Exploring the Intersection of Cultural Appropriation and Multiculturalism in Contemporary America

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Associate Professor

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex intersection of cultural appropriation and multiculturalism in contemporary America. It investigates how the blending of diverse cultures within a multicultural society can lead to instances of cultural appropriation, often resulting in tension and discontent among cultural groups. The paper also addresses the challenges cultural appropriation can cause and how it contributes to a better understanding in navigating these issues in a multicultural context. The paper clarifies the fine line between respectful cultural exchange and appropriation by analyzing examples from various fields such as fashion, music, and art. It highlights how cultural elements are frequently commercialized and misrepresented in the media. The methodology used in the paper is a qualitative analysis of literature and examples of cultural appropriation in various contexts, including fashion, music, and art, as well as a review of theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism and cultural appropriation. The paper also considers the role of education, upbringing, and media in shaping public perception of cultural appropriation. The current approaches in the literature involve defining cultural appropriation and multiculturalism, analyzing examples of appropriation across various fields, and discussing the commercialization and misrepresentation of cultural elements. However, there are gaps regarding the understanding of when cultural exchange becomes appropriation since it is such a complex subject. Finally, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how a multicultural society like contemporary America can navigate the complexities of cultural appropriation while promoting cultural appreciation and respect.

Keywords: appropriation, multiculturalism, society, appreciation, respect

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Introduction

In today's world, multiculturalism and cultural appropriation are two unavoidable terms when it comes to society. It could be said that contemporary America is a perfect example of how prevalent multiculturalism is, given that it is a country full of diverse cultures and identities. Therefore, cultural appropriation becomes a problem as the boundaries between cultures become more unclear. It is a fact that many cultures have a significant impact on one another and often intertwine. Furthermore, the question of how exactly we can determine when something is appropriation is being raised. When it comes to multiculturalism, the word's etymology, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, indicates that it is a society of multiple cultures ("multiculturalism"). So, why does the problem of cultural appropriation arise at all, and why are cultures not pleased that someone is trying to spread their culture, and that other people are interested in it? Overall, there is a fine line between appropriation and celebrating or embracing another culture, which further emphasizes the importance of this issue. This paper aims to explore the complex intersection between cultural appropriation and multiculturalism in contemporary America. The paper will also highlight the difficulties in distinguishing between a respectful cultural exchange and appropriation as well as investigate the factors that contribute to cultural appropriation and the reasons why it often leads to discontent among cultural groups. The question arises of how a developed multicultural country like contemporary America can successfully navigate and balance the issues of cultural appropriation. The paper is divided into two parts, the first part will discuss the concept of multiculturalism and how it is promoted in contemporary American society. It will explore the benefits of a multicultural society and the challenges that arise when different cultures intersect. The first part will also address cultural appropriation, defining what it is and why it can be problematic. The second part will provide specific examples of cultural appropriation in various contexts. It will also analyze how cultural elements are often commercialized and misrepresented in the media and discuss the impact of media representation on public perception and understanding of different cultures.

