

HIP-HOP AND CULTURAL INTERACTIONS: SOUTH KOREAN AND WESTERN
INTERPRETATIONS.

by

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DEDICATION

To Frankie and Holly for making me feel close to normal.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Gaps in The Literature	10
II. METHODS.....	11
Method Used to Analyze Music Videos and Lyrics	11
Method Used to Analyze Online Interactions.....	12
III. MUSIC VIDEO ANALYSIS.....	15
Introduction.....	15
Physical Appearance and Wealth.....	16
IV. LYRIC ANALYSIS.....	21
V. FORUM ANALYSIS.....	25
Introduction of Racism Online.....	25
Recognized Themes	26
Like and Dislike in Consideration	27
American Popularity and Comparison.....	28
Racism.....	29
Paternalism, Nationalism, and the Essentialism of Language	31
VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	35
APPENDIX SECTION.....	37
REFERENCES	41

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
1. Themes Found in Music Videos	16
2. Most Recognized Themes in Song Lyrics	22
3. Total Themes Identified in Search	26
4. Narrowed Themes Identified from Samples	27

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized world, there are often questions of hybridity in every aspect of culture from fashion and music to language and religion. The ethnocentric view often parroted by the American public is that the rest of the world is simply trying to mimic the American way of life and failing (Pieterse 2001:225). This study argues that cultural integration of music genres occurs in such a way that the uninformed eye may not notice the difference. Korean hip-hop culture, and rap music specifically, is not a simple copy and paste of American hip-hop into South Korea. It has been glocalized to fit cultural norms, expectations, and history, while still maintaining important aspects of American hip-hop. Hybridity and glocalization have shaped Korean hip-hop into what we see today, but racial stereotypes and the struggle to define authenticity prevent not only Korean but many Asian communities from being fully able to express their struggles through the medium of rap.

KEY WORDS: Rap, Hip-hop, South Korea, Glocalization, Hybridity

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, there are often questions of hybridity in every aspect of culture from fashion and music to language and religion. The ethnocentric view often parroted by the American public is that the rest of the world is simply trying to mimic the American way of life and failing (Pieterse 2001:225). However, history tells us that cultures are in a constant state of change, not just in terms of technology but in the way human, animal, and environmental rights as international norms have proliferated. Pieterse writes that, “The importance of hybridity is that it problematizes boundaries” (2001:220). Cultural boundaries will be pushed, but that does not delete hundreds of years of social history. New ideas may be introduced, but that does not completely overwrite a plethora of ideas that existed previously in a culture. Because cultural integration happens in such a fluid way, I want to consider the value of the hip-hop genre of South Korea. Music, fashion, media, and self-identification are all a part of how American hip-hop has been reshaped to fit into Korean culture. Hip hop cultures are not full of one size fits all ideas that can simply be placed into a new culture and location and remain unchanged. For this reason, I am interested in asking the following research questions: 1) how hybridity and glocalization have shaped Korean hip-hop; 2) how Korean artists are projecting themselves in the global hip-hop culture; and 3) what kinds of backlash Korean artists have faced from netizens in relation to American hip-hop.

Literature Review

A plethora of ideas come to mind when someone says the word hybrid, Pieterse (2001) discusses the history and various types of hybridization in the social sciences in a succinct manner. Hybridity was first discussed in terms of agriculture, pastoralism, and horticulture. It has been used to discuss notions of race in the past and combinations of animals today such as the griffin, centaur, cyborgs, and more, including cars, technology, and lifestyle (2001:223). Hybridization has always been occurring, but has recently seen growth due to advances in technology. Borrowing from Pieterse's (2001) definition of hybridity, it is "recent combinations of cultural and/or institutional forms" that occurs through "dynamics such as migration, trade, ICT, multiculturalism, and globalization" (222). It is under this thought process that I will be looking at the globalization and glocalization of music.

Globalization has become a buzz-word in a variety of academic fields over the past few decades. Despite the common rhetoric that all artists are just copying each other with a slight twist to not be accused of plagiarism, the globalization of music is tied with culture and also with politics, economics, and religion. From the laws passed in multiple U.S. cities about baggy jeans (Ferris 2014), to governments and churches banning songs and censoring lyrics (S.C.S. 2014), music and music culture does more to shape society than it appears to on a day-to-day scale. The spread of music does not affect each space and population in the same ways. Bynoe (2002) says about the globalization of hip-hop that "if international artists are selectively taking parts of Hip Hop culture and reconfiguring them to fit their own histories and experiences, without understanding the framework in which the components developed, how can these new cultural expressions

still be called ‘Hip Hop’” (2002:78)? This is a valid concern for those looking at the authenticity of hip hop as it travels and is adapted into other cultures outside of the United States. For this reason, it is important to look at glocalization instead of only globalization. Motley and Henderson’s study (2007) found that there are “commonalities among members of the hip-hop Diaspora [that] suggest that the core essence of hip-hop is shared by marginalized groups” (1). Their data also illustrated the commonly found idea that “hip-hop is malleable and is adapted to speak to members of multiple national cultures, and localized socioeconomic and political conditions” (1). The ability of hip hop to fit itself not only into other cultural spaces but also into political and economic conditions is important in recognizing the potency of the genre. As Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006:234) point out,

The emergence of youth cultural media serves to illustrate that youth culture is therefore not just globalizing in terms of content—that is, the objects and images consumed by young consumers globally—but also in terms of form, as the institution of youth spreads and becomes integrated, appropriated, and creolized in a variety of local modernizations, statehoods, and postcolonial discourses. Youth has become an institutionalized and mediated identity space, readily available transnationally for the construction of youth culture into local social structures and issues.

What is described above is glocalization as it pertains to youth culture. Music is key in almost all aspects of culture in daily life. This includes singing in the shower in the morning, driving to work with the radio on, hearing music in every store, lobby, elevator, and street corner, and more. Even more so, music is an important part of identity for many people. The genre of choice and the markers that people use such as language and fashion to represent themselves in that sub-culture are a part of what makes up the music

experience. Authenticity and belonging to a genre as a true member are important rites of passage for youth all over the world.

Identity is key in the way people view authenticity, but who is the judge? As Volgsten points out, “Not only can musicians be blamed for failing in their attempts to give authentic expression to given styles or genres, even the musician’s own personal style of expression can be an expectancy to live up to” (2014:121). How authenticity is measured depends on the judge’s perspective. Volgsten (2014:121) goes on to say, “Today’s rappers, just as yesterday’s blues singers, are expected to originate from the bottom strata of society. At least if they are to be able to deliver authentic blues or rap.” However, if that is the judge of authentic rap, then many prominent rap artists like Ice Cube and Kanye West would be considered inauthentic. In the case of this study, are the artists supposed to be striving towards authentically Korean, authentically hip hop, or authentically something else entirely? Is it possible for a different nationality to be authentically American hip hop? If they tried, they would likely be berated heavily by the masses. This brings about the question of authenticity in music and art forms in general. What it means to be authentic consists of a fleeting definition that becomes more difficult to pin down the more examples given. I intend to examine the way respondents and netizens view rap music authenticity within the context of globalization, hybridity, and glocalization in order to gain a better understanding of how it is being judged.

Although rap is a relatively young genre of music, it has amassed a large amount of attention from scholars all over the world. There is a vast breadth of research concerning hip hop and rap that has developed since the first official rap album was released in 1979 titled “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang (McQuillar 2007).

