korean dramas and pop music, has caused a significant shift in international public opinion. Both China and Japan experienced a massive influx of South Korean media into their markets which markedly altered public opinions regarding the South Korean people and state. Some politicians have even noted that the Korean Wave has done more to improve international relations with South Korea than diplomats have been able to in decades (“The Korean Wave,” 2011). Furthermore, improved relations with South Korea due to the popularity of their media has inadvertently led to demand for other South Korean products as well, such as cosmetics, fashion, technology, etc.

There are claims that the Korean Wave is a challenger to the monopoly of western media in the world and, more specifically, in Asia (Kim, 2011; Yoon, 2018). Though there is significant evidence of the growing influence of South Korean media in both the Asian and global market, it is still haphazard to claim that this is a true challenge to western media monopoly. As stated before, South Korean media productions borrow much from American and western practice; in this sense, South Korean media has been argued to be nothing but a mere imitator. As South Korean

media has blended Asian and American practices into its productions, it might be argued that it is a new type of hybrid; this can once again be noted in the blending of both Korean and English lyrics. However, both media industries still rely on the same core of capitalist exploitation, making them much more similar to one another than they are different.

2.4.4 What sets K-Pop apart?

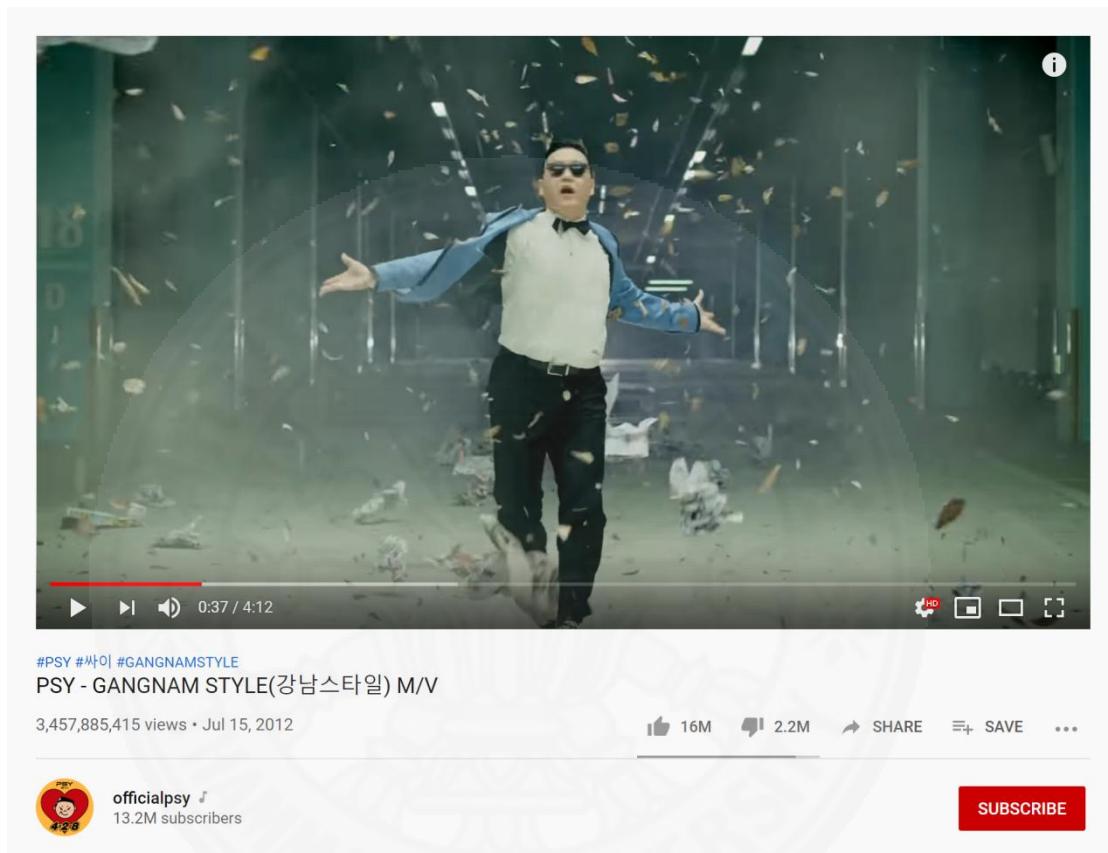
Once again, economic profitability is the marker with which the South Korean government measures the success of the South Korean media industry. Though this begs the question of what aspects actually make K-Pop and other South Korean media so successful. First, technological development in South Korea occurred simultaneously with the development of the industry. Second, the sudden development of the regional economy meant a sudden explosion of the population of middle-class consumers. Third, cultural proximity to other Asian, particularly East Asian, nations meant that products were more likely to be consumed than those of western origin (Jin, 2014).

When the age of social media began, technological advancements significantly reduced the cost of production, dissemination, and consumption ("The Korean Wave," 2011). Social media provided the avenue with which K-Pop and other South Korean media productions would be able to take the world by storm (Yoon, 2018). YouTube, in particular, has played a crucial role in ensuring that K-Pop and South Korean media continue to succeed in a global market (Ono & Kwon, 2013). For example, South Korean artist PSY's *GANGNAM STYLE* (강남스타일) music video was the first video on the streaming website that surpassed the marker of one billion views, holding the title of most viewed YouTube video for five whole years from 2012 to 2017 (Weatherby, 2017). It took PSY's *GANGNAM STYLE* (강남스타일) five months to hit the record-breaking one billion views; American artist Wiz Khalifa's See You Again music video took two years, from 2015 to 2017, to garner enough views to unseat PSY's *GANGNAM STYLE* (강남스타일) as most viewed video on the streaming website. As engagement with the Korean Wave continues and grows through social media, it reinforces the demand which in turn ensures that the South Korean media industry continues to fuel the phenomenon. For example, fans of South

Korean media often volunteer to provide language translations and interpretation services in the form of subtitles for their own communities (Yoon, 2018).

Figure 2.8

PSY's GANGNAM STYLE Music Video



Note. From “PSY – Gangnam Style (강남스타일) M/V” [Video], by Officialpsy, 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bZkp7q19f0>

Furthermore, management companies purposefully aim to have intersectionality available in their artist groups (Kuwahara, 2014). The variety of artist backgrounds, including ethnic identity, allows for greater audience appeal. In fact, management companies are renowned for being meticulous with their artists, controlling every detail of their artists in order to ensure maximum profitability; this includes artist recruitment and training, song writing, choreography, fashion, etc. (Hong, 2014). In this way, artists within the industry are as much a product for consumption as are the songs and videos that they produce (Yoon, 2018). Management companies even do their due diligence and conduct research into various

locales in order to cater their productions to localized demands ("The Korean Wave," 2011). This level of meticulous detail-oriented work ensures that management companies also minimize the risk they take when investing in some artists.

South Korean artists, specifically K-Pop artists, spend years upon years training to perfect their artform, as well as their public appearance and fashion style ("The Korean Wave," 2011). These aspects are then incorporated into their music productions, CD's and albums, music videos, etc. As K-Pop gains global popularity, their collaboration with non-Korean global musicians has also increased. The contributions of these artists help to push the genre towards a more globalized market. However, musicians are not the only ones to contribute to the South Korean media industry. Dancers and choreographers from all over the world are recruited to create challenging and eye-catching choreography, further allowing for a global appeal of domestic productions.

Additionally, South Korean culture allows for male artists to present themselves in a significantly different light than their western counterparts. Where western male artists focus on ruggedness, toughness, and "hard" masculinity, South Korean male artists are allowed to explore "soft" masculinity (Yoon, 2018). This alternative pathway to portraying and interpreting masculinity allows for greater flexibility in defining what a man can be. Men don't just need to be rough and tough; they can also be soft and gentle, kind and caring. The uniqueness of this aspect draws the audiences that long to see men in a different light.

Figure 2.9

Comparison of South Korean and Western men



Note. From “7 Korean Ulzzangs and their Western equivalents,” by Koreaboo, 2017.

<https://www.koreaboo.com/stories/7-korean-ulzzangs-western-equivalents/>. Copyrights 2017 by Koreaboo.

Another aspect of important notice is the lack of an independent music scene in South Korea (Lie, 2012). Japan, for example, as an extremely vibrant independent music community. Japanese media productions already had a large domestic market to be able to cater to. As such, there was no demand for the Japanese industry to seek to export its productions. In fact, internationalizing their industry appeared to be a risky and unnecessary endeavor. South Korea, however, could not build itself on only its domestic market and thus had to turn to the greater Asian market and, later, the global market in order to thrive. This helps to explain how Japan’s media dominance was quickly overcome by Korea, which now proudly boasts a global audience much more apparent than that its predecessor.

2.4.5 Blackness in South Korean popular media

In looking at South Korean anti-Blackness, one must understand the political and cultural history of the Korean nation. Early Japanese brutality against the Korean peoples during the era of imperialism led to strong sentiments of xenophobia (Han, 2015). Koreans drew a clear distinction between the “us” and “them.” Following this period, South Korean mass media perpetuated that ideology of an in-group versus all others. Primary to the 1990’s, much of this xenophobia was

contained to the domestic borders as South Koreans did not have significant exposure to the rest of the world. However, as South Korea became politically and economically developed, ample opportunity to travel abroad and witness the world opened up South Korean xenophobia to the global community.

It is in this same period of time that the South Korean youth were becoming exposed to the African American or Black culture, such as hip hop and rap (Um, 2013). The South Korean youth found utility in Black culture, which is rooted in resistance and liberation, to face their own challenges with society. Koreans from diaspora communities, such as Korean Americans, were being welcomed onto the South Korean music scene in order to import foreign cultural practices. Through this, migrant and diasporic experiences were shared through the form of hip hop and rap, especially highlighting the conflict that Korean Americans and Black Americans had with one another. Following the turn of the century, reports of South Korean racial prejudice significantly increased, both in South Korea and abroad (Han, 2015). This is due to the general ignorance that South Koreans have regarding the issues of inter-race relations.

As Black culture was imported into South Korea from the United States, the context of Asian American, especially Korean American, and Black American relations cannot go unacknowledged. There has been significant history between the two communities, spanning issues of colonialism, exploitation, music, and racial tensions (Yang, 2013); one of the most prominent cases being the incident of the 1992 Los Angeles Unrest. Asian Americans have been known to appropriate or steal Black culture for their own benefits, but Black Americans have also perpetuated orientalist ideologies at the detriment of Asian Americans. Generational issues such as these ensure that relations between the communities are tenuous at best.

Figure 2.10

1992 Los Angeles Unrest in Koreatown



Note. “What photographer of the LA riots really saw behind the lens,” by A. Campbell & M. Ferner, 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/photographers-los-angeles-riots_n_5902c4ffe4b02655f83b5a86. Copyrights 2017 by Verizon Media.

In the United States, Asian Americans are often denied popularity and fame no matter what they do. As such, they often turn to the use of Black culture or to Asian markets in order to find success (Yang, 2013). Jay Park, a Korean American from Seattle, is a clear example of both, becoming famous in South Korea as a South Korean artist while also popularizing hip hop, b-boying, and rap in the South Korean market.

Hip hop, rap, and other aspects of Black culture were created as a necessary form of expression for survival in and resistance against a dominant hegemony (Um, 2013). Because of this utility, youth from across all cultures have turned to the use of hip hop, rap, and Black culture as a popularized genre for generational communication. K-Pop and other South Korean music genres have in turn appropriated Black culture in order to blend it into their productions, hoping to appeal to a global audience. This appropriation is ironic when discussed in juxtaposition to the strong stance of xenophobia and colorism (and in extension racism) in South Korean history.