1. Promoting Multiculturalism and Addressing Cultural Appropriation

To better understand the issues of multiculturalism and cultural appropriation, it is necessary to define and clarify these two terms more closely. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, cultural appropriation is defined as "the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture" ("cultural appropriation"). Wearing traditional clothes from a culture that is not your own without respect for that same culture, such as an American wearing traditional Croatian clothes is one example of cultural appropriation. In other words, appropriation occurs when another culture is taken over; however, this term is often confused with appreciation. Cultural appropriation covers a lot of different actions, but their common feature is that people from one culture take or use something that belongs to a different culture (Young, "Profound Offense" 136). This could be anything from fashion and music to symbols or traditions. The key point is that one group is borrowing from another, often without understanding or respecting its original meaning. If a person borrows from another culture, not for one's purposes, but driven by sincere motives and a desire to learn about and respect the other culture, then it can be said that it is not appropriation but rather appreciation for that culture. If we consider the example of an American who wants to wear Croatian traditional clothing, it's important to understand his or her reasons for doing so. If one wears it out of a genuine desire to learn about Croatian culture and does so with full respect, then this would not be considered cultural appropriation. However, it is crucial to recognize that the line between appropriation and appreciation is very thin, and there is no clear answer to whether something is purely appropriated or genuinely appreciated since we can never know a person's true motive. "Other members of the society are obliged to be cognizant of this sensitivity. Members of the minority may even deserve certain protections" (Young, "Profound Offense" 143). When it comes to multiculturalism, the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "the belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance" ("multiculturalism"). In this context, multiculturalism is important because today's society is no longer homogeneous and divided by clear borders as it was in the past; rather, it is intertwined, with numerous cultures inhabiting the same areas, sharing customs, rituals, etc. Therefore, the growing presence of multiculturalism, especially in developing countries that are often destinations for immigration and migration, such as the USA, has increased the challenges of appropriation. Additionally, people today are traveling more often and encountering cultures and customs that are unfamiliar to them. This makes the topic especially important, as it is crucial to avoid offending other cultures.

1.1. The Role of Upbringing and Education in Promoting Multiculturalism

To ensure the future of a more inclusive society, it is essential for young people, especially those living in multicultural communities, to begin learning about not only their own culture but also the cultures of those around them. Children are more adaptable and open-minded than adults, making it much easier to teach them to respect and appreciate other cultures. In contrast, adults often have established views and habits that can be challenging to change. This is why education and upbringing play a crucial role in addressing and preventing cultural appropriation. In *The Sociological Dimensions of Multicultural Education*, Cook claims that some people are opposed to multicultural education overall and explains that "critics of multicultural education believe it is unnecessary because it would create disunity and negate America's core values" (1). Kapile emphasizes that in multicultural societies, it is important to provide teachers and educators with proper training to effectively promote cultural awareness and understanding among their students (717). He argues that by creating an environment of respect and inclusion from a young age, educators can help prevent the appropriation of cultural elements and encourage appreciation of all races and ethnicities instead (717). As Cook explains, "The original intent of multicultural educators was to combat racism by creating academic and social space for African Americans and other people of color in the school system" (4). This highlights the importance of using education as a tool to not only combat prejudice but also to encourage a more understanding and respectful society. Educating children about the importance of different cultures and respect for diversity helps them mature into adults who are aware of cultural boundaries and less prone to cultural appropriation. It is essential for all stakeholders to work together to create a supportive learning environment that promotes the growth and development of every student (Kapile 717). These are the efforts needed to ensure a society where cultural exchange is not frowned upon because of appropriation but is celebrated. By ensuring a safe and inclusive space for students of all backgrounds, educators play a crucial role in combating both racism and cultural appropriation. Another aspect of multicultural education is ignorance. Cook states that some critics think that multicultural educators don't do enough to talk about how racism affects students' learning and development (1). Although the critics believe that multicultural education tries to promote diversity and inclusion, they point out that if there is not a sufficient focus on racism students' opportunities and experiences will be negatively affected and multicultural programs might not fully address the real problems of inequality in schools (Cook 1). This is why the influence of teachers and educators extends far