Despite its youth as a music form, rap has spread to all largely human inhabited continents (Bynoe 2006). Beginning with American rap, there are a variety of rap subgenres that have developed over time, including, but not limited to, conscious rap, gangsta rap, and party or pop rap. This genre as a whole is unique in its development over time and its purpose. It evolved from the American musical stylings of jazz and blues as well as other international branches of music into an art form used to express ideas, concerns, and discontentment towards social issues. Despite rap gaining its footing and recognition in the American media scene first, it is important to recognize the outside influences that helped develop it, as well as where it has moved in today's globalized world. Many historians trace the roots of conscious rap back to spirituals sang by enslaved persons in the Americas (Cheney 2005). From there, it grew and evolved with society as social issues came and went. Starting out in the Bronx, hip-hop was able to spread early on through mixtapes that were more easily and cheaply spread and replicated than vinyl. Early artists like The Last Poet, Clive Campbell, DJ Hollywood, and Zulu Nation were formative influences in the beginning of hip-hop. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's song "The Message" was an influential track for being noted as one of the first of its kind to decry the struggles of the urban poor and the violence they faced in their everyday lives (Rock and Roll 2007). Public Enemy was one of the first predominantly political hip-hop groups with multiple albums pointedly making statements about the state of racial ties in the United States (Rock and Roll 2013). Their work influenced a new wave of musicians to critique the world around them as they did in the songs "Fight the Power" and "Don't Believe the Hype". "911 Is A Joke" is another key song of theirs in which they examined the way that police are often late to come to

the aid of black crime victims. Race and poverty are not the only topics discussed in rap that make it such a powerful genre throughout time. Simply looking at a Killer Mike song will show several examples of protest lyrics. Within American rap in the last decade the public has seen songs about the pressures on youth, issues faced by different racial minorities, political change requests, and more. In current hip-hop literature, Travis and Bowman (2011) examine empowerment through rap music for youth and the balance between risk behavior and positive growth. Although rap literature largely focuses on negative aspects of the culture, there seems to be an increase in scholastic attitude that hip-hop culture and rap specifically can encourage more youth to act for positive social change in the future.

I am interested in how hip hop culture and the rap genre have evolved and changed in different cultures, particularly outside of the United States. Each culture has universal needs and problems, but they also have their own unique stressors and forms of oppression acted upon them. My focus here lies in the South Korean hip hop music scene. Korean rap first came into recognition with the artist Seo Taiji in March 1992 (Morelli 2001:250). Due to strict censorship laws in place at the time, the lyrics did not drift from the standard romantic idyll that was popular at the moment (Howard 2006:87). In 1997 the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) developed new rules for pop stars appearing on TV. The KBS said that “There were to be no ear-rings, no dyed hair, no tattoos, no exposing of navels, and: ‘Entertainers who wear outfits which may harm the sound emotional development of youth will be banned’” (Howard 2006:82). Despite this, the genre was new to the Korean music scene and paved the way for a new brand of hip hop. Because of restrictions, rap in Korea developed in a different way than it did in the

American music scene. While there are still censorship laws, they are not the same as the aforementioned original laws. Despite colorful hair, dramatic makeup, and young men with ear piercings being a norm on music shows in Korea now, the country is still under fire for vague and random censorship acts. The guidelines themselves are unclear as seen on the Ministry of Family and Gender Equality website (KCSC 2011), but even more important is the haphazard nature by which banning of songs, music videos, and television music performances occurs (Freemuse 2014). The controlling of what content is exposed to the public limits what rap artists can discuss if they are seeking to expand their audience outside of neighborhood shows and the internet.

The globalization of hip-hop, understanding the importance of rap lyrics, analyzing authenticity on both a local and global scale, and understanding youth culture in Korea are all topics I pulled from in search for a better understanding of the problem at hand. Condry (2000) has established a strong foundation for hip-hop in Japan with a focus on authenticity and globalization. This was done through various qualitative studies that had strong narratives. Khuin (2006) and Liu (2014) among others have laid a foundation for the discussion of Chinese rap and hip-hop. These two global powers have established their place in hip-hop culture, but Korea has been largely ignored by scholars until recently. The amount of data that have been accumulated about the Korean music scene focuses on the powerhouse that is K-pop. It is largely overlooked by the public that not all Korean music falls under this one genre. Despite the lack of an academic focus on the growing Korean music scene and how the culture at large is changing in relation to it, an increasing amount of popular culture digital magazines and bloggers are beginning to sit up and take notice.

A study by Motley and Henderson (2007) analyzed empirical research on hip-hop from 23 different scholars. The countries discussed included France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, England, United States, Japan, Malawi, Tanzania, Cuba, South Asia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and more. They found that hip-hop has the ability to be adapted across the world despite differences in local culture (1). Amongst the articles, only a few focused on Korea, that being from Morelli (2001), Lee (2010), and Um (2013). Morelli's chapter "Who Is a Dancing Hero? Rap, Hip-Hop, and Dance in Korean Popular Culture" discusses the keenly important resituating of cultural contexts that occur when Western music is adopted into Korean popular culture. While important, the data no longer reflects the music scene today since it was published in 2001. She mentions various groups and styles that have since grown out of popularity. For example, Seo Taiji and the Boys, while still heavily respected, are not the frontrunners in the style anymore. Despite Korean rap being discussed in various articles in smaller sections, I noticed a lack of focus on the newer generation of Korean hip-hop. All of the articles and book chapters I came across featured older artists who are no longer the face or the influence of the industry. It has been well over a decade since many of the discussed artists were at the height of their fame; a re-evaluation is strongly needed. Um (2013: 53) has the most recent work on Korean rap and focuses on the way the "process of appropriation of African American hip-hop and rap into a Korean popular music form has come about through multiple selective strategies of adoption and adaptation with respect to the associated cultural, musical, and linguistic components of the genre." The breakdown of characteristics of Korean hip hop on both the local and national level are key in understanding identity. The common practice of English and Korean language

mixing in lyrics appeals to domestic listeners while traditional Korean references such as the integration of traditional music are included to appeal to the local (Um 2013: 55). Fashion has also been altered to be more culturally appropriate. There exists a 'clean version' for hip-hop style that includes "semi-fitting garments" instead of baggy jeans and t-shirts (Um 2013: 56). It is important to note distinctions that have been made in order for products and concepts to be sold on the Korean market. Glocalization is best utilized to further explore the market side of hip hop culture.

Lee (2010) approaches Korean hip hop with a sociolinguistic focus. Glocalization is used to analyze not products, but language in Lee's study. There is a focus on the ways glocalization allows for a simultaneous attachment and detachment from the local (Lee 140). The topics that are discussed differ depending on location, but there is still an underbelly of frustration in the music. Watkins (2006) points out that there are more discourses about "conscripts from the South Korean army" than there are about police brutality and violence (as cited in Lee 2010: 141). Lee (2010) found that Korean hip hop artists are more pressured to incorporate both the global and the local in order to be authentic. While those at the center of the Hip Hop Nation (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009) are authentic through existence, people in other locations have to strike a balance in order to not be "*kacca* 'fake' hip hop" artists who are "inexperienced, superficial, 'young' rappers who lack passion and work ethics" (Lee:157). Although focusing on Asian American hip hop, Chang (2007) proclaims that "hip hop is a lingua franca that binds young people all around the world, all while giving them the chance to alter it with their own national flavor" and asserts that the genre is "a vital progressive

agenda that challenges the status quo” (60). This is an overarching consensus amongst the literature that is important when considering the authenticity of the music at hand.

