EVOKE

About the Ethnographer

I am an undergraduate student in Anthropology and Latino/a studies. This semester (and this class) has been an awakening for me because I have learned so much, developed new interests, and gotten to know some brilliant professors. I look forward to going to grad school in a few years and would like to get into the History of Consciousness program at UCSC. I am also looking at a few American Studies programs.

A Document

http://www.odos.uiuc.edu/aacc/programs/asiantation.asp

The Asian America Cultural Center puts on a program called Asiantation, as well as the accompanying booklet. This has been going on for 13 years, and is designed to introduce the any new student to the UIUC Asian American Community. The first page of the booklet explains that "Asiantation" is not simply a play on words for "Orientation", but that the name asserts an identity counter to that which has been traditionally been given to Asians. Under the explanation for the name "Asiantation", the book briefly defines who might fit into the category "Asian American".

An anonymous poem clarifies why the name Asiantation is used in place of Orientation. The first three stanzas address stereotypes of Asian people; "head bowed", "model minority", "Lotus blossom", and "ching chong" are among the phrases used. These correspond with the racial stereotypes that Asians are submissive, exotic and hypersexualized, speak and intelligible language, and that they are on the "whiter" end of the racial hierarchy as compared to other racialized groups. The next stanza of the poem states: "Oriental is a white man's word", and the poem proceeds to identify racial stereotypes. The poem crescendos at the end, and shouts "WE ARE NOT Oriental... The time has come to look at who gave the name," thus renouncing the term "Oriental" and self-naming themselves "Asian".

The poem uses language to assert agency and claim a particular identity. It uses the plural "we" to self-name the entire group, and to counter the white hegemony. Oriental is the "white" way of referring to Asian, and it intrinsically calls to mind racial stereotypes and unjust power relations between the two groups. In order to understand the difference between Asiantation and Orientation, one must acknowledge that racial stereotypes do exist, and that Asian Americans must negotiate unjust power situations. The word Oriental has a colonial and ethnocentric connotation of something which is exotic, precious, savage, or inferior, and thus ties into a negative racial stereotype. On the same page of the poem, the booklet says that "Asian American is a term of empowerment." It then says that the important part of the term is that it affirms one's status as American, and thus "not a foreigner". This assumes that the person considers his or her self to be American. The last paragraph describes an Asian American as anyone who is American, but also as “having origins in any of the original peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.” However, I have learned that Asian
American is a complex term. In order to explain, I will use an example. My roommate is Korean, but she was born in LA when her father was finishing his PhD. They returned to Korea, and lived there for over 10 years. In high school, my roommate went to study in the U.S., and eventually started University at UIUC. Her mother has since moved here so that her younger brother can attend Middle School. I asked my roommate "Do you consider yourself Korean? American? Korean American?" and she does not know. She explains that she is not American, because she was raised in Korean, speaks Korean often, and has many Korean friends who are new to the US. But she is not Korean because she was born and lives in the US, has many non-Korean friends, and does not "act" typically Korean. It is a complex identity, which cannot easily be boxed into the term "Korean American" or "Asian American".

The Asiantation booklet counters the belief that Asian people are "Oriental", which can be summed up by racial stereotypes and which was given to them by an outside group. It makes a claim that "Asian American" is a self-given name, which allows their "voice" to be accounted for. At the same time, it is problematic to simplify who can be considered "Asian American" by their terms. It is a complex identity, which obviously should be explored beyond the scope of this welcoming booklet.

Files:
asiantation_2006.pdf (Tue 01/30/2007 1:14)

EXPLORE
Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
How does a particular "style" distinguish the Other? How is style informed by pop culture (Korean drama), class and gender?

An Early Question (I revised it...)
How important to Korean Americans is a uniquely Korean visual aesthetic? What is considered desirable "look" or "style"? How do Korean Americans present their body to the world? This refers to clothing, hair, makeup, body image, etc. I have been told that "Korean Koreans" look different than "Korean Americans", and that there are clear aesthetic markers of different groups of Korean Americans or Koreans IN the U.S. (again it is difficult to label these groups). I would like to explore this!

2/19
I like the idea about comparing perceptions, about how my original idea was broad, and that I would probably get many specific examples of how, for example, Korean Americans identify themselves through style, but only end up with a vague picture.