beyond the classroom since they are role models who shape the early development of students' attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, educators need to be conscious of how they present the topic of multiculturalism, not only through their lessons and words but also through their actions and behavior. For instance, if a teacher encourages students to respect other cultures but simultaneously displays discriminatory behavior, such as neglecting or treating children of color unfairly, the contradictory actions will undermine the lesson and fail to reach a child's mind (Suttie). The effectiveness of teaching about respect and inclusivity is diminished when students witness a disconnect between what is taught and what is practiced. To truly present values of equality and cultural appreciation, educators must show these principles in their everyday interactions with students. This includes actively engaging with students from diverse backgrounds, recognizing and celebrating different cultural contributions in the classroom, and addressing any biases or prejudices that may arise. By doing so, teachers help create an environment where all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Suttie). Additionally, Cook states that neglecting an individual's ethnic identity by teachers and school officials can result in discouragement (4–5). This underscores the importance of ensuring that all adults involved in a child's upbringing, including educators and parents, actively support and respect cultural diversity, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and accepting society. "From the multicultural perspective, when teachers and school officials ignore an individual's ethnic-group identity, it discourages the individual and causes counter-productive thoughts and behaviors" (Cook 12). Moreover, educators should strive to implement teaching strategies that promote inclusivity and appreciation of diverse cultures. This could involve incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, using culturally responsive teaching methods such as increasing empathic communication and encouraging students to develop cross-group friendships, as well as creating opportunities for students to learn about and celebrate various cultural traditions (Suttie). By integrating these practices, educators can help build a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment, where students are encouraged to explore and appreciate different cultures. While doing so, they can effectively reach a child's mind, helping to build a more just and understanding society for future generations. Cook states that: "The standard definition of inclusion is the support and appreciation of every individual's contribution to schools, companies, and organizations" (4). Kapile underscores this by noting that "well-trained teachers in multicultural approaches tend to create inclusive classroom environments, pay attention to individual student needs, and promote appreciation for cultural diversity" (718). However, the responsibility for shaping young minds and encouraging an acceptance of different cultures extends beyond the confines

of the educational system. Indeed, children often model their opinions and behaviors after their parents, highlighting the significant role that parents play in fostering a culture of acceptance and respect (Kapile 717). According to Kapile, when inclusive values are nurtured at home, children are more likely to embrace cultural diversity and engage with it positively (719). This contrasts with situations where parents may exhibit racist attitudes or behaviors, which can hinder a child's ability to appreciate diversity. Kapile further asserts that "when these values are instilled at home and reinforced in the community, multicultural education can become a stronger force in shaping a more inclusive and empowered society" (719). Therefore, in order to promote cultural awareness and understanding in society a successful collaboration of educators and parents as well as all members of the community is essential.

1.2. Challenges and Consequences of Appropriation in a Multicultural Society

The question of how a multicultural society like the United States can successfully navigate and balance the issues of cultural appropriation has been addressed by several scholars and sources. For instance, Rina Arya explores the concept in her article "Cultural Appropriation: What It Is and Why It Matters?", highlighting the complexities that arise in a diverse society. Arya emphasizes the need for careful consideration of cultural ownership and sensitivity to avoid the negative consequences of appropriation, especially in a multicultural context (4). Similarly, Richard Rogers in "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation" discusses the challenges multicultural nations face when engaging in cultural exchanges. He argues that the distinction between exchange and appropriation can become ambiguous, particularly when power imbalances are involved, making it difficult to establish clear boundaries (476–78). Moreover, Jana Cattien and Richard John Stopford address the entitlement and property issues linked with cultural appreciation in "The Appropriating Subject: Cultural Appreciation, Property and Entitlement," arguing that in multicultural societies, there is a constant tension between celebrating diversity and respecting cultural boundaries. They suggest that addressing these issues requires an ethical framework that acknowledges historical power dynamics (1073). In a society where many cultures intertwine, it is inevitable to address the problems and consequences of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is a complex issue that involves the use, borrowing, and reshaping of cultural heritage by individuals or groups from outside that culture (Arya 3) "When appropriation is seen as morally problematic, this is because it is perceived as not legitimate, not fair, or, in general, not attentive to the rights and needs of those