Gaps in The Literature

There is a limited body of research concerning Korean hip hop. While an increase in interest in this topic has been seen in recent years, Korean rap netizen forum studies have yet to be seen. Discussions of authenticity are popular, but have not been addressed on a large scale in Korean rap. I further this discussion of authenticity in music through this research. Femcees outside of the United States are also largely passed over when content analyses are conducted. In the studies previously discussed, male MCs comprised all or nearly all of the samples. I seek to raise the amount of femcee inclusion in this study for a number of reasons: female hip hop artists, particularly in Korea, are understudied; gender is likely central to issues of authenticity; and the glocalization of hip hop in Korea may be gendered as well. In other words, there may be differences in the ways in which male and female emcees appropriate hip hop from other parts of the globe to create their own perceived “authentic” music. The increasing globalization of music and the ease of access with which music subcultures are making their way in the digital world are important in understanding how youth cultures are evolving over time. The glocalization of music is not only happening in South Korea, but countries all over the world (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009). Understanding the importance of that and the question of cultural authenticity that is derived from it is important for analyzing the way music crosses cultural and racial lines.

II. METHODS

Methods Used to Analyze Music Videos and Lyrics

For the lyric analysis segment of this research I pulled from a convenience sampling of Korean hip-hop and rap songs that also had music videos and available English translations. Due to language barriers, time constraints, and travel funding, this method of analysis was the best option at present. A total of 50 songs were used, featuring both male and female artists, 65 in total. The songs ranged in release date from 2012 to late 2016, the bulk of which came from 2015. I wanted to use the most recent music in order to avoid talking about music fashions that had already passed by. I purposely sought out female MCs, 11 total, to feature in the study because they are often omitted due to less visibility. The songs were sought out through YouTube, blogs, and music websites that discussed K hip-hop artists. That said, the content themes of the songs were not greatly distinguishable between male and female artists, therefore not changing the results greatly. Due to accessibility of songs, translated lyrics, and music videos, the artists featured are more popular, also known as mainstream to many. The content of artists considered “underground” may differ, but access to that population is not currently possible.

Erving Goffman’s presentation of self informs the theoretical concept for the music video analysis section of research. The balancing of hip-hop culture and hegemonic culture in each country is unique and presents different challenges for artists trying to succeed in hip-hop within their own cultural framework. International hip-hop artists face a particularly tough challenge in their self-presentations for two main reasons; they have the job of not straying too far from American hip-hop and rap in order to

maintain authenticity from its source, and they are tasked by their own cultural expectations to present some recognizable form of their own reality so as not to seem like outsiders.

A grounded theory approach is utilized in the lyric analysis section. The topics in rap lyrics have always varied, but the dispersal of the genre to suit different social needs has expanded it even more. Hip-hop was born “as a cultural and artistic movement to promote non-violence among Afro-Americans living in the Bronx” (Watkins via Risso 2016:1), but the purpose has since shifted to accommodate changing sub genres and cultural differences among artists. The songs analyzed made up the same sample as the music videos used in the last section. Translations to English were taken from the official music videos or fan translation sites. Those taken from fan translation sites were compared to other translations to ensure that there were not large differences in content.

Method Used to Analyze Online Interactions

The short history of the internet has largely been a racially white one. This includes everything from initial ideas and designs to who had early access and who are presented as the creators of technology now; note that I say creators and not builders. In current media, “the images of racial or ethnic minorities and their relationship to IT infrastructure and design are either as consumers or operators of the technological wizardry created by whites” (Kevorkian and Taborn via Daniels 2012:696). Northern California and the area dubbed ‘Silicon Valley’ gave rise to the internet and studies focused on the internet (Daniels 2012:697). While the area states that it is diverse (Pitti 2004), that diversity is limited by labor divisions. Daniels presents the following insight:

The industry, like the region, carried with it the inequalities of race, class, and gender of the social context. The tech firms in Silicon Valley are predominantly led by white men and a few white women, yet the manual labor of cleaning their offices and assembling circuit boards is done by immigrants and outsourced labor, often women living in the global south. (2012:697)

Although this research was conducted in the earlier 2000s, there have not been vast changes since (Allen 2014). Access to said technology is still unequal. While the digital divide may appear to have disappeared with the widespread use of internet via cellphones, there is an ongoing ‘second-level’ divide that corresponds to usage instead of access (Buchi et al. 2015). The inequality is important to keep in mind when considering forum participation.

In the forum comment analysis section of this research, a total of 172 forum comments were pulled from 33 different URLs. Six different websites were pulled from, as listed in Appendix B. I chose these websites because they had some amount of discussion forums or comment feeds relating to Korean hip-hop and rap. Multiple Kpop specialty websites were excluded from the data due to the way that would skew comments in a more positive light. Only one was used, it having been established in 1998 and therefore having a large breadth of content. People who seek out the K-pop specialty fan websites are less likely to present a view of someone who has not been regularly exposed to hip-hop and rap music from outside of the United States mainstream. In the cases of YouTube, auto play often takes users from one video to the next in a way that can connect them to videos they would not have originally searched for. Similarly, YouTube suggests top videos and recommended videos that relate in some manner to past streaming history, which can lead viewers to Korean rap and hip-hop music videos. Samples were also pulled from a music producing website forum, a rap music forum, and

a Korean wave forum. Forums, unlike auto play, consist of the web user purposely seeking out or clicking on the feed from a list of recent content. There is a larger amount of choice then in the decision to participate in the reading/viewing of forum material and commenting afterward. It should be noted that I left the forum comments unaltered in grammar and spelling. I felt that this was an important aspect to the language being used. If there are asterisked out letters in a word, it was done by the hosting website, not by choice.

III. MUSIC VIDEO ANALYSIS

Introduction

Visual media has become increasingly important in the selling of products, not just physical but digital as well. The way that an album cover looks, the music videos and performance associated with the songs, and the visuals of the performer themselves influence who will buy the music and products associated with the brand name of the artist. Having said this, the visuals used to sell a song do not always match the lyrical message being spread. Hip-hop culture in the United States is well known for having distinct physical styles, particularly with a focus on hair and clothes. The image has changed many times since the inception of hip-hop, but there remain key style signatures. As noted by Rose (1991:277) about hip-hop during the 1980s and early 1990s,

I use hip-hop to describe a way of dressing, walking, and talking. The dress refers to the myriad shades and shapes of the latest fly gear: high-top sneakers, bicycle shorts, chunky jewelry, baggy pants, and polka-dotted tops. The hairstyles, which include high-fade designs, dreadlocks, corkscrews, and braids are also part of this fashion.

Fashions change every year in each country, but aesthetics also differ between cultures.

The way that hip-hop, and rap specifically, are presented differs from country to country.