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
Future Plan
It is assumed that style plays a critical role in "intra-ethnic othering." Why? Is this because one group feels that it is superior? Is it influenced by "traditional" values? This is the direction I would go with this inquiry. Ultimately, I would like to see if style is a way in which people manipulate and control their appearance in order to conform or not conform to specific standards or values. I would interview more people; Korean and Korean American men and women. I would also include other smaller groups, such as the stylish and studious groups of Koreans.

I have been thinking about implications of style on "intra-ethnic othering" but have neglected to think as much about how other aspects, like how religion, racism, and how Koreans value education play into style. This really came out in the interview with Wayne Song, when he brought up the importance of school and how this contributed to him growing up "not caring about appearance". I think I will ask more questions pertaining to these topics. Also, I will try to interview more male Korean Americans, and more Koreans who consider themselves "trendy". I would like to talk to those involved in the Korean church, and those who feel like outsiders to the Korean church, such as one of the women whom Kelly Chong interviewed in her article about Korean Christians. How does the desire/need to conform play into style? How does this relate to ethnic identity or becoming "American"? I am realizing that the topic of style is one, which can span all of these broader issues.

My project has nothing to do with race and phenotype kind of things, so I want to make that clear in the questions I pose. I will use the words "style" and explain that I mean the way in which someone presents their body, be it clothing, hair, makeup, the way one "carries" oneself, or how ever the person wants to interpret style. I will focus on Korean American's and Koreans perception of Korean Americans and Koreans. I do not want to focus solely on the differences between their style, but on things that "mark" each style. However, it will be interesting if a Korean American is perceived as a Korean American because he or she is NOT displaying something that is more Korean (Does that make sense?). In order to do this, I will interview the people I know from classes, work, social stuff, etc, and try to represent Koreans and Korean Americans...and every (Korean) person in between. I expect that there will be almost hostile remarks from some people about the "Other"; this will play into "intra-ethnic othering". There will probably be some gender issues. Also, from what I can infer from previous readings, it will be interesting to hear what Koreans and Korean Americans say about other groups of Asians, because it seems that people often define style as being "not like" another group's style.

An Initial Plan

How do Korean Americans' perceive Koreans? How do they tell who is Korean just by looking? How does it help Korean Americans to create their own identity? Ultimately, how does this play into what Pyke and Dang call "intra-ethnic othering"?

I would begin by talking to Korean Americans from class and outside of class broad questions about how they know someone is Korean just by looking. This question would have to be vague, because I do not want to influence how the person with whom I am
talking categorized or describes the group. Once I have talked to people would try to map out the characteristics that people describe. I would also ask them to describe Korean American style and characteristics. Apart from interviewing, I would observe Koreans and Korean Americans in public places where both groups are present. I would note how they interact, as well as different style markers and characteristics.

For this question I am assuming there are two groups: Korean and Korean American.

**OBSERVE**

*What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?*

**An interview with Wayne Song (pseudonym)**

First I began by explaining the class and my project to Wayne. Then I asked him to just talk a little about style without really prompting him about anything in particular. I used a recorder and than transcribed the interview. Wayne has been in the U.S. since 2002. He transferred from a University in Korea to Parkland, and then to the U of I.

Wayne: the difference between um... "twinkies" and just us, FOBS-

Anona: So you are saying you are FOB?

Wayne: Yes I am!

Anona: Ok

(I did not prompt Wayne to use these terms. I told him that my project had to do with Koreans' perceptions of Korean American style and vice versa, and then he just launched into talking. He rather proudly self-identified with "FOB" right away.)

Wayne: Umm, I don't know, if we are talking about style, I guess it's not only about what we wear or what we...how we dress, but there's a more deeper difference just than what we wear. I -this is my personal opinion- I feel really uncomfortable to hang out with real Korean Americans, because we are so different. Even though we're all Asian. For me, if I talk to Korean Americans I don't feel like talking with a Korean person.

(Here we could have launched into a discussion of other differences he felt between Koreans and Korean Americans, but I wanted to talk a bit more about style.)

Wayne: I'll talk about how those two groups ['"whitewashed" vs."FOBS"] are different, how they are different in appearances. I see it as Korean Americans are more typical frat-fraternity people in the way they dress. They care more about their--they work out more than we do. They dress more like Americans. And opposed to that, Koreans prefer to be just skinny. Is this on the topic?
Anona: Oh yea! Tell me more about the ideal body type?