Over the past thirty years, South Korean celebrities, and not just K-Pop artists, have engaged in behavior that they deemed as “Black” for public consumption, such as blackface, while concurrently denying any accusation of racism (Han, 2015). This trend shows that South Korean discourse regarding racism, and in extension colorism, is severely limited. South Korean discourse often focuses on the superiority of blood purity and homogenous nationalism, justifying the sense of xenophobia, which inadvertently includes racism and colorism. That is to say, South Korean discourse does not distinguish explicitly on race or color, but assumes the superiority of the pure-blooded homogenous Korean nation in comparison to all others. In judging others, South Koreans will look to country of origin, wealth of said country, origin of culture or blood, etc. While not explicitly looking at Blackness itself, they coincidentally include it when attempting to discern an individual’s country of origin.

Part of the lofty, self-aggrandizing perspective of the South Korean people stems from their sudden economic development in the late 1900’s (Han, 2015). The sudden influx of wealth led the nation to believe in its own capitalist exceptionalism, eventually leading to what Gil-Soo Han calls “nouveau-riche” racism – racism of the newly rich. Though some would believe that the younger generation would be able to break away from this mentality due to their increased accessibility to a global community, studies have shown that they are socialized by the older South Korean generation and take after them in this regard.

South Korean productions are made and marketed for a global audience, but, in this sense, are still not global productions (Han, 2015). This rampant behavior of appropriation of Blackness for consumption while concurrently rejecting Blackness in all other regards has become public knowledge thanks to South Korea’s intentional export of its own media. Wherein the United States of America, Blackface is used as minstrelsy to unveil white Americans’ contradictory desire for and despise of Blackness, South Korean Blackface is utilized to legitimize ridicule for Blackness and Black peoples, affirming negative stereotypes and ensuring the perpetuation of racism and colorism.

On top of ridiculing Blackness, South Korean media bastardizes Black culture in order to commodify it for profit. Hip hop and rap are often associated with the suburban or urban middle class in South Korea (Um, 2013), a stark contrast to its

ties to the most disadvantaged communities in the United States of America. Rather than focusing on political resistance as Black culture had originally intended, South Korean-appropriated Black culture focuses on aesthetics and profitability. Essentially, the culture is taken and “cleaned up” for capitalist consumption, utilizing the global popularity of Black culture while putting a soft, light-skinned Asian face to it (Lie, 2012).

John Lie quotes Lee Soo-man in saying, “South Korea has consumed Black music in Asia. Just as J-Pop was built on rock, we made K-Pop based on Black music” (Lie, 2012). With that being said, the popularity and success of K-Pop can thus be said to be heavily reliant on Black culture, which is appropriated, exploited, and bastardized for the purpose of maximizing capitalist profits to the benefit of the Korean economy.

CHAPTER 3

DATA COLLECTION

As was stated in the previous sections, colorism has had a long history in the mind of the Korean people; it is deeply rooted in socioeconomic beliefs and helps to distinguish virtuosity from villainy. Relatively speaking, the introduction of racism into the national narrative is quite new, beginning with the introduction of western foreigners into the country, specifically American soldiers. In this significant period of South Korean history, engagement with Black and white Americans helps to shape the conception of race and Blackness within Korea. These social constructions around race incorporated skin color and have endured until today.

This study specifically looks at the engagement of South Koreans with the issues of race and color in media, particularly in K-Pop. However, K-Pop is not the only media source to engage in these issues. Major television broadcasting channels have also blundered into conversations of race and color. A few of these major television production channels include 문화방송주식회사 (romanized as Munhwa Broadcasting Company or MBC), 에스비에스 (romanized as Seoul Broadcasting System or SBS), and 한국방송공사 (romanized as Korean Broadcasting System or KBS). In the past decade, these three television channels have broadcasted blatant Blackfacing in their programming.

3.1 Blackface in South Korean popular media

Blackface is a type of performance that gained significant attention in the mid-19th century as a form of minstrelsy and mockery. The performance was a means for non-Black peoples to paint themselves literally black, don tattered clothing, and act out scenarios that portrayed Black people in stereotypical fashion (Kaur, 2019). These stereotypes emphasized that Black people were lazy, dangerous, hypersexual, uneducated, etc. Though the primary goal was to provide comedy and humor for entertainment, the practice is inherently harmful to Black peoples and communities around the world.

MBC, SBS, and KBS directly promoted these behaviors in the early 2000's by broadcasting them to the nation publicly. In the case of MBC, comedians 이경실 (romanized as Lee Kyung Shil) and 김지선 (romanized as Kim Ji Sun) performed Blackface for the Lunar New Year special of a tv show called *세상을 바꾸는 퀴즈* (romanized as *Quiz that Changes the World*). They both dressed in a yellow and purple basketball uniform, reminiscent of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team, with black long-sleeve shirts and pants underneath to emulate Black skin. They painted their skin a dark brown color, leaving ample space around the lip area as well as on the forehead around the eyebrows. To top it off, they wore a small wig with tight black curls.

Figure 3.1

*Comedians 이경실(romanized as Lee Kyung Shil) and 김지선(romanized as Kim Ji Sun) on *세상을 바꾸는 퀴즈* (romanized as Quiz that Changes the World)*



Note. From “Korean pop culture’s history of appropriating black culture,” by D. Chung, 2012. <https://www.koreaboo.com/article/korean-pop-cultures-history-appropriating-black-culture/>.

This presentation of Blackness from a South Korean perspective was made globally accessible through the popular media platform, YouTube. The video was inundated with comments critiquing the act of Blackface on South Korean public television and online media. Even South Korean netizens (shorthand term for internet citizen) expressed their concern through the MBC homepage and MBC's social media

account on Twitter regarding how culturally insensitive the skit was (Yun, 2012). Because of the backlash, MBC released an apology statement a month later and had the video removed from their public media platforms ("MBC Issues an Apology," 2012).

Arguments made in defense of the blackface cited a late 1980's South Korean cartoon whom was popular in Korea: 아기공룡 둘리 (romanized as *Dooly the Little Dinosaur*). The famous animation features a variety of characters, one of whom is named 마이콜 (romanized as Michol) and is portrayed as a thin, dark-skinned man with large pink lips and curly black hair; the show even goes as far as to say that Michol's role model is Michael Jackson, the Black American Prince of Pop. The performance was claimed to be a cosplay (shorthand term for costume play) and parody of the character Michol. However, that argument did not seem to sway those who were criticized what they viewed as blatant Blackface in the modern era.

Figure 3.2

아기공룡 둘리 (romanized as *Dooly the Little Dinosaur*)



Note. From "Dooly museum: Resident-friendly theme park," by B. Byung-yeul, 2015, December 11. *The Korea Times*. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2017/10/141_192889.html.

SBS, too, was guilty of a similar act. In their 2017 show, 웃찾사 레전드 매치 (romanized as *Laughing Legend Match*), Korean comedian 홍현희 (romanized as Hong

Hyun Hee) dressed up similarly in Blackface and performed her own rendition of “The Circle of Life” from *The Lion King* (Choi, 2017). Hong dressed up in a dark brown body suit with a cheetah print short top, a feathered headdress, Black braids, and a skirt made of cabbage leaves. Hong also painted her skin the same dark brown color, leaving ample space around her eyes and eyebrows, while also painting large pink lips (Dahir, 2017). This portrayal of Blackface on public media once again led to immediate international backlash.

Figure 3.3

홍현희 (romanized as Hong Hyun Hee) on 웃찾사 래전드 매치 (romanized as Laughing Legend Match) [Screenshot]



Note. From “A Korean TV has now apologized for using blackface,” by I. Dahir, 2017. BuzzFeed News. https://www.buzzfeed.com/ikrd/people-are-not-happy-with-this-korean-show-for-using?utm_term=.vfYOGp7ar#.mtxrewBbR.

Within a few days, SBS had removed the media clip from all their media platforms and issued a short apology (이정현, 2017). This was followed up a week later with an apology from Hong on her personal social media account on Instagram. Though both apologizes were released relatively quickly, they contain no reflection upon the action of Blackface but rather simply apologize for the occurrence.

Figure 3.4

홍현희 (*romanized as Hong Hyun Hee*)'s Apology on Instagram



Note. From Hong Hyun Hee [@hyunheehong]. (2017, April 26). Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BTWBu9Lh8vD/>.

Text Translation: This is Hong Hyun Hee. I am truly sorry to those who have been hurt because of my inconsiderate gag. I will think more carefully from now on and will try to give you a healthier laugh.

KBS also has its fair share of controversy with Blackface. In 2014, *개그콘서트* (*romanized as Gag Concert*) portrayed two performers who donned blackface and dressed in what they deemed to be African tribal clothing, only to demean and degrade in an attempt of comedy (T. Kim, 2014). Three years later in 2017, this is followed up with an advertisement for a play titled *The Blacks*, featuring a number of South Korean actors in Blackface (Aran, 2017). Unsurprisingly, the play featured and was written by cast members of the *Gag Concert*. After significant backlash, KBS removed the characters and the play from their promotional materials.

Figure 3.5

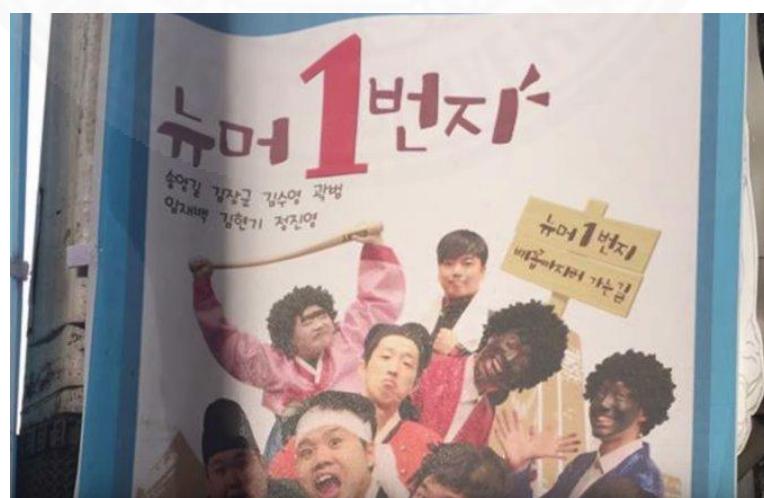
개그콘서트 (*romanized as Gag Concert*)



Note. From “Gag Concert offends with another witless blackface gag,” by T. Kim, 2017, July 9. *The Korea Times*. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/07/511_160671.html.

Figure 3.6

Promotional Material for the Blacks



Note. From “Korean network backtracks after racist blackface ad causes firestorm,” by I. Aran, 2017, August 24. *Splinter*. https://splinternews.com/korean-network-backtracks-after-racist-blackface-ad-cau-1798383419?fbclid=IwAR2zVE9nloFTNQBYi8_ZM2iWrLnIAZCWNqBHoQKp-EjAmiOcusJrWvHJNY.

Most strikingly, this phenomenon is not unique to television shows of purely South Korean production; *SNL Korea*, an American import, featured a skit in 2011 wherein three South Korean women dressed in Blackface in order to parody *The Dreamgirls*, an America musical about a trio of Black women trying to make their way in the largely white and male music industry. *SNL Korea* may be in South Korea and feature primarily native South Koreans, but it is still an American product that is owned and operated largely by Americans. International outrage led to a petition being created in order to have the issue of Blackface be properly addressed in South Korean media (Clayton, 2011).

Figure 3.7

SNL Korea Parody of the Dreamgirls



Note. From “[Throwback] to a time where idols covered Dreamgirls,” by SheeraEthereal, 2017, January 20. Onehallyu. <https://onehallyu.com/topic/457529-throwback-to-a-time-where-idols-covered-dreamgirls/>.