In this section I am interested in whether there is a significant clash between South

Korean cultural concepts of image and hip-hop visual culture. Hip-hop culture has been

altered to fit different norms in each new place it is being created. That said, mainstream

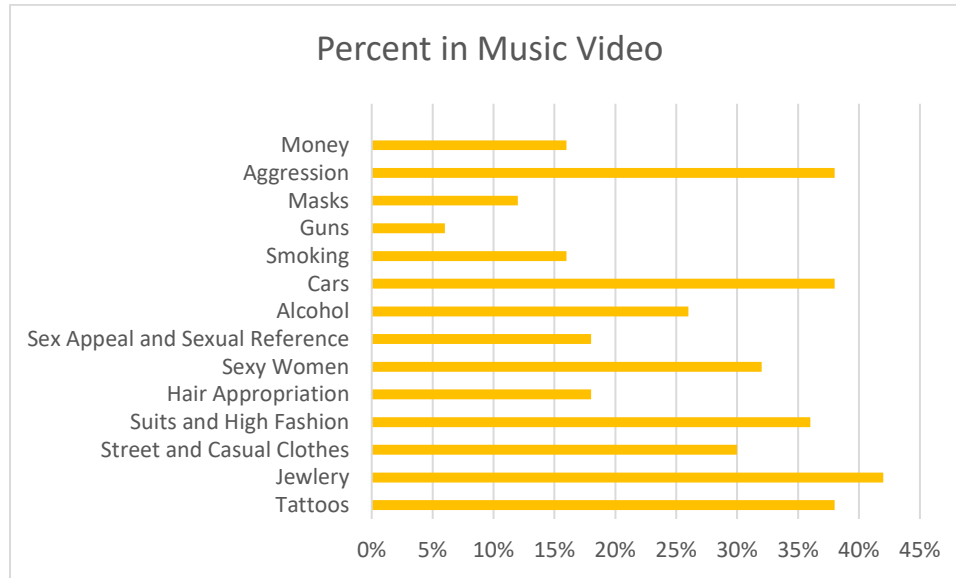
South Korean standards for social decency and norm are potentially challenged by youth

in subcultures such as hip-hop. A music video analysis has been conducted to see what

visual and behavioral differences are being portrayed that clash with Korean societal

expectations for youth in general.

Table 1. Themes Found in Music Videos



Physical Appearance and Wealth

Clothing is not only an important element in hip-hop, but it has throughout history been a key component of identity in Korean culture. Korean artists and fans tend to wear colors that are more culturally specific, Korean flag prints, and slimmer styles than their American counterpart. (Ha and Park 2011:25). As stated by Um (2013), “hip-hop fashion is also adapted and mixed for local tastes to create what is termed a ‘clean version’ for middle-class clients. Instead of baggy trousers and T-shirts, semi-fitting garments have been chosen by many hip-hop fans and musicians alike, so that they will blend more easily while still making their own fashion statement regarding hip-hop aesthetics” (55-56). The ratio of street and casual hip-hop clothes (30%) to suits and high fashion (36%) present in the music videos is indicative of the cultural influences present in the way hip-hop culture is being worn in South Korea. Similarly, jewelry (42%) proved to be

important in Korean hip-hop visual culture. Almost half of the videos featured artists with jewelry such as chains, bulky rings, and gold or silver mouth grills. The jewelry chosen shows status, an important part of self-presentation in both hip-hop and Korean culture. An alteration of style must be done in order for Korean artists to balance the authenticity of home culture and hip-hop subculture. Part of Goffman's presentation of self focuses on the appearance of a performer in relation to identity. Appearance of a performer exists to assist in mood setting and portray factors such as status, state of being, and role as well as reinforcing information about gender, age, job, and more. According to Seo via Ha and Park (2011), "Korean youths are a materialistic generation and have a strong obsession with appearances. They spend a lot more than older generations, prefer foreign brands, place importance on looks, keep up with new trends, and express their identity through fashionable items and appearance" (25). While this information may be older, it has not seemed to decline any with the massive growth of the Korean fashion industry and the use of high-fashion clothing articles and well fitted suits that many Korean rap artists don in their music videos. The use of brands like Louis Vuitton and Chanel in hip-hop is not a norm in American hip-hop, therefore making a branch off to showcase the importance of high-fashion to Korean artists in their presentation of self. Adding to the importance of showing wealth, the presence of expensive cars (38%) set a certain tone in the music videos. There was a difference in the cars being used depending on the style of the artist. Range Rovers and Jeeps were the cars to have in music videos that featured a clothing aesthetic more similar to American hip-hop street wear. On the other hand, Lamborghini and Cadillac graced the sets of artists who chose to present themselves in more high fashion, bright, and flashy clothing.

The appropriation of Black hair styles (18%) was noticeable, but also complex. Some artists, such as Yoon Mi Rae, are half black and half Korean, thus preventing her from being considered an appropriator by her choice to wear her hair in microbraids. In other music videos that featured hairstyles that are historically related to the black community, there were more racially diverse casts, including black Koreans. The history of racism towards people of non-Asian descent has been very different in South Korea than in the United States. While this population is still not represented in Korean media, they do exist. South Korea is not as racially homogenous as it might appear to outsiders. When discussing the history of race and multiracial children in South Korea, Kim (2016) notes that “After gaining independence from Japan in 1945, and after the 1950-53 Korean War, a new racial project emerged, as there were many orphans and biracial Koreans born to Korean women and fathered by American soldiers. The new racial project now included skin color and physical features as determinants of a “pure” Korean race” (43). While the appropriation of hair-styles is occurring, it should not be viewed in the same way that it is in the United States. In the United States, the black population has been ridiculed, put down, fetishized, and turned away from jobs due to the racist idea that their hair is somehow less clean or professional. While this attitude is slowly changing, it does not negate the fact that when white American celebrities wear cornrows, micro braids, or alter their hair to become afro-like, they are praised as being trendy. Korean artists are using the hairstyles as a presentation of self in order to be more strongly linked to American hip-hop artists. The question is whether there is an awareness for these artists of the racism non-” pure” Koreans in their own country are facing due to darkness of skin tone instead of hair.

Considering the rate that tattoos showed up in the music videos (38%), there is a clash between Korean hip-hop culture and hegemonic ideas about tattoos. Tattoos have a long and criminalized history. Most research focuses on extreme body modification and tattoos as well as how tattoos fit into criminal activity. Treadwell points out that

Tattooing carries several medical risks, including the transmission of infectious diseases, and this might help to explain long-entrenched prejudices towards bearers of tattoos... Perhaps more importantly tattoos are used among some criminal subcultures, such as the Yakuza in Japan and white supremacist gangs in the USA, to show gang affiliation; they record an individual's personal history, accomplishments and convictions... (2014:67)