Wayne: The idea of the ideal body is totally different. So Korean people just prefer to be skinny, they don't really care about being muscled up. Just some details.... we, Korean people care more about specific items that they wear. They pay more attention to what kind of clothes they buy, and how they dress up their hair. Even guys. And what kind of shoes they wanna wear. They pay more attention to that. That's a big difference--that's a major difference. Korean people--not about all Korean people--they really like wearing expensive stuff. It seems like many Korean people, many Korean guys, think that that represents their... there are some people that really think that if they wear expensive stuff they are a cooler person than others. And I don't think any Korean Americans are like that.

Anona: (surprised) Really?

Wayne: It doesn't seem to me, not as strongly as like FOBS.

Anona: Do you think this might have to do with different class issues or with Korean pop culture, or with any other things like that?

Wayne: I think they are related, but I don't know, because basically thats how it is in Korea too, and they are just doing the same thing over here. So it could be related to maybe Korean pop culture, but I don't know...

(What Wayne said about body image recalls my earlier interview with Michelle Kwon and what she said about Koreans' desire to be skinny. Wayne seemed to consider Korean pop culture to be an entire realm on its own, which does relate to style, but is also its own particular genre.)

Wayne: One other thing that I think is really interesting, is among the Koreans who just came over here to study, there are people like who we just talked about, but there is another group who just concentrate on studying. They are more dedicated to actual classes and stuff, and the style of those people is obviously different. It seems like those types of people, which I think I am part of, don't really care about how they appear to other people. They just want to make sure that they succeed in all the classes they are taking, so what they wear is not really a big issue. They just want to make sure that... they are just um, maybe this is just Korean culture, but dressing up nicely in regular basis and paying a lot of attention to that like, parents just don't like that because they think you are paying too much attention to that side and you're not paying attention to your school work. So that's sort of the environment I was grown up in, and I think a lot of people who came for studying here have grown up in the same environment and under the same influence. So those kind of people do not really care about their style. I think there is a really strong contrast between those two groups among the Korean people here.

Anona: I know when I walk through the engineering quad and through the computer science quad, everyone disappears except for engineers and the computer science people.
I mean, it’s all ethnic groups and everything, but it’s the type of people you are talking about. They look totally different, and I feel out of place. It's not like I dress nicely all the time, but I pay attention to what I wear. Would you say that this group of Koreans might identify with this universal not caring about what they are wearing? Or is it a particular Korean way of not caring about what they are wearing?

Wayne: Oh I think so…it's not just a Korean thing. But I think it's maybe more---that phenomenon--is maybe more distinct among Koreans because of the home education that I just told you about. That type of influence is much stronger among Korean homes. I don't have any basis for saying this...I'm guessing that it is because it really was back in Korea.

(This part of the interview was the most interesting to me, because it related style to education, which I had not thought about previously. First, Wayne distinguishes two groups of Koreans within the "FOB" group: the more stylish Koreans, and the more studious Koreans. He self-identifies with the more studious group. Wayne relates his not caring about style to the importance places on school in his home life. School was emphasized as an important use of time, and appearances were considered to be a more frivolous use of time. Wayne seems to equate dedication to education with success in life; this is in tune with many of the articles we have read in class. Now I wonder what the attitudes of the more stylish Koreans is toward school and education? Do these students not feel that education is necessary for success in life? Is style used as a way of defying "traditional" values about education?)

Wayne: I think one thing that I notice about...well, I didn't notice this before I came here, but after coming here, Korean people, like the trendy Korean people, are really cutting edge. They want to get the newest stuff that comes out, but that also makes them end up wearing all the same stuff. That is definitely more evident among the Korean people than among the Americans. If there is one brand that is regarded to be hot, than everyone is gonna wear that. I think even Korean people know that they end up wearing all the same stuff, but they still do that. And that’s probably because--this is just my opinion--maybe because by being stylish what they want to do is not to express themselves, but just to be one of the cooler people. Instead of expressing their own style they just want to get the good stuff.

Anona: Does this create an elite group of stylish students where they kinda want to fit into this group?