with prior claims to the items appropriated" (Heyd 37). It is crucial to consider how these practices are carried out to maintain respect among different communities and to avoid perpetuating historical injustices. As Young points out: "Several reasons have been advanced for thinking that cultural appropriation is wrong. Among these is the claim that appropriation from another culture can cause profound offense to the members of that culture" ("Profound Offense" 135). This offense can stem from the feeling that a culture's unique practices and symbols are being used without understanding or respecting their original significance. Defining and determining when something constitutes cultural appropriation presents a significant challenge. Not all acts that borrow from other cultures are inherently wrong, but they can often be perceived as disrespectful or offensive if the borrowing is done in a way that commodifies the culture and turns it into a material product for the purpose of profit (Arya 4). This is why it is so important to understand the boundaries of cultural exchange. For example, simply wearing traditional clothing or using cultural symbols without understanding their meaning can be seen as reducing these elements to a mere fashion or trend, stripping them of their cultural and historical significance. The challenge, as Young articulates, lies in the fact that "it is often, if not always, impossible to define cultures in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions" ("Profound Offense" 136). Young suggests that cultures are fluid and dynamic, making it difficult to establish clear guidelines for what constitutes respectful cultural exchange versus appropriation ("Profound Offense" 136). Moreover, according to Arya cultural appropriation is important because it highlights issues of power dynamics between different cultures (2). "Cultural appropriation is important because it concerns the phenomenon of exploitation that has existed historically and continues to do so between cultures of unequal power" (2). According to Arya, a central element of cultural appropriation is the power asymmetry between two cultures, where the dominant culture often borrows from the less privileged one (3). This borrowing can often occur without acknowledgment or compensation, which can further entrench inequalities and perpetuate stereotypes (Rogers 485). Arya emphasizes that this power asymmetry often remains insufficiently highlighted, distorting the true value of cultural assets (3). The social history and significance of these cultural products can become obscured or completely lost, reducing them to mere commodities for consumption by the dominant culture (Arya 4). Arya notes that "one of the biggest challenges raised by cultural appropriation is the instability of the concept of culture" (9). The question remains about who has the authority to speak for a culture and to determine what constitutes appropriate use of its elements. Ultimately, what is most important to emphasize is that, in cases where cultural elements are borrowed rather than stolen, the person or group adopting parts of another

culture must understand what these elements represent and express genuine respect for that culture. This ethical approach to cultural exchange ensures the responsible sharing of cultural elements and the recognition of historical injustices (Young "Profound Offense" 141). As Young notes, "not all acts of cultural appropriation that cause profound offense are immoral" ("Profound Offense" 135). In a report on Australian indigenous cultural and intellectual property, Terri Janke argues that it is not ethically wrong to borrow motifs, styles, or themes from other cultures, as long as it is done with recognition and respect (qtd. in Young, "Profound Offense" 138). His perspective emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and showing respect to the source of the cultural elements being used, while also challenging the idea that cultural appropriation is necessarily ethically problematic (138). Young's defense of cultural appropriation highlights the value of artistic expression and creativity. He believes that borrowing elements from different cultures should not be restricted but rather encouraged to foster creation and innovation. The defense of cultural appropriation, as presented through Young's views, serves as an argument in the debate on whether cultural appropriation is always harmful or can it also be beneficial for appreciating other cultures ("Art" 475). This highlights the need for an understanding of cultural appropriation, one that considers the context, intent, and impact of the borrowing, rather than applying universal judgment ("Art 472"). Cultural appropriation is complicated and requires thinking about the cultural, historical, and social backgrounds where these practices happen. To handle cultural exchange ethically, we must respect each culture's heritage and avoid taking advantage of marginalized communities. By understanding that cultures are always changing and considering the power imbalances involved, we can better navigate the thin line between appreciating and appropriating cultures. This way, cultural exchange can add value to the diversity of our societies.