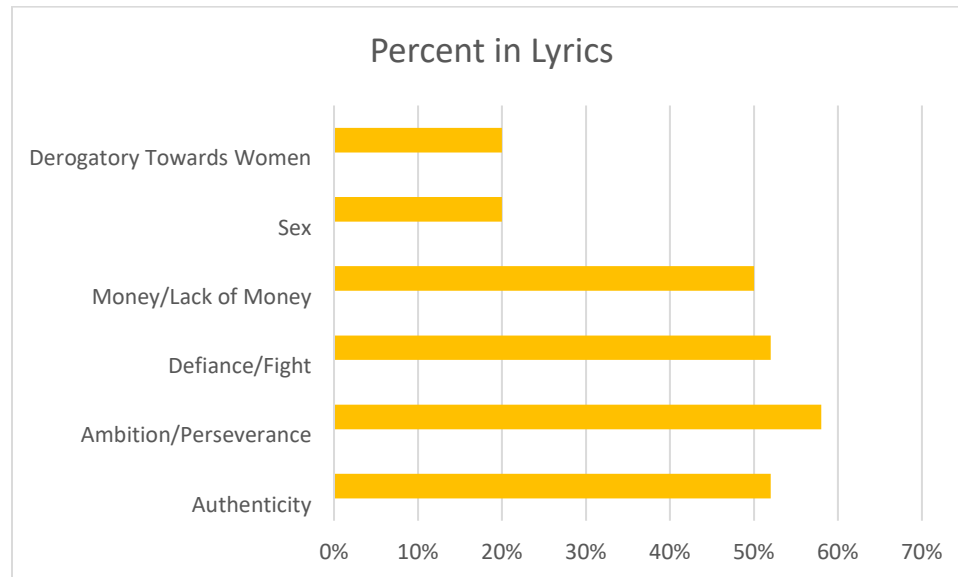
The attitudes that many societies have concerning tattoos have begun to change in recent decades, but when the shift began in South Korea is unclear. An article from twenty-eight years ago reflected a very strong anti-tattoo sentiment. Researcher Jong Ju Kim claimed that his study showed “high scores in items of psychopathic deviate and schizophrenia... [and that] this suggests that those with tattoos were impulsive, hostile and were prone to delinquent behavior” (1991:255). Tattooing in South Korea is not illegal, but only licensed medical doctors can practice the art (AFP 2015). The Korean Medical Association spokeswoman Ahn So-Young is cited as saying that it is a medical procedure because it is invasive due to the fact that the skin is punctured and bleeds (AFP 2015). Despite this, there are many tattoo shops in Seoul, the capital city, and there has been a growth of Korean celebrities from all professions sporting their tattoos openly. The 38% of music videos that featured tattoos, sometimes very heavily, indicate that the association with organized crime and gangs is declining. However, hip-hop artists are still known to have tattooed parts of their bodies blurred out when they appear on television due to remaining censorship laws.

The presence of smoking (16%) and alcohol (26%) was lower than anticipated in the music videos. According to Park et al. (2009), “For years, South Korea has had one of the highest levels of tobacco use among males in the world, but a steady decline has been observed recently” (657). There may be heavy censorship of cigarettes on television in South Korea, but this does not extend to the internet where these music videos are being released. The alcohol that was most commonly seen in the music videos was soju, an important socio cultural staple. Soju ranges in alcohol content from 18% to 45%, with the most common proof at 20% (Harkness, 2013:13). The choice to use soju instead of large quantities of beer or hard liquor is a way the hip-hop visual culture has been modified to represent a more authentic Korean self. The presence of these substances was merely a background characteristic in most of these videos, much like the sexy women interacting with or dancing behind the rap artist in 32% of them. The women (and occasionally men) that featured as background characters and dancers all played the traditional roles that are seen in music videos. They are love or lust interests, partners who had mistreated the artists in the past, friends and crew, or simply there to promote visual sex appeal. Although a number of videos featured scantily clad women, they still conformed to Korean cultural norms. The women showed as much leg as possible, but still had their chests and upper backs covered in a show of modesty as is culturally appropriate. The balance of hip-hop culture and Korean culture in the clothing choices on backup dancers, while small, is yet another example of how Korean MCs have altered the American hip-hop trends to fit their own culture in order to provide a more authentic presentation of self.

IV. LYRIC ANALYSIS

To the uncritical eye, hip-hop culture and rap specifically may seem the same no matter where it exists. The subculture of hip-hop has trends that follow it to every location as discussed previously with a focus on presentation of self. Despite the similarities, the question of whether culture is affecting the lyrical themes of rap music in South Korea is worth looking at. Culture affects everything it touches, from the way people act to the selling of slip-ons instead of buckled shoes in cultures that take off their shoes when entering a house. It would seem that music would be affected as well, but the ways it is changed may not be expected. The male MC I interviewed spoke about the way being Korean influences his style in the following way. He said, “Since I’m Korean American, I obviously have a different experience from, let’s say, a black person or a white person and whether I know it or not... it’s always going to affect my music. ... I try not to write lyrics specifically for... Asian people, but sometimes when I write, there might be... I might slip in a reference of... Korean culture... or sometimes I might say like, a Korean word when I write” (Personal Interview, December 2, 2016). This MC’s view of the creative process and how culture can intervene is relevant to the discussion of lyrical analysis.

Table 2. Most Recognized Themes in Song Lyrics



The themes that arose most commonly in the lyrics included pride/skills (68%), ambition/perseverance (58%), authenticity (52%), defiance/fight (52%), and money/lack of money (50%). Despite cultural references and nuances throughout the music, there did not seem to be any major shift in content from the stereotypical rap content seen in the United States. While the main themes may not have differed greatly, the lyrics have been globalized in a show of hybridity. The instrumentals for the backing track of songs differs from what is the norm in the United States. There are often influences of other genres included in Korean rap. Some examples are classical and jazz. The use of alternative beats from the American standard shows that MCs in Korea are altering hip-hop to suit cultural ideas of good music.

Authenticity, ambition, and defiance are all culturally shaped in unique ways. While authenticity is often a hot topic of conflict between fans and MCs themselves brag about it often lyrically, there does not seem to be a set indicator of what it means to be “real”. As indicated by an interviewee, “the youth have some degree [of]... pre-existing

knowledge that ... at the end of the day, this is just like a fantasy. ... rap is... an exaggerated fantasy, it's art". He continued on to say that "It's not like how it was thirty years ago where like... you get caught lackin' or you get caught lookin' like you're not real or anything like that... maybe you're not authentic or something [but] it doesn't matter as long as it sounds good" (Personal Interview, 2016). This art form stresses a sense of realness while presenting an extreme persona of toughness. There are not large amounts of street crime in South Korea, thus leading doubters to claim Koreans cannot know the hardship that many Black American MCs face. The trials of youth may not be the same in each country and culture, but this leads to variety in the way artists can present themselves. Dok2 presents the stress he faces in the song "Still On My Way" with the lyrics, "my frowning eyebrows/ the worries pile up in between/ I can't shake it off and it gets entangled again/ beaten by works/ now I don't even know what my dream is/ with a confused head... I have to eat if I want to live/ I was born as a man on earth. I can't accept poverty" (Lee 2015). The costs of living continue to rise in many countries around the world, South Korea not excluded. Living in cities like Seoul is notoriously expensive, but much like California and New York in the United States, being in the entertainment industry requires living in a certain location. Despite anti-poverty policies, the MCs currently in their mid-to-late twenties and thirties grew up during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. This contributes to what some scholars have called the materialistic and money focused attitude of many young Koreans. MCs throughout the sample talk about both having money for themselves and their families and the fear of not enough money. They say they work constantly and have no time for fun in order to survive, but "don't wanna work like a machine and be broken" (Lim 2015) anymore.

Poverty shame and a cultural importance on work ethic informs the artist's choice to stress concepts like hard work, authenticity, and money. The cultural importance of hard work is also how skills are shown. Artists are sure to cite how hard they work, as is the case in "Recipe" by Luizy and Flowsik when they say "Putting in the work without the party", and "So Busy" by Kitti B and Jace with the line "It's heaps of work day after day/ I want a break, but that's a big dream/ Can't have hobbies anymore/ Money comes in only to go out right away". These are unique cultural markers, along with references to specific places and people in South Korea, that make Korean rap a unique hybrid.