Wayne: Yea…I mean, that kind of trend separates people, but I don't think one group is "elite" . I don't think it's anything like that, because some people think its funny. They just laugh at it. You guys are all wearing the same stuff. It's funny. I don't think anyone is going to call that "elite". It's just ...people with different styles.

(Wayne notes the stylish group as conforming to rules set by what they think is trendy. He seems to show here his not caring attitude about style when he says that he thinks it is funny that these students wear the same thing. By caring so much about how they look
the stylish Koreans all end up looking the same, and this is slightly ironic for a group who spends so much time and energy on their appearances. I got the impression that Wayne saw this as kind of frivolous and silly, and that he does not want to conform to any group but also does not want to care about his appearance much. Should I add that when I talked to Wayne, there was nothing about him that seemed to mark him as particularly Korean, American, trendy, nerdy, or whatever category one wants to talk about. He seemed to not spend time on his hair, like the Korean guys he talked about earlier, but was wearing a yellow and black cap that did not have a logo on it.)

An Interview with Michelle Kwon

This interview took place for a couple of hours, but I only transcribed the parts that pertained most to my topic. Michelle also talked openly about her Korean mother, gender roles, domestic violence, Korean small business owners, drugs, sex, family...She was open and easy to talk to, and was not afraid to voice her opinions. She was always careful to make sure would not make broad generalizations according to what she said were "just what she thinks" and her "personal bias". She identified with being Korean American, and did not look upon Koreans favorably in general. Michelle was interested and enthusiastic; she said that being Korean American "is the one thing I could talk about forever". She thought a class that discusses the Korean experience on campus was useful and interesting, and expressed a desire to take it. The following interview touches upon topics, which speak to inter-ethnic othering, gender roles concerning body image, class issues, the influence of pop culture, and identity negotiations for Korean Americans, among other themes. I tape recorded the interview, and later transcribed it.

I guess my topic is talking about style. How do Korean Americans perceive Koreans and how do Koreans perceive Korean Americans through style? This is like the way they present their bodies...to the world. So that’s anything; haircut, clothing...

I feel like Koreans have a set style that they follow because they're pretty into the Korean celebrities. Everyone, well not everyone, but most people watch Korean dramas and movies. Like when a guy meets a girl he bases how pretty she is by a Korean celebrity.

So it has a lot to do with pop culture?

Yeah. I feel like Korean style in general is so different than American style. I don't know, maybe it’s because American style is slower than the rest of the world’s style. Guys, I feel like, in Korea, they like to be more pretty than more masculine in general. That's how I see. I mean, they all...like when I watch pop culture things, they all look like girls to me, and I just think they look gay. My mom's like "Well you know, that's what they like, that's what's in fashion right now..." for guys to be more pretty.

You watch Korean dramas?

Yeah! That's how I learned the bulk of my Korean, through Korean dramas.
So you identify with being Korean American?

Yeah. I don't identify with being a Korean from Korea, because I'm not. I mean, they can tell. It's quite obvious. I obviously don't dress like a Korean girl. I don't have long black hair that's curly or dyed. In general, I feel like Korean girls are extremely, I don't know what this has to do with style, but really skinny and conscious of their body. I think a good body type is proportional and curvy. But Korean girls think that as long as they're extremely skinny than that constitutes being really pretty. And I don't. This is just what I think!

I feel like Korean guys.... I'll just generalize what they wear from what I see. They always wear beanies no matter what season it is. I find that ridiculous--its summer and they're still wearing beanies. Its not even winter, come on! And they love wearing colorful clothes. I'm pretty sure there are a lot of Korean Americans who are rich and wear nice, lavish clothing, but in Korea you ALWAYS dress well. Even if you go to the grocery, even if you are running errands, you still look good. They are pretty superficial. They judge you from what you wear, which is I guess why they just look more put together all the time. I don't mind going out in sweats and a sweatshirt. I don't care. But Korean girls will always wear nice shoes and clothes and have a put-together look. And they love brand names; they love designer.

It could be a class issue?

Yeah, I mean, it's a class issue. Back in the olden days and still now its pretty much a hierarchy of how rich you are and what level you are. Koreans, they dress well, and they have an air of being better than other people. I don't know if I'm just biased because I really don't like Korean people! (embarrassed laughter) Well, because I know that they think they are better than Koreans who have been raised here, and I mean, I don't think they are better than me, you know.