1.3. Cultural Integrity and Authenticity

Contemporary America is arguably the best example of a multicultural society. Cultures have been mixing in the United States for many years, with new cultures continually arriving, as people from around the globe choose the USA as their permanent home. Interest in American culture leads to the realization of how important multiculturalism is since the country was built on integration and immigration (Sielke 49). In such a diverse environment, the challenge of preserving one's cultural integrity and identity while also integrating into the American culture becomes increasingly complex (Rogers 486). This leads to the issue of assimilation which

Rogers explained as a change of identity or adaptation to the other culture (481). "First, assimilation involves internalization of the imposed culture, including reformation of identity, values, and ideologies. Assimilation involves the displacement of the subordinated/native culture by the colonizing culture, which necessarily involves the appropriation (broadly speaking) of the dominant culture by a member of a subordinated culture" (Rogers 481). Hirsch explains assimilation as a concept that no longer exists in a clear, objective form today and claims that it has become a reflection of different ideas about what it means to be "Americanized" (37). People who move to contemporary America often feel pressured to Americanize, meaning they may have to put their cultural practices aside to fit into mainstream society. "Nevertheless, cultural blending is still limited since the Anglo-Saxon culture and its institutions are still dominant" (Ziyanak 148). Ziyanak also explains that as time goes on, people slowly become more a part of the dominant culture around them, meaning that they start to adopt the customs, beliefs, and behaviors of the majority group. Thus, it frequently becomes evident that through assimilation people lose their cultural uniqueness. Ziyanak claims that because of this push towards assimilation, individuals may lose touch with their original cultures and customs, which complicates the dynamics of appropriation and multiculturalism (147). So, while they may fit in more with the dominant culture, they might also give up some parts of who they are in the process (Ziyanak 147). However, it is important to note that this does not mean that complete assimilation occurs. As Ziyanak argues:

> As of today, there is no empirical evidence that shows that any ethnic group has totally assimilated into the Anglo culture and its institutions. Throughout the U.S. nation's history, this theory was the most prevalent ideology that explained assimilation. On the other hand, partial assimilation is of course evident among some groups. (Ziyanak 148)

Although it might seem at first that immigrants are losing their original cultures and roots, studies show that most people manage to keep their identity and cultural integrity. The Melting Pot theory better describes the current situation in the USA because it includes both cultural and biological mixing. According to this theory, the host Anglo-Saxon group and immigrants blend together to form a new, shared identity. As Ziyanak notes, "The Melting Pot theory involves cultural and biological blending, where the host group and immigrants merge to create a new, common group" (Ziyanak 148). This blending process, however, does not mean complete ignorance of the original culture. While assimilation and cultural appropriation are often discussed in relation to maintaining cultural identities, it is also crucial to consider how these processes contribute to broader social inequalities (Matthes 352). Matthes states:

While cultural appropriation is one route by which credibility deficits are created and exacerbated, I have maintained that it is just one way among others in which social inequalities can evince themselves through acts of expression and representation: it is the problem of unjust credibility deficits generally and the systematic inequalities that allow for them, as opposed to specifically those generated by individual acts of cultural appropriation, that should be of primary concern. (Matthes 363)

Therefore, while assimilation pressures exist, they do not necessarily lead to a total loss of cultural identity. Rather, they reflect complex layers of Americanization and reveal the underlying inequalities that persist in society (Hirsch 38). The way different cultural layers interact in America helps explain the ongoing challenges people face in keeping their cultural heritage. It's important to understand that this process is always changing and shaping the cultural scene. This is why talking about assimilation and appropriation is so important in discussions about diversity and inclusion in the United States.