There was a presence of linguistic themes that were seen less in lyrics but highly represented in the music videos. These include sex (20%) and derogatory language concerning women (20%) in the lyrics. Although sex appeal and women as sex items was represented in 32% of the music videos, lyrics only referred to this topic in 20%. This is a dynamic that reflects marketing as influence in artistry. Some artists have very little if any control over the image their company creates for them, leading to conflict of audio and visual representation. An example of this is the contrast of the song "Wave" by Microdot feat. Luizy and Flowsik. The lyrics make no mention of sex or women, focusing more on skills and reputation, yet there are sexy and notably silent women in the background.

V. FORUM ANALYSIS

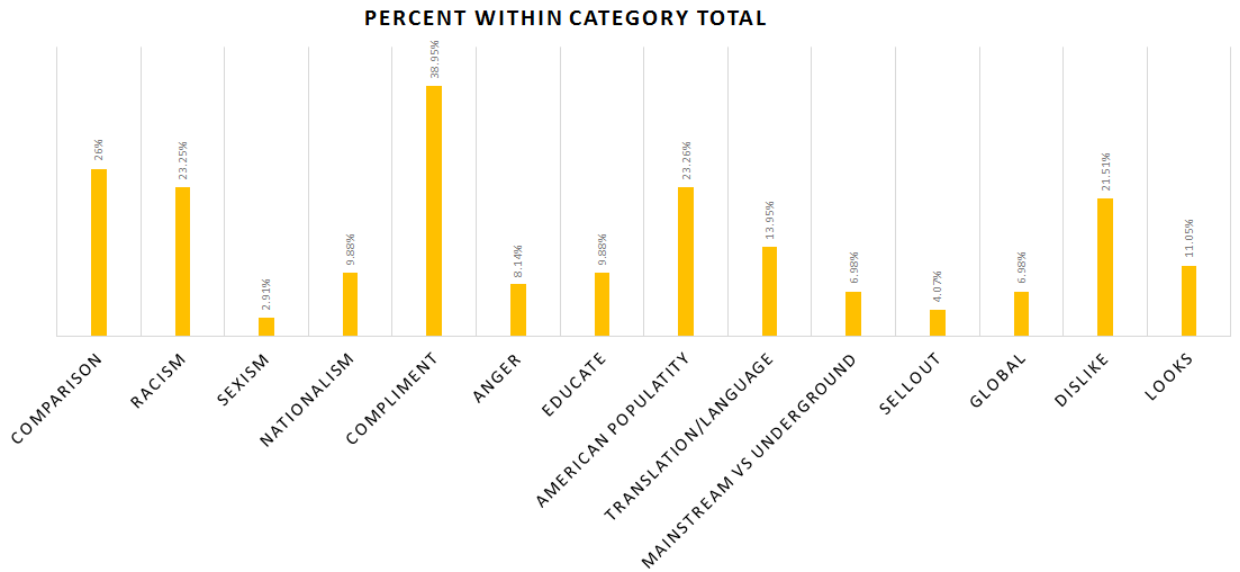
Introduction of Racism Online

The topic of race online has been discussed extensively by a few scholars, but most of the focus lies on the way that white extremist groups utilize the internet in attempts to spread their message and connect to like-minded people around the country and globe. Daniels (2009) analyzes this and more in a series of essays and books that helped inform this writing. Daniels' discussion of imagined threat from the unfamiliar that extremist groups often perceive is linked to the notion of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006). In his discussion of imagined communities and nationalism, Anderson's description fits the concept of a Global Hip-Hop Nation (GHHN) (Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook 2009) well. He says that communities are "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006:6). Just as the GHHN consists of people who will never truly know of each other's existence, the global hip-hop and rap community has become an imagined community. As all nations exist though, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006:7). This inequality that exists below the smooth surface of a supposedly united music nation is what is seen amongst the data collected. Intersectionality occurs between racism and American nationalism and the GHHN. On this note, this section of the study is looking at whether there is a perceived threat of "the other" towards Korean hip-hop from western fan bases online.

Recognized Themes

There were a total of 14 themes recognized throughout the accumulated comments as seen in Figure (1). These were narrowed down to nine categories of note, two of which I exclude for reasons discussed below. The themes that most commonly arise in the comments are compliment (39%), dislike (22%), racism (23%), comparison (26%), American popularity (23%), nationalism (10%), education (10%), translation/language (14%), and looks (11%).

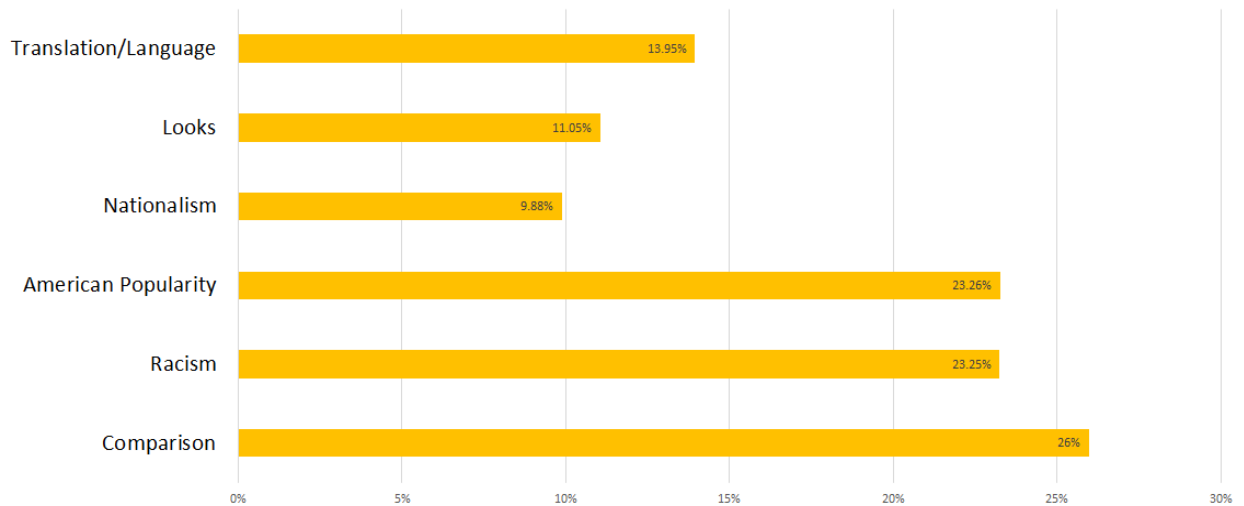
Table 3. Total Themes Identified in Search



Like and Dislike in Consideration

It is important to consider the way people choose to talk about their likes and dislikes when looking at the percentages that make up the categories of compliment and dislike. Often, a compliment is more straightforward in nature, but the way a person chooses to say that they dislike a certain artist or song can be presented in multiple ways. Dislike is presented as anger, racism, sexism, nationalism, negative comparisons, discussions of mainstream versus underground rap, accusations of being a sell-out, and derogatory language about physical appearances. For this reason, there will not be any focus put on the amount of distinct categories like and dislike found in the comments, and the focus will instead be on the types of dislike that are shown.