Does this come out to you in the way people dress and walk around and stuff?

I mean, yeah. Especially because just the way they look and the way we, Korean Americans look, it's just completely different. Starting just from the way they dress, you can tell who you are. It distinguishes you.

Do you have any Korean friends, like from Korea?

I dunno. I mean, in high school my roommate was from Korea and she was...I mean, their nice Koreans, but just living with her, she was always obsessed with how she looked. Trying to always look good. Her dieting was ridiculous! Like, I don't even know why you diet. You're skinny. They're just crazy-obsessed with being skinny. Eat whatever you want, you know, like, you can't starve yourself. I guess being skinny is good, but the way Koreans go about being skinny isn't a healthy way. Girls are crazy. Like my friend's roommate, she's from Korea, and she's... she's so skinny, and she still considers herself fat. Like she could be a model; she's tall and skinny. And I asked my friend if she ever
eats, and she said "Yeah, she eats cereal...like from time to time." I don't know how people do that. This is just what I think. I guess I care how I portray myself, but Koreans really care about their image to the rest of the world. I guess maybe they have a much more superficial culture than what we do.

I feel like the trend on campus is for girls, and maybe guys too, to pretend like they don't care about how they look, and that’s how they portray themselves.

Like that indifferent air, yeah.

Like "I just rolled out of bed" ...it's like just as "superficial" maybe?

That's true…

It seems like a very American thing, on this campus.

I feel like it’s a college thing

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You went to boarding school in....New Jersey or Maryland or something?

I went to school in Maryland. I always say I'm from DC. I mean, I've lived in Kansas and Texas and Saudi Arabia. I don't really know where to say. When people used to ask me where I was from I used to have to go into a long story and they'd be like "what?"

Were you ever around Koreans or in a Korean atmosphere?

When I was in Kansas I was probably one of five Korean people in my class. It was a huge white population basically. There was a huge Korean church and they're all Korean American, but um…When I lived in Kansas I considered myself white, I didn't even consider myself Korean. For a while I had, like, identity issues. When we moved to Maryland there were so many Korean people. I was shocked, I mean, I had never seen that many Korean people in one place before. We went to this restaurant and we were leaving and I was picking out candy from the candy jar. This Korean lady in Korean was like "You can have as much as you want," and I turned around and I was like "Oh my god, the waitress thinks I'm Korean!" and my sister's like "You are Korean!" (laughs)

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I don't know what American style is. I don't like it, but that's my bias. I guess if you see Korean girls here they kinda meld into the American fashion. I see them in skirts and leggings and stuff, but you can tell, it just doesn't suit them.

I wonder where the Koreans who go to school here buy their clothes? I mean... Marketplace Mall?
Well a lot of the guys…the majority of the clothes I see them wear is like Abercrombie and Fitch, and they wear a lot of Puma.

(About her boyfriend, who is Korean American from LA)

When I first met him I like didn't know what to think of him. He dressed really well, but I knew he wasn't from Korea. So it was like...like a mental hmmm? He was known for wearing blazers and dress shirts and ties like all the time. He never looked bad. The one time he did, everyone was taking pictures.

You think it's a West coast thing at all?

I don't know, I think it's just him. All of his friends don't dress like that; they are all white, but they dress like skater kind of style.

An interview:

I began my interview with Jane by asking her how she identifies herself; is she Korean, Korean American, Asian American, all or neither, etc. Jane, who one might say fits into the 1.5 generation category, explained that she thinks of herself as having two separate selves in two different contexts. When she is with friends who knew her as a child in Korea, or with family, she is a "typical Korean girl". When she is with friends who she has made since she moved to the U.S., regardless of their ethnic identity, she is "Champaignian". These two selves remain separate because of the differences in courtesy, mannerisms, humor, and topics that one talks about with others. Jane gives an example of a situation in which her two identities clashed. During Thanksgiving, she and her mother and brothers, who live in Champaign, had dinner with a friend of her father's. This friend is from Korea, but has lived in the United States for many years, but because Jane knew this friend in Korea, she was her Korean self in the situation. As they were sitting, Jane's mother became angry and annoyed at Jane because her pants were too low in the back. Jane told me "I don't care about showing my back, but I became really depressed because maybe I am getting too far away from being Korean," because a Korean girl would not let her back show. She cites this as an example of how her Americanized self clashes with her Korean self in a Korean context in Champaign.