From these examples, one can already surmise that the South Korean entertainment industry has little to no understanding of race politics and the implications they have on the modern, global society. These occurrences are not rare and are not limited to just these large television broadcasting companies. Individual celebrities from various production companies have fallen into similar pitfalls. With years of training from their respective companies, some may assume that these idols or celebrities would have received some training regarding their public performance.

However, instances of Blackface are just as rampant, if not more so, from these K-Pop idols.

Similar to MBC's Blackface television show, parodying Michol from *Dooly the Little Dinosaur*, 윤보미(stage name Bomi) of the K-Pop group 에이핑크 (romanized as Apink) is contracted under Play M Entertainment (formerly known as A Cube Entertainment and Plan A Entertainment). Bomi appeared on SNL Korea and cosplayed as Michol, wearing a wig of think black curls while having drawn a wide circle around her mouth to represent large lips (IATFB, 2017a). Furthermore, fellow bandmate 오하영 (stage name Hayoung) defended the cosplay by claiming that Michol is not a Black man rather than apologize for the blatant Blackface.

Figure 3.8

윤보미(Bomi) of 에이핑크 (Apink) Cosplaying as Michol



Note. From “Bomi did blackface while impersonating Michol, a beloved cartoon character,” by IATFB, 2017. Asian Junkie. <http://www.asianjunkie.com/2017/07/02/bomi-did-blackface-while-impersonating-michol-a-beloved-racist-cartoon-character/>

Figure 3.9

하연(Hayoung) of 에이핑크(Apink) Defending Bomi's Cosplay of Michol



Note. From “Bomi did blackface while impersonating Michol, a beloved cartoon character,” by IATFB, 2017. Asian Junkie. <http://www.asianjunkie.com/2017/07/02/bomi-did-blackface-while-impersonating-michol-a-beloved-racist-cartoon-character/>

From SM Entertainment, the popular boy group 엑소 (romanized as EXO)'s 김종태 (stage name Chen) also made reference to Michol in a V Live broadcast (Mkim93, 2018). V Live is a live-streaming broadcast platform that allows South Korean celebrities to be able to interact with their fans, both domestic and international. While streaming along with his bandmates, 변백현 (stage name Baekhyun) decided to draw on Chen's face with dark lipstick, forming a large outline around his mouth. Chen made a comment comparing himself to both Michol as well as Kunta Kinte, a character in the American historical drama *Roots*. *Roots* follows the life of Kunta Kinte, a Black man who is kidnapped and taken to the Americas as a slave.

Figure 3.10

변백현 (stage name Baekhyun) of 엑소 (romanized as EXO) Drawing Big Lips on 김종태 (stage name Chen) of 엑소 (romanized as EXO) [Screenshot]



Note. From “EXO’s Chen under fire for a possible “racist” remark on “V-Live,” by mkim93, 2018, April 15. Allkpop. <https://www.allkpop.com/article/2018/04/exos-chen-under-fire-for-a-possible-racist-remark-on-v-live>.

Some fans have taken to defending Chen by claiming that the Korean context of “Kunta Kinte” is different from the American one; in Korean, the name is used as a descriptor for people with fuller lips (Cannon, 2018). However, even in that context, the name “Kunta Kinte” is meant to poke fun at or denigrate an individual’s attributes. Though it is not as explicit as earlier performances of Blackface, Chen’s statements in regards to Michol and Kunta Kinte are still shaded with the sentiments of Blackface.

Also from SM Entertainment’s pop boy group 슈퍼주니어 (romanized as Super Junior), 신동희 (stage name Shindong) too performed Blackface on the variety show 강심장 (romanized as *Strong Heart*). As one of the show’s hosts, Shindong dressed in blackface to perform what he called a cosplay of Oprah Winfrey, a famous Black American woman known for her talk show and various media engagements. Aside from donning a black wig and painting his skin a dark brown shade, Shindong also wore a set of fake, large, red lips. Needless to say, the particular portrayal of Black lips with obscenely large lips derives from the history of Black minstrelsy,

which, as state before, stems from a history of denigrating Black peoples in order to oppress and subjugate them.

Figure 3.11

신동호 (stage name Shindong) of 슈퍼주니어 (romanized as Super Junior) Dressed as Oprah Winfrey [Screenshot]



Note. From “Super Junior,” by your fave is problematic, 2018. Tumblr.
<https://yourfaveisproblematic.tumblr.com/post/49870822647/super-junior>.

From the same production company and boy group, 김종운 (stage name Yesung) also performed Blackface when cosplaying Nick Fury (Hyeona, 2013; IATFB, 2017b). Nick Fury is a comic book character from Marvel Comics, but is portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson, a Black American actor, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The cosplay was performed in 2013, but Yesung reshared the same video again four years later in 2017 on his social media Instagram account. The post has since been deleted, but there were no public apologies made in regard to this incident of Blackface, in either iterations. In fact, another member of SM Entertainment’s Super Junior, Henry Lau, commented in support of Yesung’s resharing of the video (Juhli, 2017). Henry Lau, a Canadian idol in the K-Pop industry, claimed that Blackface can’t be racist if it is cosplay.

Figure 3.12

김종운 (stage name Yesung) of 슈퍼주니어 (romanized as Super Junior) Dressed as Samuel L. Jackson



Note. From “Yesung reposts old vid of him doing blackface, Henry compares it to wearing a wig,” by IATFB, 2017. Asian Junkie. <http://www.asianjunkie.com/2017/04/02/yesung-reposts-old-vid-of-him-doing-blackface-henry-compares-it-to-wearing-a-wig/>.

Figure 3.13

Henry Lau Defending 김종운 (stage name Yesung) of 슈퍼주니어 (romanized as Super Junior)



henryl89 left a comment on yesung1106's post: if this is racist. then thor wearing the blonde wig is also racist. c o s p l a y . 3m



Note. From “Yesung reposts old vid of him doing blackface, Henry compares it to wearing a wig,” by IATFB, 2017. Asian Junkie. <http://www.asianjunkie.com/2017/04/02/yesung-reposts-old-vid-of-him-doing-blackface-henry-compares-it-to-wearing-a-wig/>.

South Korean idol engagement with Blackface isn't restricted to just cosplay either. Sometimes, performances are built around the practice of Blackface. Founder of one of the largest three entertainment production companies in South Korea, 박진영 (stage name JYP, J. Y. Park, or The Asiansoul) performed his song 그녀는 예뻤다 (translated as “She Was Pretty”) with dozens of backup dancers all dressed in Blackface (MBCkpop, 2012). Though the performance was done in 1997, the video we re-uploaded to MBC's YouTube channel in 2012. Significant backlash occurred for the lack of authenticity in regards to Blackness and the lack of inclusion of actual Black people in the performance. However, no apology was made either by JYP or MBC.

Figure 3.14

박진영 (stage name JYP)'s Performance of 그녀는 예뻤다 (translated as “She Was Pretty”)



Note. From “JYPark - She was pretty, 박진영 - 그녀는 예뻤다, MBC Top Music 19970614 [Video],” by MBCkpop, 2012. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2MR8G5QbkI>.

마마무 (romanized as MAMAMOO), a K-Pop girl group formed by RBW (formerly known as WA Entertainment), also had a performance which included Blackface. However, instead of backup dancers, the members of MAMAMOO themselves donned Blackface in an attempt to emulate Bruno Mars and his colleagues

his music video, “Uptown Funk” (Herman, 2017). The performance was first made as a video and played at one of their concerts. MAMAMOO received considerable backlash for their portrayal of Blackface and promptly made a public apology. Unlike prior apologies, MAMAMOO explicitly mentioned their use of Blackface and apologized, claiming that they will continue to learn more about this and other issues that are relevant to the international community.

Figure 3.15

마마무 (*romanized as MAMAMOO*) Performing Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk”



Note. From “MAMAMOO did blackface at a concert and there’s not much more to say, really,” by IATFB, 2017. Asian Junkie. <http://www.asianjunkie.com/2017/03/03/mamamoo-did-blackface-at-a-concert-and-theres-not-much-more-to-say-really/>.

Outside of performances that are meant to channel Blackness, South Korean idols have also been known to perpetuate Blackface on their own personal time. 王嘉爾 (stage name Jackson), a member of JYP’s 갓세븐 (*romanized as GOT7*) boy group, has engaged with Blackface at least twice in his career (Koreaboo, 2017a). A fan edited photo of Jackson with darker skin was shared with him, after which he reposted it to his own social media page on Instagram. Due to much commentary from his fans, Jackson removed the photo and apologized for sharing it (Jinyoung's

Ears, 2019). In another instance, Jackson was once again caught in a controversy regarding Blackface. For the Oksusu ad commercial, Jackson appeared in black full-body paint. Once again, Jackson faced accusations of engaging in Blackface.

Figure 3.16

王嘉爾 (stage name Jackson) of GOT7 (romanized as GOT7) Sharing Blackface on Instagram



Note. From “GOT7’s Jackson outs himself as ignorant bigot, calls fans “haters”,” by Koreaboo, 2017, June 10. <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/got7s-jackson-outs-ignorant-bigot-calls-fans-haters/>.

Figure 3. 17

王嘉爾 (stage name Jackson) of 갓세븐 (romanized as GOT7) In Oksusu Commercial with Black Body Paint



Note. From “[VID] 160128 #GOT7 #Jackson [SK 브로드밴드] sk 옥수수 론칭 (Oksusu) CF http://youtu.be/BFw51uedoZs [Image attached] [Tweet],” by JJ Project GOT7 [@JanDJ_Thailand], 2016, January 27. https://twitter.com/JandJ_Thailand/status/692565675550834688.

Aside from Jackson, there is also another Blackface incident surround 이기광 (stage name Gikwang or Kikwang) from the boy group 하이라이트 (romanized as Highlight) of Around Us Entertainment (formerly known as 비스트 [romanized as BEAST] of Cube Entertainment). As part of a SNL Korea skit, Kikwang dressed himself up in Blackface; he painted his skin a dark brown, leaving ample space around the lips to imitate larger lips, while also wearing large hoop earrings and a wig of tight black curls (Guest, 2012b). On top of his attire and face paint, Kikwang also ate watermelon while in costume, tapping into the watermelon-eating stereotype of Black Americans.

Figure 3.18

이기광 (stage name Kikwang) of 하이라이트 (romanized as Highlight) Performing Blackface on SNL Korea



Note. From “Blackface is still racist and wrong. Yes, even in Korea,” by Janine, 2012, July 12. Seoul Beats. <https://seoulbeats.com/2017/07/blackface-is-still-racist-and-wrong-yes-even-in-korea/>.

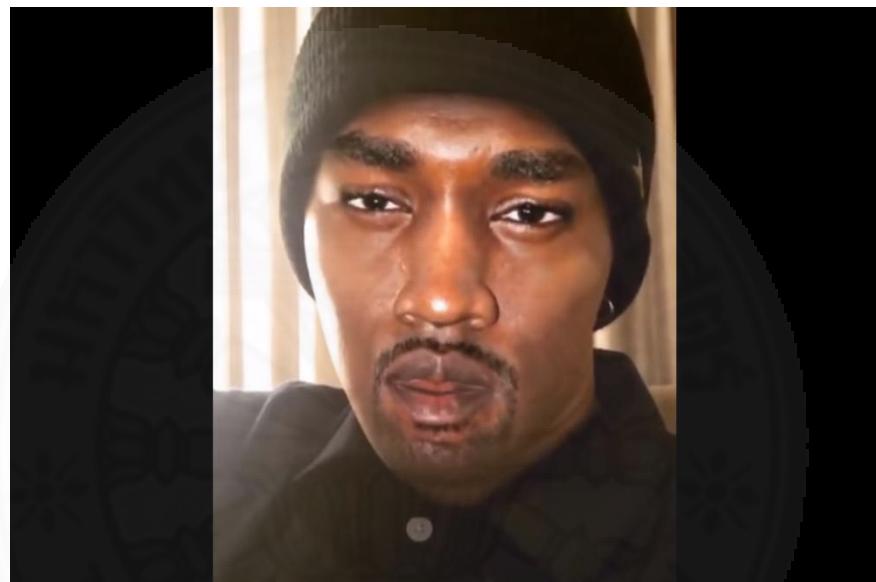
For those that may not connect the exaggerate large lips to minstrelsy of Black people, Stardom Entertainment’s 우지호 (stage name Zico) from the boy group 블락비 (romanized as Block B) helps to clarify any doubt. In Block B’s song titled “LOL,” Zico raps the following line: “I’m full of Black soul; look at my lower lip” (minji15, 2012). It becomes apparent that from their perception, larger lips are associated with Black people and Blackness.