Table 4. Narrowed Themes Identified from Samples



American Popularity and Comparison

The categories of American popularity and comparison are combined in this discussion due to the large amount of overlap that occurs throughout the comments that feature these themes. Ethnocentrism pervades much of the forum discussions. There is a focus on the ability of the Korean artists presented to do well in the United States, reflecting the attitude that talent is only real if it has been recognized by the American music industry. This focus reflects in comparisons to American artists and arguments about authenticity. Although complementary in nature, the comment about a Korean MC saying that “his rapping skills are literally comparable to Eminem’s. This is insane.” cuts out the ability of artists to stand on their own identity, forever being compared to American rap artists. This is also exhibited across rap as a genre in which any female MC’s talent is compared to a male’s. American rap being stolen is a popular vein of discussion in the forums as well. One person simply left the comment, “All I have to say is these guys just jack the styles of the current rappers hot out right now and just use korean lyrics”, while another added in the following input. The commenter decidedly stated that “my sister listens to K Rap all the time. Majority of them sound like ripoffs of Big American Hip hop artists”. An ethnocentric viewpoint, this statement adds to the theoretical idea of the perceived threat to community. The American rap community are supposedly having their music “jacked” and translated into other languages and cultures. This attitude takes away from the ability of youth outside of the United States to experience hardship and use an art form such as rap. The overall sentiment of many commenters concerning authenticity and a lack of it for any hip-hop artists outside of the United States can be summed up in this forum post:

Anybody can mimick a beat that sounds like some hardcore gangsta rap music. But they weren't brought up in the ghetto and they haven't sold drugs, been to jail or even held a gun for that matter. ... At least rappers in US have some rap-sheet to establish themselves as so-called-gangsta-rap.

This point of view is interesting considering that many American rap artists do not have the experiences the commenter mentioned either. This can be seen with popular MCs such as Romeo Miller, Riff Raff, Tyga, Drake (Canadian), Kanye West, and Jermaine Dupri who grew up in middle to upper class homes. These artists are rarely called inauthentic due to their upbringing, although there was backlash at first for some, and it is interesting to consider the blanket statement above concerning U.S. rappers in general.

That being said, there are also people who stood up for non-American artists through comments such as, "People always act like music is just American and all the rest are just that, the "rest". No, you don't have to be American to be good". There are positive attitudes found amongst the comments, leaving a sense of hope for the future of non-American artists in the United States and West in general.

Racism

There are multiple ways that racism is presented throughout the forum comments. The first of which is racism related through sexuality and concepts of masculinity. Many of the comments used derogatory homosexual slang to refer to the Korean males in the music videos shown in the forum threads. This includes comments such as, "they sleep with each other" and "-bunch of fags acting gangster inside kia Carnival lol". Comments such as this present the common stereotype that Asian males are "effeminate and gay" and therefore cannot be seen as "tough and straight".

The stereotyping of race by jobs occurs as well in comments reflecting sentiment like “It’s just so hard to take them serious in hip-hop, considering their history, we like them making cars and computers and stuff we need them more in that feild”. Opinions like this are common both online and off, limiting what Asians and Asian-Americans who see this attitude may feel they are capable of pursuing in interests in fear of being called fake. This discomfort with Asians moving outside of the normal stereotype is reflected as well by the statement “korean rap scene will always be the strangest thing to me. Its like australian mexican salsa music”. The pushing of racial stereotype boundaries and the aggressive and negative response back reflects a perceived threat from said forum participants.

Racism through a complete lack of political, social, and historical knowledge also occurs in interesting ways. Many big name American music artists have collaborated with Korean hip-hop and rap artists over the years. This includes artists such as Snoop, Missy Elliot, Skrillex, Warren G, Riff Raff, OG Maco, and more. These big music names do not seem to feel a sense of discomfort when working with non-American artists, and behind the scene videos of the creation of such music shows camaraderie that transcends language barriers. Having said this, some American rap music fans do not seem to share the same sentiment. One such conversation began with the initial comment, “Warren G producing for Korean artists now?” and was followed up with the response “he a prisoner of war OP/free my boy warren g.” The term OP here is slang for over-powered. Lack of distinction between North and South Korea is possibly the case presented here. Another example of a lack of cultural awareness is the “well-meaning” statement saying, “Oh my. Even Korea has been infected with Western materialism and sexuality. Total rubbish.

Korea needs to maintain its traditional music and culture.” I am curious as to what the commenter means by “traditional” and what exact time period they believe they are referring to. It seems relevant to mention that this forum user is likely from the United Kingdom judging by their use of the slang term “rubbish”. This shows that the sentiment being portrayed on these largely American based websites are not solely from the United States but other Western nations as well.

Paternalism, Nationalism, and the Essentialism of Language

The theme of visual looks was narrowed into a discussion of appreciation versus fetishism. A strong paternalistic attitude is expressed through the demasculinization of Korean male rap artists. This manifests in different ways. One example is a comment saying “I know Zico’s tryna be all swag but he still ends up coming off cute XD”. This attitude is well-meaning and not intended to be derogatory, but it does reinforce the idea that Asian men are not masculine or capable of aggression. The paternalistic attitude is also seen in the post, “the quiett cute ass ‘specially when he speaks english. Gah!”. The fetishization of Asians speaking English is interesting. Because there is the stereotype that Asians cannot speak “American style” English, they are often perceived as fans by words like cute and adorable simply by their ability to speak another language. Similarly towards female MCs is the sentiment that Asian women are docile and non-aggressive. This is reflected through the statement, “I love Glime so much. She looks like a porcelain doll but has this rough and tough voice and unique style”. This is meant as a compliment, as many comments on looks are, but it asserts the dangerous and all too popular idea that Asian women are like dolls, therefore objectifying them to a plaything role. The fact that the netizen points out her tough voice means that it was not expected and went against the

stereotypical norms for Asian women. Stereotypes being broken often make people uncomfortable, thus leading them to attempt to mentally re-categorize people to find a fit. This othering was accomplished when talking about the artist Dok2 when a fan said, “I see some his before pics when he was young, maybe that’s why he keep his his short hair cuz his natural hair is curly, that makes him look pure Latino lol”. Dok2 does not fit the standard stereotype of an Asian with straight, black hair, therefore forcing out of the mental category of Asian. Although that particular artist is racially mixed, Korean; Spanish; and Filipino, this does not take away from the way that him having curly hair was seen as a marker of otherness.

Nationalism was portrayed in a very aggressive manner in the data collected. One of the first comments of this nature that I came across insisted that the initial poster “keep that foreign scum out my ears and my country!!!”, perhaps not considering the fact that they chose to take the time to listen to and watch said video, at least partially. Another comment continued the idea of country invasion by saying “these koreans infiltrated the unites states music market”. This sense of extreme ethnocentrism in the form of nationalism is present in the post saying, “gay or not, their behavior is weird, we have a strong western culture that proved to be successful over all other nations, adapting their weirdo shit is a step backwards”. Once again being referred to as gay, the attitude presented is one of superiority and disgust over anything that appears to be non-western. The concept of western versus non-western seems to be of great importance for many, showing that there is a large educational gap in understanding the constant flow of information, styles, technology, and culture not just from the United States outward but from other world nations into the United States. English is presented as a supreme

language in music by the comment that “they can try all they want but no other language is going to overtake or even equal English rap. Even our slang, just ****ing works a billion times better”. This pro-English sentiment is reflected further in the next section as well.