Jane was born in LA, but grew up in Korea. When she first arrived in the U.S. as a student, she used her American citizenship as a way to "fit in" and claim American identity. Now she says "I say I'm Korean because I have no problems fitting in and socializing with American kids". Jane purposefully keeps her Korean self and American self-divided. At first her philosophy was that she was in the U.S. and would enjoy American things while she was here, because she could not do that in Korea. Now that she has been in the U.S. for 6 years, and has been in Korea 2-3 months out of those 6 years, Jane says "I don't know what one has to claim to be fully Korean anymore. I don't know what's going on in Korea now... it's healthy not to know."

I had initially planned to talk to Jane about Korean American's style, but after posing a broad first question, the conversation seemed to head in a different direction. Jane did note that Korean Americans have a particular style, and that this could be noted
in clothing and makeup. This depends on the individual, however, because if there is someone who dresses uniquely, "it's not easy to tell if she is from the Philippines, Korea, Mongolia... anywhere because we all have similar [faces]". Jane notes that even among Korean Americans who have been in the U.S. for a while, like she has, there are differences in style. I will narrow down my question and next time, explore style more. I think the 1.5 generation group would be interesting, because often these people have been Americanized to some extent, but, according to Jane, are still distinguishably Korean.

DISCUSS
Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data

Research Proposal
Abstract
My research aims to study how Korean and Korean American students use style and their bodies as active discourses through which they negotiate identity within the "ethnic community". Personal appearance can be manipulated, and, I would argue, is a performance that is informed by ideas about religion, education, and social class. Through my research, I hope to show that the making of "ethnic identities" and the processes of "intra-ethnic othering" are complex, even within what is often thought of as a homogenous "ethnic" group.

Statement of Research Problem
Koreans and Korean Americans are often racialized into homogenous ethnic groups such as "Asian" or "Korean." While the white majority dictates who belongs in particular racial groups, "ethnic boundaries" are defined within the racialized group itself (Kibria 78). People actively create markers of ethnicity, which include shared history and shared sets of values. I argue that there is a way in which these perceived markers of ethnicity are performed in the day-to-day through the body. More specifically, within the ethnic Korean community on campus, the way that style and personal appearance are consciously and actively manipulated is informed by ideas about religion, education, and social class. Studies have focused on the idea of "intra-ethnic othering" within the Korean community, where Korean-born Koreans and Korean Americans are socially divided, often based on how "Americanized" or how "ethnic" a person is perceived to be (Pyke and Dang). This "intra-ethnic othering" is evident in the various Korean student groups and churches on campus. Kang and Lo establish two ways in which people negotiate identity: "discourse of dispositions" and "discourse of agency" (95). A certain "disposition", such as the way someone feels, thinks, or what they prefer will cause a person to identify with particular group, while a discourse of agency is actively and consciously performed by a person (103). Korean Americans use these discourses to negotiate their ethnic identity within the Korean American community (95). Through my pilot research, I have learned that style is a dynamic and agentive production, but that it reflects particular set values and ways of thinking. In one interview, Wayne told me that because he values academic success over personal appearance, he dresses like the "un-stylish FOB" group, and not the "stylish FOB" group. This suggests that "intra-ethnic othering" is at work within what are often thought of as homogenous groups within
ethnic communities, and that it is also informed by these "dispositions". By looking at how a racialized group uses style, I hope to understand the complex and often conflicting ways in which people negotiate and articulate ethnic identities.

Statement of Proposed Research
Through my research I will explore the role of style in the making of ethnic identities among Koreans and Korean Americans on campus. I will pay specific attention to processes of intra-ethnic othering and the articulation between agentive and more inherent discourses of ethnic identity. I argue that the way ethnic Koreans use style is informed by religion, education and social class. In order to address this, I will need to consider the following questions: How do Koreans and Korean Americans use style to align themselves with particular groups of people and distance themselves from others? What does this say about the creation of "ethnicity"? I will also need to consider how style is influenced by North American and Korean pop culture, by gender, and by transnational flows and globalization. The University of Illinois is a particularly interesting space to study because it is so large and diverse. University students seem to be at a critical stage of identity making, and this is especially salient in a space that offers so many "ethnic options". Intra-ethnic othering is obvious on campus within student clubs, groups, churches, and the social scene in general. Furthermore, I would argue that style and appearance are important in the everyday lives of young people and are a huge part of youth culture.