Furthermore, 동영배 (stage name Taeyang) of YG Entertainment’s 빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG), too has been caught in Blackface. BIGBANG is one of the most popular boy groups to have come out of South Korea’s K-Pop industry and are renowned for their inclusion of several hip hop and rap elements in their productions. In 2016, Taeyang recorded a short video of himself with a face filter application. The application overlaid Kanye West’s face atop Taeyang’s own face. Taeyang is then recorded to say “Happy Monkey New Year” in an unidentified accent, followed by repeated screams (inheavenhomin, 2016). Though he did not physically paint his skin black in the manner that other idols and celebrities have, he

still donned the appearance of a Black person in order to make a statement. Because of international backlash calling Taeyang racist, the idol released an apology statement after deleting the video from his social media platforms (Edwards, 2016).

Figure 3.19

동영(Stage name Taeyang) of BIGBANG With Kanye West's Face Transposed atop His Own



Note. From “Big Bang Taeyang is racist [Video],” by Inheavenhomin. 2016, February 8. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyXMu03GZws>.

YG Entertainment’s BIGBANG, though, is no stranger to the controversies of Blackface. BIGBANG’s leader, 권지용 (stage name G-Dragon) has been caught in Blackface a number of times as well. In 2011, G-Dragon did a photoshoot for Vogue Korea in which he made a tribute to a Black American musician and actor, Andre 3000 (ygentsalahgaul, 2011). In the photographs, G-Dragon is clearly seen to darken his skin with make-up in order to portray Andre 3000, a clear practice of Blackface. No public apology or statement was made in this case.

In 2013, G-Dragon posted an image of himself to this social media Instagram account, wherein he painted his face black (Hogan, 2013b). The controversy around the imagery included the fact that his presentation of blackface

greatly resembled the movement that was started a year before around the shooting of Trayvon Martin, a Black youth, in the United States by a white police officer (Maloney, 2012). Though no apology was issued, a spokesperson representing G-Dragon claimed that it was a simple use of face paint and has no relation to any racial or political statement (Hogan, 2013a). However, this was not the only instance of Blackface that G-Dragon engaged with in that year. Later in the very same year, G-Dragon released a song and music video titled “Coup D'état” in which he once again makes an appearance in full-body black paint (Bigbang, 2013). No public statement or apology was made for this incident either.

Figure 3.20

권지용 (stage name G-Dragon) of BIGBANG Dressed as Andre 3000 for Vogue Korea



Note. From “Iconic Big Bang (Vogue),” by Ygentalsalahgaul, 2011, June 15. Blog at Wordpress. <https://ygentalsalahgaul.wordpress.com/2011/06/15/iconic-big-bang-vogue/>.

Figure 3.21

권지용 (stage name G-Dragon) of 빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG) Performed Blackface on Instagram



Note. From “X [Photograph]” by 權志龍 (@xxibgdrgn). 2013, July 30. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/cZKVD7NgPc/>.

Figure 3.22

권지용 (stage name G-Dragon) of 빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG) in “Coup D'état” Music Video



Note. From “Why G-Dragon is problematic,” by Blackinasia, 2013, September 4. Tumblr.
<https://owning-my-truth.tumblr.com/post/60288959237/why-g-dragon-is-problematic>.

The list of Blackface instances in South Korean popular media listed above is not anywhere near exhaustive. In fact, Blackface has been noted by both domestic and international fans to be a common practice within South Korean popular media.

3.2 South Korean impersonations of blackness

Beyond blatant displays of Blackface, other forms of Black racist archetypes are perpetuated throughout South Korean media as well. For example, impersonations of Black personas are also an occurrence that helps to fuel misunderstandings regarding Black peoples and communities by perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

From SM Entertainment's girl group, 레드벨벳 (romanized as Red Velvet), 손승완 (stage name Wendy) was caught doing an impression of Black women while on a talk show called *Talk Mon* (SBS PopAsia HQ, 2018). When asked about what American English is like, Wendy, who was raised in Canada and the United States, performed two variations of American English: white women and Black women. When impersonating Black women, Wendy pursed her lips, wagged her finger, and rolled her neck, perpetuating an all-too-common stereotype of Black women as “sassy” and “attitude-y” (Olive, 2018). Wendy also regurgitated a series of sentences that incorporated the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or African American Language (AAL) in an attempt to mimic Black women (Russell, 2018). The other members of the talk show, the hosts, and the audience all laughed and applauded Wendy’s performance. However, there was significant international criticism for this impersonation, placing emphasis on how many had expected that she should have known better based on her Canadian and American background.

Figure 3.23

손승완 (stage name Wendy) of 레드벨벳 (romanized as Red Velvet) Performing Black Impersonation



Note. From “K-pop band member gets flak for ‘racist’ imitation,” 2018, March 7. *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/k-pop-band-member-gets-flak-for-racist-imitation>.

Starship Entertainment’s boy group 몬스타엑스 (romanized as MONSTA X) also faced similar backlash when its member, 이주현 (stage name Jooheon) did his impersonation of Black men during a talk show interview. On the show *Radio Star*, Jooheon changed his demeanor in order to show the other talk show members what “Black man style English” sounded like (MBCentertainment, 2015). He utilizes AAVE or AAL in order to portray what he states is “Black man style English.” However, he supplements his language performance with his change in demeanor; he nods at the hosts, waves his jacket, furrows his brows, and licks his lips while addressing the hosts of the show, attempting to emulate what he believes is the behavior of Black men. During this exchange, the screen is split between Jooheon’s performance and a video clip of a Black man wearing a du rag. This performance, like Wendy’s, is met with laughter and applause from the hosts and audience.

Figure 3.24

이주현 (stage name Jooheon) of 몬스타엑스 (romanized as MONSTA X) Performing Black Impersonation



Note. From “[Radio Star] 라디오스타 - Joohun showed black man style english 흑인이 되고 싶던 주현, ‘흑인 st 영어’ 20150722 [Video].” By MBCentertainment, 2015, July 22. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clggiNB1CQ4&feature=youtu.be>.

Zico of Stardom Entertainment’s Block B has also stated that it is his hobby to mimic the way Black American men speak English (belacqua, 2014). In Block B’s own reality television show, *개판 오분전* (*5 Minutes Before Chaos*), the members discuss how Zico is an expert on speaking Black English, to which Zico responds by performing what he believes to be an impersonation of Black American English (Jun, 2014).

Though these performances are quite brief, their very existence does indicate a deep and profound misunderstanding of Black peoples, Black communities, and Black experiences. However, short impersonations are not the extent of these performances. 트루디 (stage name Truedy) of Stone Music Entertainment is a solo artist who has built her entire career on impersonating or emulating Black culture and Black peoples. Truedy first gained recognition on the rap contest television show called *언프리티 랩스타* (*Unpretty Rapstar*). She had her hair in cornrows and permed the ends in order to give them tight curls, hairstyles often associated with Black culture

and Black peoples. Her lyrics in the competition included discussion of “the first Black people” as well as other narratives common to Black experiences (Guest, 2016). On top of all this, she even stated that 윤미래 (stage name Yoon Mi Rae), who is half-Black American and half-Korean, is her idol and role model.

Truedy’s performance both on and off stage led to a widespread belief that Truedy was of mixed-race background, specifically half Black and half Korean. However, high school graduation photos of Truedy surfaced, shocking the world and confirming that, in fact, Truedy was 100% Korean (Koreaboo, 2015). The nature of this impersonation was not accidental as Truedy has publicly claimed that she attempts to emulate Yoon Mi Rae and does so by performing what she believes is “Black” or “hip hop style” (“How Truedy Killed,” 2017). Due to the extent of this impersonation, some conversations have begun to question whether or not Truedy’s performance is considered an act of cultural appropriation.

Figure 3.25

트루디 (stage name Truedy) at 언프리티 랩스타 (romanized as Unpretty Rapstar)

Compared to Her Graduation Photo [Screenshot]



Note. “‘Unpretty rapstar 2’ truedy graduation photo catch netizens by surprise,” by Koreaboo, 2015, October 17. <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/unpretty-rapstar-2-truedy-graduation-photos-catch-netizens-by-surprise/>.

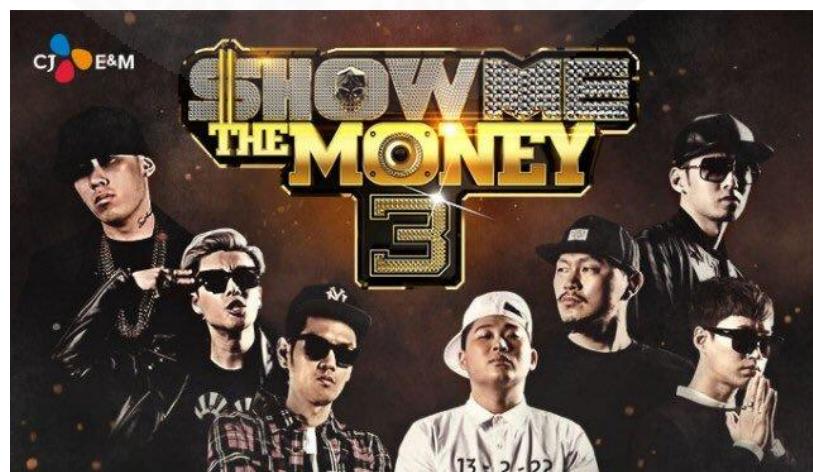
3.3 South Korean cultural appropriation of blackness

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of cultural practices or behaviors from another culture. However, the context for cultural appropriation assumes that the adoption of practice or behavior is done incorrectly. There are various ways for culture to be adopted incorrectly, but the one that will be addressed in this study focuses on how the taking of culture is done so without consideration of social, cultural, or political histories. Cultural appropriation, then, is intrinsically tied to cultural insensitivity or cultural incompetency.

Truedy's rap persona is built upon what she understands as "Black" or "hip hop style," drawing inspiration from Yoon Mi Rae's persona and performance. As someone who is of South Korean descent with no Black lineage, Truedy is adopting practices and behaviors from Black culture in order to succeed in the entertainment industry. The case of cultural appropriation by Truedy is not unique in the South Korean entertainment industry as many idols have adopted Black culture as a tool for building their success. Contestants of *Unpretty Rapstar* and its male-focused counterpart, *쇼미더머니* (*Show Me the Money*), can be easily noted to borrow much of their style from Black culture.

Figure 3.26

쇼미더머니 (romanized as *Show Me the Money*) Promotion Flyer



Note. From "Thread: Cypher part 1 [Image attached] [Tweet]," by hopekidoki [@hopekidoki], 2018, April 1. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/hopekidoki/status/980168599670177792>.

Figure 3.27

언프리티 랩스타 (*romanized as Unpretty Rapstar*) Promotion Flyer



Note. From “Unpretty rapstar season 1 episode 2,” n.d. K Show 123. <http://kshow123.net/show/unpretty-rapstar-season-1/episode-2.html>.