Language is a theme that has been interwoven with several of the topics already discussed. It seems to hold a particular place of importance for identity and is seen as an all or nothing category for whether people enjoy music or not. There are listeners who do not think understanding a language is essential to enjoying music, and may even be encouraged to learn new languages because of it. The forums and comment sections were full of fans asking for translations to be released for more recent songs. Many even shared that they had started learning Korean such as this listener saying “I have been listening to nothing but KHipHop for the past 3days. I’m new to this & i love it about to learn Korean so i dont have to look up lyrics lol”. This positivity and interest in learning a new language shows an openness to other cultures that is not seen in other comments. On the other side of positivity there are people who feel disgusted and even threatened by music with lyrics that they are not capable of understanding. Some listeners feel entitled to having an opinion on the matter of language because of social relations as seen in the comment, “How can anybody have an opinion on this if they dont speak korean? This proves nobody cares about nothing but the visuals and beat. This shit looks like a spoof of what they think hiphop is. My wife is korean so I see this clown shit fairly often”. The fact that his wife is Korean acts as a false supporter of his opinion, as though he is an expert simply because of this relationship. This vein of discussion is particularly unique considering that people go to opera performances in languages they do not understand

and appreciate it nonetheless. The focus on American popularity and the tie to language is also expressed with the statement, “NO major urban station is going to play some **** that’s not even in English unless it’s patois or maybe a little spanish”. While it is unclear where this person is, the possibility that they are from a place like New Orleans due to their inclusion of the term patois is possible. They claim that mainstream stations will play songs with a little bit of Spanish, but the United States in the past decade has expanded its popular music to include songs spoken in complete Spanish by artists like Pitbull on pop radio stations. The stereotype that Asians are incapable of speaking English with an American accent is also reflected in this section. One comment claimed that “If they not speaking english or at least spanGLISH I’m not listening and if their accent gross I’m not listening”. The mentioning of a “gross” accent shows that there is a preconceived expectation for people from outside of the United States to be incapable of learning an American or Western accent.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hip-hop and cultural interactions can be examined through the lenses of glocalization and imagined communities. This research exhibits a growing need to look at how people engaging in popular media are viewing their place in the world. The collaboration of artists around the world continues to grow in popularity, but fans are not necessarily jumping on the bandwagon. Identity, authenticity, and nationalism play a part in the less than enthusiastic responses to glocalization. Ethnocentric attitudes from the global west are indicative of remaining racist attitudes. Analyzing Korean rap enables sociologists to analyze how South Koreans are adopting and adapting a musical art form and look at the type of detrimental backlash Korean Americans could be facing as a result.

Through the music video analysis it is possible to look at the ways South Korean rap artists have glocalized hip-hop imagery to suit cultural norms and standards. While many aspects remained similar to American hip-hop, the variety of fashion and accessory choices shows that dominant cultural trends affect sub-cultures in unique ways. A content analysis of lyrics indicated that, while major themes appearing in rap music between America and South Korea may be similar, the reasons behind each theme is different. The lived experiences of different cultures create a unique voice and purpose for each bar of lyrics written. There will always be songs written purely for popularity, but relatable culture has to be recognized in some form in order for music to build a fandom. For example, guns and violence were not spoken about in Korean rap because they are not a common part of South Korean life. The importance of hard work, the desire to have and

show off money, and a frustration with social expectations and authenticity were all presented through a cultural lens that would not appear the same in any other country.

The forum analysis allowed for a glimpse of how racism and nationalism within the United States and west in general are creating a barrier against Korean-Americans and Asians in general. Because this population is often viewed as the model minority, they are not taken seriously, emasculated, fetishized, and socially blocked from sharing experiences of hardship. The spirit of hip-hop is no longer being limited by race or nationality, and the literature should reflect as much. If more focus is put on the ways people outside of the United States empower themselves through music, a stronger understanding of other peoples can occur through shared experience of arts. The arts and music have always been forces capable of connecting people regardless of language barriers. The issue that currently exists, due to resistance against music associated with other, puts communities growing in diversity at a risk for alienation of the foreign. Music is just one step towards community relations that push people past what they are familiar with. The global music community exists but there are still dividing identities that prevent a cohesive social connection.

This research contributed to an understanding of the role music, and hip-hop specifically, plays in identity creation and the maneuvering of imagined communities. I propose that further research be conducted analyzing the ways music and art communities, both imagined and real, contribute to concepts of nationalism through a lens of authenticity. As I proceed to my doctoral degree, I anticipate continuing this thread of global analysis.

APPENDIX SECTION

A. SONG LIST38

B. FORUM LIST.....40

APPENDIX A: SONG LIST

Artist	Song	Year
Skrillex feat. Diplo, CL & G-Dragon	Dirty Vibe	2013
CL	The Baddest Female	2013
CL	Hello Bitches	2015
Cheetah	My Number	2015
Jessi	Ssenunni	2015
Jimin & J. Don	GOD	2015
MFBTY feat. EE, Rap Monster & Dino-J	Buckubucku	2015
Paloalto	Good Times	2015
ZICO feat. Penomeco & The Quiett	Yes or No	2015
Dok2 feat. Zion T.	Still On My Way	2015
Masta Wu feat. Dok2 & Bobby	Come Here	2014
Epik High feat. Beenzino, B.I, Verbal Jint, Mino & Bobby	Born Hater	2014
Mino	I'm Him	2014
The Quiett	Your World	2016
Beenzino	Life In Color	2016
Beenzino	Break	2015
G2 feat. B-Free, Okasian, Reddy, Huckleberry P, Paloalto, Sway D & DJ Djanga	Shikgoo	2015
G- Dragon	One of A Kind	2012
The Quiett feat. Dok2	2 Chainz & Rollies	2013
KittiB feat. Verbal Jint	Doin' Good	2016
KittiB and Jace	So Busy	2016
Jace feat. Kisum	Not Enough	2015
Jessi, Microdot, Dumbfoundead, Lyriks	K.B.B.	2016
Simon Dominic	Simon Dominic	2015
San E, Mad Clown	Sour Grapes	2015
Kisum	2 Beer	2016
C Jamm	Illusion	2015
Mad Clown feat. Jinsil	Fire	2015
Rap Monster	Joke	2015

BewhY	Shalom	2016
Loco feat. GRAY and DJ Pumpkin	Respect	2015
San E feat. Bumkey	Body Language	2014
Miryo feat. GaIn	Queen	2015
Tymee	Crazy Fate	2012
JuB & Ji Dam Yuk	My Sympathy	2015
Lucky J	No Love	2016
Gilme	Success (Don't KILL My Vibe)	2014
BTS Suga	Never Mind	2015
Hyolin, Zico & Paloalto	Dark Panda	2015
Vasco	All Black	2015
E-Sens	Back in Time	2014
Verbal Jint feat. Taeyeon	If the World Was Perfect	2015
Verbal Jint & Sanchez feat. Bumkey	Doin' It	2015
JKyun	BadX	2015
Yoon MiRae	JamCome On Baby	2016
Beenzino feat. YDG	January	2016
Luizy and Flowsik	Recipe	2016
Microdot Feat Ravi and Lil Boi	Wave	2016
Iron	System	2016
B-Free	James Bond	2016

APPENDIX B: FORUM LIST

1. Forums.soompi.com
2. Futureproducers.com/forums
3. Kanyetothe.com/forum
4. Rapnation.net/forums
5. Onehallyu.com
6. Youtube.com

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