Discuss

I was initially interested in talking about a particular "Korean" style because noticed that the Korean students on campus dress differently than other "ethnic" groups. It seemed that Korean girls and guys were stylish; they had trendy haircuts, accessorized to the max, and were even dressed nicely for class. I did not have any real questions to begin with, and I thought my interest was rather shallow. Looking back, I realize that this was because I knew nothing about "Korean America"! After reading the Pyke and Dang article about "intra-ethnic othering" I hypothesized that style might be an integral part of the "othering", and I began to question how Korean Americans view Koreans' style, and how Koreans view Korean Americans' style.
My first interview was with a 1.5 generation student, and it was not very successful in that it did not address my questions about style. We talked more about identity; she seemed to fit into Pyke's and Dang's "bicultural middle", which is neither "FOB" nor "whitewashed". The interview actually helped me to think more about intra-ethnic othering and the divisions that might exist between Koreans. In my second interview I addressed more specifically the questions I had about style with a Korean American girl. I asked her how she perceived Korean style, and how it differed from Korean American style. I did not ask bold questions because I just wanted to let her talk. She talked about how Koreans are influenced by Korean pop culture, especially drama, and that they are always "put together". She thought that Koreans felt they were superior to Korean Americans, and showed this by wearing expensive, designer clothing and dressing up all the time. Korean Americans, on the other hand, dressed in the "typical" casual, college way. She also talked about Korean girls desiring to be super skinny, and that Korean
Americans were not as "obsessed with being skinny". This interview was shocking for me, because the girl told me bluntly that she did not like Koreans! I assumed after these two interviews that Koreans and Korean Americans are two very different groups, and that Pyke's and Dang's analysis of intra-ethnic othering is true on this campus.

My third interview was with a Korean guy who self-identified proudly as being a "FOB". He began by telling me that Koreans and Korean Americans are very different groups, thus confirming what I had already learned. He said that Koreans care about wearing expensive clothes, and that they like to be skinny, while Korean Americans dress more "fraternity" and work out. Koreans who wear expensive clothing do that so they can be "cooler" than others, and he noted that he sees this desire to fit-in play out within Koreans, but not within Korean Americans. The most interesting part of the interview was when he said there were two groups of Koreans: the studious group, to which he belongs, and the stylish group. He connected education to style, saying that because the studious group is more concerned about studying and succeeding, they had less time to worry about how they look. He said that his parents put such an emphasis on education while growing up, that he concentrates on school rather than style. The connection between values about education and how it is reflected in a person's style is interesting.

Does this mean that the stylish Koreans do not care about school? The stylish students might be more wealthy, and thus able to buy more expensive clothing, and also less dependent on doing well in school in order to be successful.

After three interviews, I realized that style is important in the concept of intra-ethnic othering because it is usually a clear indication of whether a person is "FOB" or "whitewashed". However, I have learned that style is intertwined with values about education, religion, and has class implications. Kelly Chong's article about Korean Christians quoted a girl who talked about how Korean church-goers were "preppy, appearance conscious people". I hypothesize that style is used to mark one's "American-ness" or to reject it. Among Koreans on campus, style is a marker for who is here to study, and who is here to have fun. Style is intertwined with the need to conform, whether this is with the "mainstream", with an ethnic group, or with a church group. Style is something that can be manipulated; it is an everyday self-expression. Because how a person looks is critical to racism AND style, it is interesting to me how people who are racialized use and manipulate style in order to claim a particular identity, to form solidarity with people or to distance themselves from others.

REFLECT

Link

Connect with other resources and materials

Yu Kyung Kang is looking at how chokeeyuhaksengs in the Korean Church of Champaign Urbana (KC) group Crossroads choose whether to use Korean or English in different situations. In an interview with three Crossway students, one student mentioned that style distinguishes yuhaksengs from 2nd generation Korean Americans. Koreans care about appearance, have a put-together look, and use "stronger" make-up. Korean Americans are more casual, and seem more interested in comfort than style for everyday activities. Yu Kyung Kang's work concurs with mine, in that it reflects style as an element involved in "intra-ethnic othering". One can hypothesize that by simply looking at
the way a person dresses or wears make-up, a Korean or Korean American will judge whether he or she should speak Korean or English with that person. It will be interesting to see if Yu Kyung discovers that style plays an important role her questions about language use.