Aside from contestants of these two competition-shows, several established artists have also taken to appropriated Black culture in order to promote their art and brand. 신동근 (stage name Peniel) is a Korean rapper who comes from Cube Entertainment’s boy group 비투비 (BtoB). As a Korean-American rapper, he already engages in one of the most well-known Black cultural practices: rap. However, alongside his practice of rap, Peniel also dresses himself in hip hop or urban fashion of Black inner-city youth. This presentation can be noted in his music video titled “_Flip” featuring Beenzino (1theK, 2019).

Figure 3.28

신동근 (stage name Peniel) of 비투비 (*romanized as BtoB*) In “_Flip”



Note. From “BTOB’s Peniel is ready to ‘flip’ with Beenzino in MV teaser,” by T. Luu, 2019, August 26. All Access Asia. <http://allaccessasia.com.au/btobs-peniel-is-ready-to-flip-with-beenzino-in-mv-teaser/>.

Peniel is not the only artist to engage in this sort of adoption of Black culture. 김지원 (stage name Bobby) is a rapper for YG Entertainment's boy group, 아이콘 (romanized as iKon). Not only does Bobby say that he was inspired to rap by American rappers, but that he actively studies their style in order to take what he likes for himself (Nikki, 2015b). Though Bobby was born in South Korea to South Korean parents, like Peniel, he spent a number of years living and growing up in the United States of America. His emulation of style was so precise that even Cory Townes, writer for *Ebony* magazine, stated that he was shocked by how precisely American hip hop had been replicated in South Korea entertainment media.

Figure 3.29

김지원 (stage name Bobby) of 아이콘 (romanized as iKon)



Note. From “iKON – Bobby,” by Nikki, 2015. Cultural Appropriation in Korean Hip Hop. <http://khiphopappropriation.blogspot.com/2015/12/ikon-bobby.html>.

Another artist from YG Entertainment, 이채린 (stage name CL) is a rapper from the group 투애니원 (romanized as 2NE1). Since 2NE1 disbanded in 2016, CL has been working as a solo artist under the same management label. She too has built her fame off of being able to adopt Black culture into her performances (Nikki, 2015a). For example, in her music video titled 나쁜 기집애 (“The Baddest Female”), CL wears gold grills, large hoop earrings, and gold chains, as is common in Black hip hop culture (2NE1, 2013). In another outfit within the same music video, CL also dons a bandana over a flannel with only the top button done, fake tattoos covering both her

arms. In this scene, she is surrounded by other dancers who also sport snapback caps and several bandanas, a style that is often identified with Black gang culture.

Figure 3.30

이채린 (stage name CL) in 나쁜 거잖아 (romanized as “The Baddest Female”)



Note. From “2NE1 – CL,” by Nikki, 2015. Cultural Appropriation in Korea Hip Hop.
<http://khiphopappropriation.blogspot.com/2015/12/2ne1-cl.html>.

Figure 3.31

이채린 (stage name CL) in 나쁜 거잖아 (romanized as “The Baddest Female”)



Note. From “2NE1 – CL,” by Nikki, 2015. Cultural Appropriation in Korea Hip Hop.
<http://khiphopappropriation.blogspot.com/2015/12/2ne1-cl.html>.

Once again from YG Entertainment, the boy group BIGBANG has also been infamous for appropriating Black culture in their productions. For example, their performance of the song titled “Bad Boy” on the televised music show called 인기가요

(romanized as *Inkigayo*) had them dressed in mostly red with sparse sprinklings of white, donning chains, beanies, and bandanas (Bigbang, 2012a). Their style was so reminiscent of Black culture that the performance video was featured on the video streaming site World Star Hip Hop, a site that catered primarily to Black urban youth (Guest, 2012a). There, they were jokingly referred to as the “Korean Bloods Gang,” referencing the Bloods gang of primarily Black urban youth in Los Angeles, California.

Figure 3.32

빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG) Performing “Bad Boy” on *인기자랑* (romanized as *Inkigayo*)



Note. From “Big Bang’s Toughest Critics: World Star Hip Hop” by Guest, 2012. SeoulBeats. <https://seoulbeats.com/2012/05/big-bangs-toughest-critics-world-star-hip-hop/>.

Looking specifically at their leader, G-Dragon, one can identify ample instances of cultural appropriation. For example, in his music video titled “One of a Kind,” G-Dragon sports yellow-blond braids and cornrows (Bigbang, 2012b). He once again emulates hip hop style by wearing various bandanas, snapback caps, large chains, etc. Interestingly, the music video also features a number of young Black children in various scenes. Sometimes they are seen sitting on a couch, sometimes they are dancing, and sometimes they are standing in front of a police lineup. The specific use of Black children as mere props for his music video can also be an argument of cultural appropriation.

Figure 3.33

권지용 (stage name G-Dragon) of 빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG) in “One of a Kind”



Note. From “One of a kind,” by Sycrah, n.d. Fanpop. <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/gd/images/31976244/title/one-kind-photo>.

G-Dragon, though, is not the only member of BIGBANG to be guilty of appropriating Black culture; Taeyang is also infamous for this sort of behavior. Taeyang has worn cornrows and Black braids multiple times throughout his career. He also dresses himself in a fashion style that is reminiscent of Black urban culture: baggy pants, bandanas, large chains, snapback caps, etc.

Figure 3.34

동영(태양) (stage name Taeyang) of 빅뱅 (romanized as BIGBANG) Photoshoot



Note. (2017). From “Timeline of Bigbang Taeyang’s hair throughout his career,” by Koreaboo, 2017, January 7. <https://www.koreaboo.com/stories/timeline-bigbang-taeyangs-hair-throughout-career/>.

From this example, cultural appropriation is seen as more than just clothing and style, but can also extend to things such as hair. Black hair and Asian hair do not share the same texture. In fact, Black hair fashion, such as cornrows, dreadlocks, and certain braids, evolved as a practice to deal specifically with the texture of Black hair. The use of them on Asian hair is not only damaging to the natural textures of Asian hair, but also appropriative of Black cultures. However, this doesn't seem to be a deterrent for the all-too-common appropriation of Black hair in Korean entertainment.

Aside from YG Entertainment, the other two major management companies also house artists who have utilized Black hairstyles in their careers. SM Entertainment's EXO 김종인 (stage name Kai) wore dreadlocks for a period of time. Similar to other Black hairstyles, dreadlocks are best utilized with hair textures that are not straight; because Asian, and more specifically Korean, hair is largely straight, the texture does not naturally lend itself to the making of dreadlocks. Therefore, the use of dreadlocks for Kai's presentation is a culturally appropriative practice. The significant difference in texture can be noted when comparing the shorter hair beneath the dreadlocks, which retain their straight texture and are too short to be included into the dreadlocks.

Figure 3.35

김종인 (stage name Kai) of 엑소 (romanized as EXO) Wearing Dreadlocks



Note. From “Korean can’t wear dreadlocks? EXO’s Kai accused of ‘cultural appropriation’,” by P. Resnikoff, 2017, July 11. Digital Music News. <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2017/07/11/exo-kai-dreads-cultural-appropriation/>.

Also from SM Entertainment, 엔시티 (romanized as NCT)'s 董思成 (stage name Winwin) is a Chinese member who also wore his hair in dreadlocks. These practices of utilizing Black hairstyles on Korean idols have faced much controversy, with some identifying it as a practice of cultural appropriation while others defend it as a style that cannot be owned by any one group of people. In fact, some fans even go as far to say that since previous South Korean idols, such as G-Dragon and Taeyang, have utilized similar hairstyles before, there is no problem with newer South Korean idols adopting the same practice (Resnikoff, 2017). Some of these fans also argue that if not all South Korean idols are equally berated for their use of dreadlocks, then no South Korean idols should face such condemnation.

Figure 3.36

董思成 (stage name Winwin) of 엔시티 (romanized as NCT) Wearing Dreadlocks and Black Braids



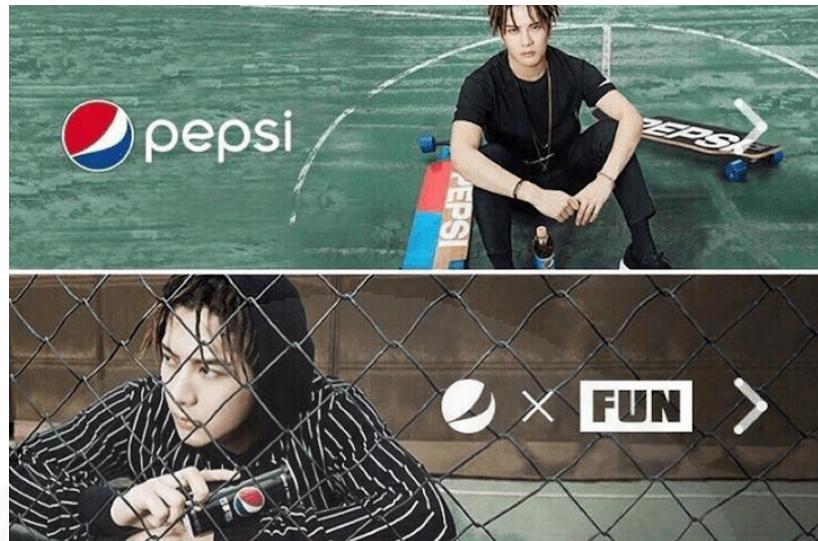
Note. From Winwin [NCT] [Photograph], by Snob Mushroom, 2017. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/151115443@N05/34164158013>.

The arguments that were used to defend both Kai and Winwin were the same ones to defend Jackson of JYP Entertainment's boy group GOT7. Jackson was featured in a Pepsi commercial wherein he wears dreadlocks. When faced with criticism from fans about cultural appropriation, Jackson defends himself and says that he isn't the first and only one to wear dreadlocks; therefore, those who assume that he doesn't respect Black culture and Black peoples are simply wrong (Koreaboo, 2017a). To him, the practice of wearing dreadlocks is a way of showing his love and appreciation for Black culture.

Figure 3.37

王嘉爾 (stage name Jackson) of 갓세븐 (romanized as GOT7) in Pepsi Commercial



Note. From “GOT7’s Jackson outs himself as ignorant bigot, calls fans “haters”,” by Koreaboo, 2017, June 10. <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/got7s-jackson-outs-ignorant-bigot-calls-fans-haters/>.

Another JYP Entertainment group, 스트레이 키즈 (romanized Stray Kids) had one of their members, 방찬 (stage name Bangchan), sporting dreadlocks as well. The appropriation of the Black hairstyle led to a controversy within the fanbase. Some fans defended him saying that he had no choice in the matter and that the management should be to blame (JazmineK, 2019b); however, other fans, particularly Black fans, demanded an apology from Bangchan for the blatant appropriation of Black culture ("Stray Kids Bangchan," 2019). Either way, both camps acknowledge that this behavior is not a unique occurrence within the South Korean music industry.

Figure 3.38

방찬 (stage name Bangchan) of *스트레이 키즈* (romanized as *Stray Kids*) Wearing Black Braids



Note. From “The Ignorance of a Hairstyle” by Amely Koenig, 2019, August 26.

AmelysWebsite. <https://amelyswebsite.home.blog/2019/08/26/the-ignorance-of-a-hairstyle/>.