In her article, Kelly Chong interviews Susan, a woman who once attended a Korean church (274). Susan talks about the pressure to conform within the social atmosphere of the Korean church, and notes that appearance was an important marker of in-group status. She says: "There were certain standards that were created there...the way you looked--they were all very preppy, appearance-conscious people," (274). In my work, I talked to a Korean American student who felt that Koreans use expensive, name-brand clothing because they think they are superior to Korean Americans. Through appearance, a group creates a certain value or idea to which they conform, and those who do not conform are not included. There is a definite negative feeling between these groups. However, in one interview, the student said that the stylish group of Koreans conforms to a specific standard to be "cool", but he did not see them in a bad light because of their snobishness. Instead, he said that they did not care about education because they were too concerned with appearance. It seems like one cannot make the generalization that Koreans who are stylish do so because they feel they are superior, but that it is for more complex reasons that have to do with values about education, religion, family, and "traditional" values.

Jung-Sun Park's article about globalization and comic books makes me wonder how style is affected by transnational flows. Korean pop culture is pretty accessible in the U.S., and vice versa. There is a growing ability to get products from anywhere in the world. Will Koreans and Korean Americans be able differentiate between each other by only looking at appearance? Will this affect whether a person begins a conversation with someone in Korean or English? I believe that globalization will not really change how Koreans and Korean Americans distinguish each other using style. People choose which group they want to identify with, and they would not choose to dress a certain way in order to identify with a group only because that particular clothing was made more available. After reading Bitter Fruit I began to wonder if Koreans are living in the same neighborhoods as blacks and Latino/as. These groups are all experiencing racialization, but they are also pitted against each other in the dominant racial hierarchy of the U.S. Hip-hop culture is unique to black and Latino/a communities, and these two groups have often come together because of the shared experience of racialization. Now hip-hop culture has spread over the entire world, and people of every ethnic origin are adopting hip-hop style of dress. Are Koreans and Korean Americans also adopting hip-hop style? This depends on how hip-hop has been received in Korea, and how it has been received by Korean Americans. I believe that urban Korean or Korean American youth who live in the same communities as black and Latino/as and share the experience of racialization might consume and perform hip-hop culture. However, I also think that the history of the black/Korean conflict will negatively affect how Koreans and Korean Americans view hip-hop culture. They might view themselves as being superior to other racial minorities, and separate themselves by not identifying with hip-hop style.

I think that by looking at Korean Americans' perceptions of Koreans (and vice-versa)
parts of the questions which Jung-Sun Park poses on page 149 can be answered. How these groups present themselves through their style is affected by transnational cultural flows and globalization. I think that in spite of changes and different flows of ideas, Korean Americans and Koreans will distinguish themselves through style and be able to identify each other just by looking.

I talked to a Korean American friend/co-worker this weekend about this class, and about my project. She thought it was a great topic (I was having doubts) and she went off about how she views Korean style and look. Soon I will conduct formal interviews with her and some of her friends because she had a lot to say. (I really want to write what she said over the weekend because it was really interesting but I won't!)

**Implications**

Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?

Recommendations

I don't know about any implications for the University. Since I see my project as something to do explicitly with the individual, I don't think I would want the University stepping in. I guess I do not understand this part!

It would be interesting if the University's archive of student life would include a lot about youth culture particular to U of I. Also, I would like to know more about what the University's role is in integrating international students, and how this might affect intra-ethnic othering.

**OTHER**

A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc

Research Reflections

This class was an entirely new experience for me. Usually in Anthro classes, we read materials and synthesize information, but it seems as though our critiques stay within the classroom setting. In this class, I felt like I was actively engaging in the analysis of our university and its broader implications. I liked that I felt a part of what I was part of what we were studying instead of just a disconnected student. The project was so useful to me, because I will be working on an independent study/honors thesis next year, and also will be trying to come up with a thesis idea for grad school. I learned a little about coming up with hypotheses based on other studies and on observations, and even learned that presenting a project is a more terrifying experience than I had expected. I do wish we could have spent some time discussing our proposal and how to write it, because I was having trouble with that.