Aside from the big three management companies of the K-Pop industry, many smaller management companies have been caught engaging with the same appropriation of Black hair. For example, 김효정 (stage name Hyolyn or Hyorin) wore her hair in braids for her debut as a rapper in the album *Dark Panda*, alongside two other rappers, Paloalto and Zico ("Hyolyn & Zico," 2015). Zico of Stardom Entertainment's boy group Block B wore braids two years later as well. 박재범 (stage name Jay Park), a Korean-American rapper and founder of the management company AOMG, also wore Black braids, along with sporting other styles that are derived from Black hip hop culture. When challenged about his use of cultural appropriation, Jay Park has responded by stating that his engagement with Black culture is one of cultural exchange and appreciation, not appropriation (Idris, 2019).

Figure 3.39

김효진 (stage name Hyolyn) in Dark Panda Promotional Material



Note. From “[HQ] Sistar Hyorin for dark panda [Photograph],” by Kpop HQ Pictures, 2015, August 26. <https://kpophqpictures.co.vu/post/127608625101/hq-sistar-hyorin-for-dark-panda-1470x2000>.

Figure 3.40

우지호 (stage name Zico) of 블락비 (romanized as Block B) Wearing Dreadlocks



Note. From “Zico from Block B wearing braids [Tweet],” by ProblematicKpop [@KpopProblematic], 2017, June 13. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/kpopproblematic/status/874596354953166848?lang=en>.

Figure 3.41

박재범 (stage name Jay Park) Wearing Dreadlocks



Note. From “Please pray for Jay Park nothing wrong with him he just need to get rid of those braids [Tweet]” by [@houduh], 2015, April 5. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/houdahell/status/584468847782166528>.

Of these K-Pop idols, most have ignored the criticisms and few have apologized. However, there is one exception that can be noted. 김남준 (stage name RM) of 방탄소년단 (romanized as BTS) from Big Hit Entertainment began his rap career engaging in behavior that is similar to other K-Pop idols, specifically appropriating Black culture. This included wearing his hair in dreadlocks, utilized language that was derived from AAVE or AAL, and dressing in a style that was associated with Black urban youth. In beginning of his career with BTS, he even performed his own impersonation of what he believes Black American English to sound like on a radio show (dheslovesbts, 2013). His use of Black culture even led some fans to question whether or not RM was of mixed Black heritage ("Is Kim Namjoon," n.d.).

However, upon learning more about cultural appropriation through the criticisms of fans, RM spent some time in the United States to learn more about what Black culture, particularly hip hop, was about and how it came to be. In interviews since, RM has stated that the way he started off was a mistake. He does not

intend to cover up his past, but hopes to learn from it in order to respect Black culture and Black peoples in his engagement with hip hop and rap (Moni, 2017). This response, though, is a unique case in regards to cultural appropriation amongst K-Pop idols; it is an exception rather than a standard.

Figure 3.42

김남준 (stage name RM) of 방탄소년단 (romanized as BTS) Wearing Dreadlocks



Note. From “But Namjoon said ...,” by Moni, 2017, March 17. Amino.

https://aminoapps.com/c/btsarmy/page/blog/but-namjoon-said/Rr4R_Wr3Iwu1lqwk2R0rp760kbD0xQ3ZeoL.

As had been mentioned a few times already, cultural appropriation can also be the way language is used. AAVE or AAL is a specific dialect or language that stems from English and operates on its own set of rules and guidelines. Though Standard English speakers may assume they understand how AAVE or AAL operates, they often misuse it in their attempts to appropriate it. Along with fashion and

hairstyle, AAVE or AAL is also another commonly appropriated element of Black culture within South Korean entertainment.

One particular aspect of AAVE or AAL that often gets misunderstood is the reclamation of language. For example, the term “nigger” was utilized as a slur to denigrate Black slaves in the early years of the United States of America. The term continues to be a racial slur; however, Black Americans have begun to reclaim the term for their own usage. The reclamation of language allows for the power of language to be returned to those most impacted by harmful language. However, this nuanced understanding is loss on many, including those within the South Korean entertainment industry, giving birth to arguments that ask, “If they can use it, why can’t I?”

From SM Entertainment, 신화 (romanized as Shinhwa) wrote a song in their early career titled *T.O.P. (Twinkling of Paradise)* which contained the racial slur:

What you gonna do, what I gotta do, this is how we do, you niggas better know, do you wanna see the light, or stand alone, in the midst of flippin' side, puttin' it down, wild comin' through your town.” ("Shinhwa (신화)," n.d.)

平井もも (stage name Momo) of JYP Entertainment’s 트와이스 (romanized as Twice) was identified to have used the racial slur in her cover performance of Tinashe’s song titled “2 On” (Tinashe, 2014). Tinashe is a Black American singer and songwriter and used the racial slur in her song in line with the practice of language reclamation. However, Momo, as a Japanese performer in South Korea, does not have the ability to reclaim the term as she is not Black herself. Although the original song reclaims the racial slur in its usage, Momo’s reutterance of it loses that context and implements the term as simply a racial slur (KevSundry, 2015). This was not loss on fans as many came to criticize her rendition of *2 On* as appropriative and racist ([@b0vvsa], 2017).

Also from JYP Entertainment, GOT7’s กันต์พิมุกต์ ภูวุฒิ (stage name BamBam) was caught in controversy when videos were published on the internet, showing that he had said the same racial slur at a private event (elliefilet, 2016).

Another instance occurred three years later on V Live; as the members of GOT7 celebrate of their birthdays, BamBam is speculated to have said something to the racial slur (JazmineK, 2019a). The controversy has seen fans both defend and criticized BamBam. Some argue that he didn't learn from the first incident while others argue that what he said was a Korean word that sounded similar. After the first incident, BamBam released an unofficial apology stating that he will do better upon his return to South Korea, whereas the second incident found BamBam defending himself and asking for people to respect him.

Another instance of the racial slur being utilized in Korean entertainment media can be seen in Banana Culture Entertainment's girl group 이엑스아이디 (romanized as EXID) appeared on a television show titled *The GuruPop Show*. One of EXID's members, 안효진 (stage name LE) responded to a question and quickly impersonated a Black accent while blurting out the racial slur (Gurupop, 2012). There was mild laughter before one of the hosts stood up to apologize for the use of the slur. The host explained that South Koreans don't really engage with the term often and are therefore unaware of its harmful context and apologized to international viewers for the mishap.

Stardom Entertainment's Zico from boy group Block B has also incorporated the use of the racial slur in his music. In his song titled "I'm Still Fly," Zico raps the following line:

I'm still fly, I'm sky high and I dare anybody to try and cut my wings. I'm still pullin' out the phantom and these haters can't stand him nigga. I'm still doin' my thing, I'm still fly, I'm sky high and I dare anybody to try and cut my wings. I'm still shuttin' cities down every time I come around. Nigga, I'm still doin' my thing. (Procrastinating Perfectionist, 2012)

Aside from his blatant and repeated use of the racial slur in his music, Zico also utilizes a number of other linguistic traits that are common in AAVE or AAL. For example, the dropping of the "g" at the end of words that have the suffix "-ing" is a common practice in AAVE or AAL. Zico's appropriation isn't just of a racial slur but also of linguistic patterns. This, once again, is not unique or rare in the South Korean entertainment industry.

YG Entertainment's iKON is also guilty of this practice of appropriation. This can be seen in their song titled 리듬 타 (romanized as "Rhythm Ta"). In this song, they repeatedly sing the line, "We gon' get it poppin'" (iKON, 2015). In Standard English, the same line would be sung as "We are going to get it popping." The dropping of words, such as "are" and "to", as well as the dropping of suffixes are all traits that are inherent to AAVE or AAL. Furthermore, they use the term "poppin'" which only has meaning when understood from the perspective of AAVE or AAL. The same lyrics, when sung in Standard English, does not carry the same meaning.

There are a number of terms that are coined within AAVE or AAL, "poppin'" included. Often time, their use outside of those specific contexts significantly alters the meaning. Aside from the previous example of "Rhythm Ta," this can also be seen in the songs of YG Entertainment's CL. For example, in her song titled "Lifted," CL repeated says "gettin' lifted" (Ticia, 2016). Similar to Zico and other Korean rappers, CL drops the end of the suffix "-ing." She also uses the term "lifted," which has different meanings in Standard English versus AAVE or AAL. The appropriation of AAVE or AAL as a language, rather than just as terms alone, allows these South Korean artists to carry meaning from AAVE or AAL into their artform.

As said before, some have made the argument that intention is crucial to understanding whether or not an act can be considered appropriation. However, YG Entertainment's girl group 블랙핑크 (romanized as BLACKPINK) proves that intention may not necessarily be as important as some argue they ought to be. BLACKPINK's two female rappers, ลิซ่า มโนบาล (stage name Lisa) and 김제니 (stage name Jennie) stated in an interview with Billboard that they intentionally studied Black American artists in order to develop their rap (Dinh, 2019). They both expected there to be significant pressure on them in regards to cultural appropriation, but ultimately decided to pursue it regardless of any expected criticisms.

3.4 Colorism in South Korean popular media

In South Korean beauty standards, the demand for paleness or whiteness is paramount. This can be most visibly noted in the South Korean entertainment

industry through the interactions that idol members and groups have with one another. The following section discusses how members of groups discuss, compare, and contrast skin tones amongst themselves.

From EXO of SM Entertainment, 김종인 (stage name Kai) is often teased for his “dark” skin. He has been compared to the color of coffee and has been teasingly asked if he is interested in skin bleaching. When drawing him, other members of EXO often color in his skin to make it appear black as well (“Suho Makes Fun,” 2017). However, another member of EXO, 김준면 (stage name Suho) is often praised for the “milky white” complexion of his skin (Koreaboo Staff, 2016).

Figure 3.43

Members of 엑소 (romanized as EXO) draw 김종인 (stage name Kai)



Note. From “Suho makes fun of Kai’s skin. Fans aren’t happy,” 2017. Kpop Viral.

<https://blog.kpopviral.com/post/163639467621/suho-makes-fun-of-kais-skin-fans-arent-happy>.

Figure 3.44

Left to Right: 김종인 (stage name Kai) and 김준현 (stage name Suho) of 엑소 (romanized as EXO)



Note. From Pinterest. (2017). <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/807059195694076811/?nic=1>.

Also from SM Entertainment, 엔시티 (romanized as NCT) also has members that are often compared due to their difference in skin tones. 정윤오 (stage name Jaehyun) is praised for his fair skin and has even been nicknamed “Whitie” by another member of NCT due to his pale skin tone. This feature alone led to several compliments about his skin, complexion, and sex appeal (NCT, 2016). Some fans even refer to him as “Casper” due to his pale complexion (Byeol Korea, 2019). This is contrasted with 이동혁 (stage name Haechan) who is often noted for his “dark” or tan complexion. This is something that has been acknowledged by Haechan himself; although, he proclaimed that he is proud of his skin tone because it is unique in comparison to that of other members (Daily Haechan Pics {Rest}, 2019).

Figure 3.45

정윤우 (stage name Jaehyun) of 엔시티 (romanized as NCT) on NCT on Air Show



Note. From “NCT U: Jaehyun’s profile and fact (new) by Laili Amalia Puteri, 2016, April 14. Kias Kreasi. http://kiaskreasi.blogspot.com/2016/04/nct-u-jaehyuns-profil-and-fact-new_14.html

Figure 3.46

Left to Right: 이동혁 (stage name Haechan) and 정윤우 (stage name Jaehyun) of 엔시티 (romanized as NCT)



Note. From “Jaehyun and Haechan 06102016 ivy club update JaeHyuck [Tweet],” by Ms. Hyungwoniverse [@szayel8], 2016, October 6. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/szayel8/status/784041308973178880>.

신호석 (stage name Wonho) from Starship Entertainment's 몬스타엑스 (romanized as MONSTAX) has also been praised on several occasions for his pale skin tone (Lia, 2019). Whereas comments surrounding his bandmate 손현우 (stage name Shownu) often revolve around his darker, tan complexion (Cha, 2018). In fact, fans even compare the two idols to see whose skin tone has greater appeal (Showril, 2017). It's no secret that the other members of MONSTA X often tease the two for the shade of their skin (Mxhypogirl, 2018). Aside from these two, however, MONSTAX members 채형원 (stage name Hyungwon) and 유기현 (stage name Kihyun) are also noted to have light complexions (Aishthetics, 2018c; Koreaboo, 2016).

Figure 3.47

Left to Right: 채형원 (stage name Hyungwon), 유기현 (stage name Kihyun), 신호석 (stage name Wonho), 이민혁 (stage name Minhyuk), 임창균 (stage name I.M.), 이주현 (stage name Jooheon), 손현우 (stage name Shownu) of 몬스타엑스 (romanized as MONSTA X)



Note. From “8 Hal yang Belum Kamu Tahu Tentang Monsta X,” by Dwinta, 2016, June 25.

Facetofoot. <https://www.facetofeet.com/lifestyle/11099/8-hal-yang-belum-kamu-tahu-tentang-monsta-x>.

MAMAMOO of RBW also compares its members based on their skin tone and utilizes it as a basis for teasing. 안혜진 (stage name Hwasa) is noted to be the most tan of the four members, even referring to herself as the “dark sister” (Those Videos Yo, 2015). Fans have noted that Hwasa has been the butt end of several jokes because of her skin tone (Coelacanth, 2018). Another member of MAMAMOO even

compared Hwasa to an image of a Black person with tight curls in their hair (Aishthetics, 2018b). On the other hand, MAMAMOO group leader, 김용선 (stage name Solar), is often praised for her pale and flawless complexion (lena_naval, 2016). Hwasa, in juxtaposition, is openly criticized for making any sort of appearance without applying makeup beforehand (JazmineK. 2019c).

Figure 3.48

Left to Right: 김용선 (stage name Solar) and 안하진 (stage name Hwasa) of 마마무 (romanized as MAMAMOO)



Note. From “[Fotos] 19.07.15 Solar e hwasa – fancafe [Tweet],” by MAMAMOO Brasil [@MMMOOBR], 2015, July 21. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/mmmmoobr/status/623278244771561473>.

Jellyfish Entertainment’s 빅스 (romanized as VIXX) has provided ample evidence of colorist rhetoric as well. 차학연 (stage name N) has repeatedly been teased about his skin color. The other members often compare him to dark colored things, such as black clothing, chocolate, black pigs, basalt rocks, etc. (Aishthetics, 2018d). He is told to not to be near certain colors as they make him look dark, such as yellow, or because he will not be seen, such as black. Whenever drawing images of N, the

members color the face black in order to tease him. The media too has a tendency to whitewash N's skin because of the Korean beauty standard that demands pale complexion in place of tan complexion. The extent to which commentary is made regarding N's darker skin tone has even led to an open letter being written by international fans, asking Jellyfish Entertainment to stop the incessant jokes regarding his skin ("Open Letter," 2015). Although N has stated repeatedly that he is insecure regarding his skin tone, he has recently worked towards becoming more proud of his complexion (Koreaboo, 2017b). This is a stark contrast to VIXX's 정택운 (stage name Leo), who is praised for how white and pale his skin is (Koreaboo, 2016).

Figure 3.49

차희연 (stage name N) of 빅스 (romanized as VIXX) Receives a Black-Faced Drawing of Himself



Note. From “VIXX Hongbin makes fun of N’s god-like sweet caramel skin with drawing. Fan’s aren’t happy,” by Kpop Viral, 2015, February 26. <https://www.kpopviral.com/vixx-hongbin-makes-fun-of-ns-god-like-sweet/>.

Figure 3.50

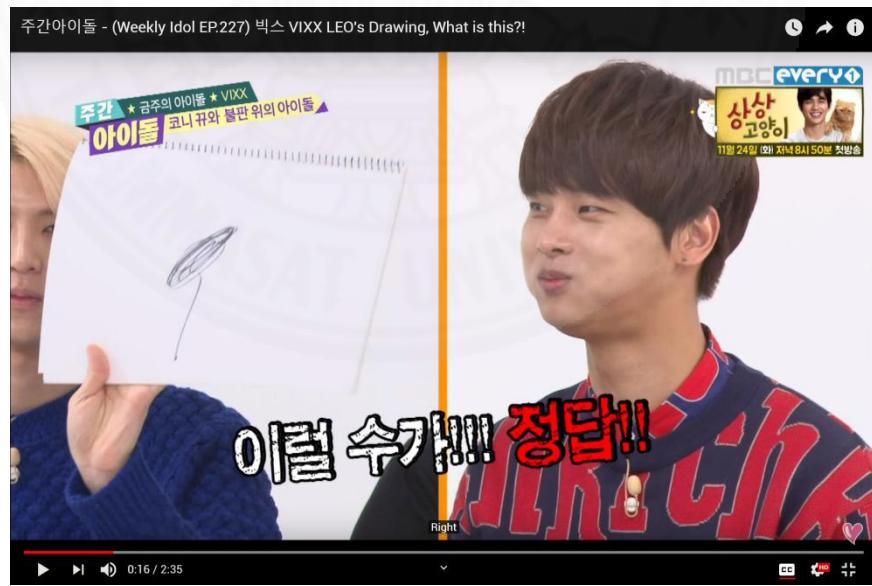
Members of 빅스(romanized as VIXX) Draw Each Other



Note. From “VIXX Hongbin makes fun of N’s god-like sweet caramel skin with drawing. Fan’s aren’t happy,” by Kpop Viral, 2015, February 26. <https://www.kpopviral.com/vixx-hongbin-makes-fun-of-ns-god-like-sweet/>.

Figure 3.51

정백운 (stage name Leo) of 빅스 (romanized as VIXX) Draws 차희연 (stage name N) of 빅스 (romanized as VIXX)



Note. From “[Weekly Idol].. [Video],” by All the K-Pop, 2015, December 2. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_Hlte0v6A4.

Figure 3.52

Photo of 차학연 (stage name N) of 빅스 (romanized as VIXX) After and Before Photo Edit



Note. Photograph from <https://freehobos.tumblr.com/post/117487291157/remember-that-famous-whitewashed-picture-of>.

Figure 3.53

Left to Right: 정택운 (stage name Leo) and 차학연 (stage name N) of 빅스 (romanized as VIXX)



Note. Photograph from <https://weheartit.com/entry/218332711>.

As a final example, the study turns to Big Hit Entertainment's BTS. 민윤기 (stage name Suga) is considered to be one of the most pale-skinned idols in the industry ("4 Fair-skinned," 2017). In fact, he is so light-skinned that his skin was described as "snow" and "marble" (Jungkook Day, 2018). Because of his pale white

skin tone, Suga is required to apply makeup and cosmetics in order to “tone down” his skin tone to match the rest of BTS (“Most of K-Pop,” 2019); this is a practice that is contrary to the industry standard of lightening one’s skin tone with cosmetics. However, his band member 김태형 (stage name V) faces the opposite experience. Other members of the group often tease him for how dark he is. For example, group leader RM had claimed that when he first met V, he didn’t see him because V was too black or dark (Aishhetics, 2018a). Another member even asked V if he was wearing stockings because his legs looked too dark (Bosch, 2017).

Figure 3.54

Left to Right: 김태형 (stage name V) and 민윤기 (stage name Suga) of 방탄소년단 (romanized as BTS)



Note. From “Taegi/Gallery,” n.d. Fandom. <https://bts.fandom.com/wiki/Taegi/Gallery#SNS%20Updates>

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Justifications for Blackface, cultural appropriation, and the various forms of both racism and colorism are justified in the South Korean entertainment industry by referencing earlier acts; if someone else had performed the problematic behavior before then the current artist is not at fault. However, discourse surrounding these issues are not necessarily meant to place blame or point fingers. In fact, the most productive race and color discourses often focus on correcting behavior instead. However, such practices and beliefs cannot be corrected if justifications are constantly made to defend the perpetrators.

MBC attempted to displace blame by apologizing while justifying the behavior by pointing to the character Michol from *Dooly the Little Dinosaur*. MBC's apology claimed that it was a "misunderstanding" and that they did not think about the international reach that their show had. Essentially, MBC is apologizing for creating a situation in which foreign viewers misunderstand South Koreans, not for South Koreans perpetuating Blackface. Bomi of Apink made a similar apology that focused on foreigners misunderstanding South Korean culture by citing how popular the character of Michol is. Identical justifications were made for EXO's Chen in reference to his comment regarding Michol and Kunta Kinte.

SBS's apology was similarly worded; they apologized for the inconvenience that the performance may have caused but did not necessarily look to addressing the issue that was presented. KBS didn't even issue an apology; they simply deleted the clip from their social media channels. The lack of acknowledgement in regards to the practice of Blackface in mainstream South Korean media is indicative of the lacking race discourse within South Korean culture. Hong, who performed the Blackface, made a similarly shallow apology, focusing on misunderstanding rather than fault.

Even SNL Korea, which is a television show format imported from the United States of America, did not properly navigate the issue of Blackface, featuring it in more than one skit. From this example, it becomes apparent that American capitalist involvement alone is not sufficient in addressing the lacking race discourse

in South Korean society. Not only did they perform Blackface through their rendition of *The Dreamgirls*, but they also had BEAST's Kikwang perform a stereotypical minstrelsy of Black people via black face paint, large lips, and, of course, watermelon-eating. These stereotypes do not originate in South Korean culture; in fact, they stem from American race discourse. Therefore, it can be argued that the inclusion of western perspective in South Korean culture does not reduce racism, but amplifies it by providing more avenues for it to be expressed.

From these examples, one can see a common thread in South Korean logic: the fault is not that South Korean race discourse is lacking, but rather that foreigners are misunderstanding the South Korean culture and the South Korean perspective. This sort of response is shown to be typical within the industry; rather than admitting fault in order to improve, blame is displaced and fault is justified. The argument simply claims that South Koreans have no conception for race and therefore cannot be racist; they understand Blackness differently in South Korean culture and to hold South Koreans to a standard of international race discourse would be to ignore South Korean socio-cultural context. However, this argument does not appropriately address the issue.

If the South Korean entertainment industry were restricted to its domestic borders and the South Korean people were not exposed to a global community, the argument may have a stronger hold. However, because of South Korea's intentional pursuit of globalizing its media productions through several *Hallyu Waves*, South Korea has chosen to engage in a global market and thus must take on responsibility for the way it interacts with a global audience.

In another defense of Blackface, South Korean celebrities and idols defend themselves by stating that they are engaging in cosplay. The idea of dressing up in costume is supposed to allow one free range to operate in any way whatsoever; however, this belief is harmful as it ignores the social, cultural, and political context in which cosplaying is performed. Essentially, dressing up for an event or a day does not separate one's performance from the way society views certain identities. Therefore, racist costumes are still racist and still perpetuate racist ideologies in society.

Two members of Super Junior dressed up as famous Black celebrities: Shindong as Oprah Winfrey and Yesung as Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury. When confronted with the fact that Blackface is a problematic practice, neither of the artists issued an official or unofficial apology. Instead, they simply ignored the international feedback. In fact, Super Junior's Henry Lau, a Canadian of Korean descent, decided to defend his bandmates rather than address the blatant racism. Similar to the case of SNL Korea, this instance goes to show that the inclusion of western perspectives or narratives alone does not remedy South Korea's lacking race discourse. If anything, these instances show how Asians, either in Asia or abroad, are complicit in the engagement of anti-Blackness and racism.

Even if apologies were made, often times lessons are not learned. This analysis is applied to both the industry and the individual. For example, Jackson of GOT7 was accused of posting an image of himself with darkened skin. When told that it was a practice of Blackface, Jackson removed the image, claimed that it was a fan edit he simply shared, and apologized, stating that he will do better moving forward. However, it wouldn't be the only instance in which he would be accused of Blackface. He painted his full body black for a commercial and was criticized for it. Though, some fans defended him by saying it's an artistic performance or that it is a play on words, referring to demons in hell. Either way, the performance still employs a practice of Blackface. Artistic Blackface is still Blackface. The value of the art does not diminish the problems of Blackface. Furthermore, the characterization of Blackness with demons, devilry, and hell is a common trope that was discussed earlier in how Asian cultures valorize whiteness and demonize Blackness. This defense of Jackson thus falls flat.

Taeyang of Big Bang similarly faces several rounds of critique for Blackface and anti-Black racism. His video with a Kanye West face overlay is problematic because it draws upon the stereotype that Black people are animals, specifically monkeys or apes. Not only does he make the connection by utilizing Kanye West's face in conjunction with the Year of the Monkey, he also screams repeatedly, further evoking the essence of an animal. The explicit identification of Blackness with monkeys or apes is an age-old American stereotype meant to dehumanize Black peoples in order to justify their oppression. Once again, one can

see how imported racist stereotypes are easily blended into Korean perspectives on race and color.

G-Dragon of Big Bang is similarly criticized. He has performed Blackface several times with significant international backlash; however, that doesn't seem to impact his personal views regarding the matter. His own representative has said that the Blackface is simply face paint and has no political or racial subtext to it. In order to make this argument, though, one must ignore all social, cultural, and political contexts. Actions performed in society are not separate from the society in which they are performed; the very existence of a thing is innately political. As such, removing G-Dragon's performance of Blackface from a political or racial discourse is impossible. The ask in and of itself is inherently harmful.

South Korean race discourse is not limited to just performances of Blackface though. This study has outlined a number of instances in which Korean idols perform what they believe Blackness is. Whether it be Wendy's impersonation of Black women or Jooheon's impersonation of Black men, these impersonations are built on a lack of understanding and a collection of stereotypes. These stereotypes exist to denigrate and limit the full expression of Blackness; their adoption into Korean culture can be attributed in part to influence from Americans during the Korean War and other western nations in the period thereafter.

It is these fundamental misunderstandings of Blackness and Black culture that has led to cultural appropriation and the existence of artists such as Truedy and Zico. These artists are able to adorn themselves in features that they believe can enhance their performance or artistry, such as cornrows, Black braids, grills, AAVE or AAL, etc. However, because South Korean culture places significant emphasis on a desire for paleness and a distaste for Blackness, these idols are immediately able to remove such adornments when it suits them. The same cannot be said of Black peoples around the world; they cannot simply toss aside their Blackness when societies marginalize or oppress them. As such, practices of cultural appropriation are harmful not only for their complicity in marginalizing Blackness, but for their use of Blackness for personal profit and gains. South Korean artists are now able to capitalize off of an imagery that is otherwise criticized and persecuted when

performed by the very people who created that same imagery themselves, Black people.

As stated earlier, South Korean celebrities and artists often look to their predecessors as excuses for their appropriation. A large number of artists, for example, have worn their hair in typically Black fashion: Truedy of Stone Music Entertainment, Peniel of Cube Entertainment, Bobby of YG Entertainment's BtoB, CL of YG Entertainment's 2NE1, G-Dragon and Taeyang of YG Entertainment's Big Bang, Kai of SM Entertainment's EXO, Winwin of SM Entertainment's NCT, Jackson of JYP Entertainment's GOT7, Bangchan of JYP Entertainment's Stray Kids, Hyolyn of Bridge, Zico of Stardom Entertainment's Block B, Jay Park of AOMG, RM of Big Hit Entertainment's BTS, etc. This is a non-exhaustive list of South Korean artists whom have worn dreadlocks, cornrows, or Black braids for a short time in order to present a certain image. After the use of the Black style had run its course, these South Korean artists abandoned the imagery and returned to their traditionally accepted Korean appearances.

When these same artists are criticized for their appropriation of Blackness and Black culture, their defense is often to refer to those whom came before them. Someone else was able to do it so why can't they? This argument is fundamentally flawed as it relies on past crimes to justify present and future ones. This sort of defense ensures that behaviors, which contribute to anti-Blackness and racism in South Korean society, continue to go unchallenged and unchanged. Justification paves way for perpetuation of these ideologies, allowing for racism and colorism to continue to flourish in the South Korean entertainment industry.

This practice extends to the use of language as well. As noted prior, AAVE or AAL is often criticized and looked down upon by non-Black people. Black communities created AAVE or AAL out of necessity due to being kidnapped and brought to a new world for the sole purpose of chattel slavery. Association with AAVE or AAL has since been correlated with a lack of education, class, and civility. South Korean adoption of AAVE or AAL in their songs, allows them to popularize terminologies that they have little to no understanding for while also capitalizing off of them. Once again, where Black people are openly punished for expressing Black

culture, South Korean artists have been able to receive praise and profit for the exact same practices.

This is not to say that South Koreans and other non-Black people cannot participate in activities such as hip hop or rap. These forms of artistry are originally founded by Black communities as forms of resistance against an oppressive hegemony. Therefore, engagement within these artforms can be respectful if they hold true to these core values. The problem arises when these same artforms are taken and disrespected by removing these core values in order to capitalize and create profits. As such, cultural appropriation is an act of capitalism. The hypocrisy lies in the fact that South Korean media demands paleness and shuns Blackness, but looks to Black culture in order to boost its market and produce capitalistic gains.

With that being said, how does Korean anti-Blackness and racism tie to their colorism? As can be seen above, the introduction of explicit western racism into Korea is palpable. Since the Korean War, South Korean race discourse has been severely limited to the stereotypes that were brought into the country by Americans. However, colorism is a practice that evolved domestically as was discussed earlier. Colorism is rampant in the South Korean entertainment industry. There is ample evidence of South Korean idols comparing one another's skin tone, teasing one another regarding skin tone, and justifying certain behaviors based on one another's skin tones. It is also crucial to note that the variations between their skin tones are actually not that significant; the colorist ideologies of South Korea run so deeply that even the slightest variation in skin tone can result in prejudice and discrimination as seen in the examples provided above.

These examples establish a clear understanding for how Korean culture craves whiteness and paleness while simultaneously rejecting darkness and Blackness. However, this practice is juxtaposed to the constant, never-ending appropriation of Black culture and Blackness. From Black fashion, to Black language, and Black music, the South Korean entertainment industry, specifically the music industry, loves to take from Black culture. When paired with their colorist ideologies, these practices of Black culture become hollow as they remove the core values that developed these Black practices in the first place. Rather than challenging a hegemonic structure and criticizing its flaws, Black culture is appropriated to reinforce them.

With this analysis in mind, it can be argued that South Korea currently inhabits what could be identified as a global version of the “honorary white” category. They do not receive the benefits of a major world power through histories of imperialism, such as the United States or the United Kingdom. However, they are not viewed as uncivilized, undeveloped, or barbaric, the way that much of the western world views Africa and the Global South. Their adaptation of racism into domestic practices can be identified as a means of internalizing international racial hierarchy. They are complicit with the status quo and aim to becomes a major soft power within that status quo. Essentially, they are aiming to become a member of the “honorary white” category of nation-states.

As introduced previously, Asian Americans find difficulty in forming coalition with other communities of color, particularly Black communities, because of their appeals to whiteness, the status quo, and the oppressive hegemony founded and maintained by white supremacy. Similarly, South Korea will find it difficult to form coalition with other formerly imperialized nation-states to challenge the international status quo for truer justice on a global scale due to their unrelenting efforts to appeal to those at the top of the international hegemony. Based on the experiences of Asian Americans, the South Korean nation-state will come to realize that it will never be able to achieve the boons and benefits of being a major world power, but will find itself incessantly sidelined by those in power and rejected by those who it betrayed by appealing to those in power.

It cannot be ignored that this race discourse is an international one that has evolved in the west. As such, it is applying a global perspective of a western discourse on the South Korean nation. However, this is not inappropriate when considering the fact that South Korea purposefully produces its entertainment media for export. South Korea’s media intentionally caters to an international audience; to ignore the social, cultural, economic, and political ramifications of an international audience would be at least inappropriate and at most maliciously harmful. Should South Korea decide to continue engaging in a global community, it is required that South Korea develop its race discourse to be more inclusive and culturally competent in regards to Black cultures and Black peoples. Anything less than this would be intentional harm caused by a nation that refuses to accept its own fallibilities.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

South Korean colorist ideologies were domestically developed whereas South Korean conceptions of race were imported via the American military and other various western institutions, such as capitalism. There is a strong demand for complexions to be pale or white, signifying purity and innocence, and a strong distaste for darkness or Blackness, implying a sense of villainy and barbarism. This can be noted in the South Korean beauty cosmetics industry as well as the entertainment industry. However, South Korean entertainment, particularly music, is rampant with the appropriation of Black culture. As an aside, it is interesting to note that the appropriation of Blackness is less common in other forms of entertainment, such as television or cinema, both of which lean more heavily on the Korean identity in order to be marketable.

The demand for whiteness in parallel with the appropriation of Black culture while subsequently rejecting Blackness is a critical issue in the modern global society. From blatant blackfacing to stereotypical impersonations to jokes about tanned complexions, South Korean popular media reveals to the world how South Koreans conceive of race and color. South Korean celebrities and companies have not taken responsibility for developing their race and color discourse, instead focusing on how to best deflect blame by looking to history as an excuse or by applying a colorblind lens of analysis. This continued behavior reinforces negative perceptions regarding Black people both within and out of South Korea, despite the fact that the industry significantly profits off of Black culture. The lack of cultural competency in South Korea has led to the reproduction of problematic narratives within the global market, which is then sold off for international consumption.

Because of their current understanding and practice of race and color, South Korea provides support to an international hierarchy structured around a Black and white binary dichotomy. This hierarchy was established through western imperialism and the establishment of capitalism as a global economic system. Rather than use its newfound popularity and acclaim to challenge the inequity of such institutions, South Korea has chosen to instead further prop it up in hopes of gain

profits and repositioning itself as one of the elites. In this sense, not only are they complicit in the maintenance of an oppressive international hegemony that prioritizes whiteness above all else, they are active in contributing to and reproducing a system that enacts institutional harm on communities around the world.

This also points to the lack of a well-developed racial lens with which to build South Korean understanding of race politics. This study has shown how the practice of domestic colorism and international racism has combined in order to construct South Korea's positioning on the international Black and white hierarchy as well. The positioning taken by South Korea is similar to that of many diasporic Asian communities: that is, one of "honorary whites." Such categorization looks at how certain communities pander to whiteness and various institutions of power and privilege in hopes of inclusion, rather than looking to the dissolution of such institutions for the betterment of all.

With that being said, this study strongly recommends that the South Korean nation invest significantly and immediately in developing its race discourse in order to better understand and respect Black peoples and Black cultures. Otherwise, the immediate divestment from appropriation of Black culture would be the appropriate course of action. In not addressing their lacking race discourse, the South Korean media that is purposefully exporting to a global market reinforces the marginalization of Black peoples around the world. Not only do Black communities feel the direct impact of these decisions, non-Black communities take note from the behavior of South Korean celebrities in order to justify their own biases against Blackness. In doing so, South Korea has the opportunity to become a global leader in reshaping, or even challenging, the international hierarchy that is structured around whiteness and white supremacy.

As stated by the famous Black activist Martin Luther King Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Therefore, South Korean media, with its global reach, has a responsibility and duty to stamp out the injustices it perpetuates by justifying anti-Blackness. Either that, or forfeit its claims to the appropriation of Black culture for personal profits.

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