2. Cultural Appropriation: Examples, Commercialization and Media Representation

To understand the contemporary situation surrounding cultural appropriation and multiculturalism, it is essential to look into specific examples that demonstrate how these concepts are portrayed. Media, fashion, and pop culture are just a few examples where cultural appropriation frequently occurs, often in ways that may not be immediately obvious. This appropriation can take on various forms, such as using texts, clothing, hairstyles, or even specific words, all of which can be borrowed from one culture by another, often without proper acknowledgment or respect for the original context (Heyd 41). It is crucial to recognize these examples and understand the underlying motives, especially when these actions are driven by the commercialization of cultural elements for profit. Heyd, the author of *Rock Art Aesthetics and Cultural Appropriation,* emphasizes the fundamental injustice involved in profiting from another culture. He notes that such practices can have a significant economic impact on the original groups (38). As he explains, "For instance, if cultural appropriation leads to a loss of potential income for the original group; as may occur when a musical style such as the blues, jazz, and hip hop, or when Native North American images on T-shirts, are marketed by outsiders to the original groups, it may be perceived as unfair" (Heyd 38). This perspective underscores the financial and ethical implications of cultural appropriation, highlighting how the commercialization of cultural elements by those outside the original communities can contribute to broader patterns of exploitation and inequality (Heyd 41). However, as Heyd points out, it is important to note that not all examples of portraying cultural elements in various fields are considered appropriation since some examples are trying to do the opposite and celebrate a different culture (39). "Given that at least some cultural appropriations may indeed be innocent, and possibly even useful, either globally or to the Indigenous or minority groups affected through the stimulus that they may provide to cultural development, we may (roughly) distinguish between 'problematic' and 'unproblematic' appropriation" (Heyd 39). Thus, we should be very careful when attempting to differentiate between appreciation and appropriation.

2.1. Examples of Appropriation in Fashion

Chumo observes that the fashion industry is one of the most prominent examples of exploiting cultural elements for profit, often crossing the line between inspiration and appropriation without acknowledging it (66). He claims that high-profile brands like Gucci, Dior, and many

others frequently incorporate cultural elements into their shows or photoshoots, even when the clothes being presented have little or nothing to do with these elements (66). "The fashion industry has frequently been criticized for its involvement in cultural appropriation. One trend within the industry is the adoption of traditional clothing, symbols, or designs from marginalized cultures for profit, often without permission or acknowledgment" (Chumo 64). An instance of this occurred in America in 2016 during a Marc Jacobs show that featured some of the industry's most famous models, including Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner (Pham 67). As Pham notes, Marc Jacobs featured a predominantly white cast of fashion models who attracted attention not because of the clothes but because of the models' hair, which was styled in fake dreadlocks wrapped in multicolored yarn" (Pham 67). This choice sparked significant controversy, starting a debate about whether this was a case of cultural appreciation or cultural appropriation. Some critics argued that it was an unethical use of cultural elements and accused Jacobs of exploiting Black culture for aesthetic purposes without understanding or respecting its significance (Pham 70). Others, however, defended Jacobs on grounds of artistic freedom and multicultural exchange, suggesting that the use of dreadlocks was a source of inspiration and should be seen as a form of cultural appreciation rather than appropriation (Pham 71). "The critical examination of cultural appropriation in the fashion industry reveals a complex and multifaceted issue that intersects with various aspects of culture, identity, and power dynamics" (Chumo 70). The backlash against Jacobs's show was intense, with many accusing him of racism, opportunism, and cultural insensitivity. As Pham describes, "Jacobs's show, its media coverage, and the brand's social media publicity set off a furious public debate between, on one hand, those accusing Jacobs of racism, opportunism, and cultural insensitivity and, on the other hand, those defending him based on artistic freedom, multicultural exchange, anthropology, reverse racism, and not sweating the small stuff" (68). Even though people complain about it, borrowing cultural elements often gets ignored or overshadowed, especially when big designers and brands are involved. Negative feedback usually doesn't make designers change their ways. Instead, marketing experts often try to spin these actions as cultural appreciation, which makes the discussion about cultural exchange even more confusing. "We have seen how this practice can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, erode cultural identities, and contribute to the commodification of culture for profit. The implications of cultural appropriation are far-reaching and extend to issues of representation, diversity, and ethical responsibility within the fashion world" (Chumo 70). The concept of "racial plagiarism," as Pham calls it, highlights the underlying racial relationships and inequalities that terms like cultural appropriation and appreciation often obscure (68). Pham explains that in the fashion industry, racial plagiarism

occurs when a designer appropriates racial and indigenous styles, forms, practices, and knowledge without obtaining permission or giving proper credit to the original community (68). "Racial plagiarism highlights the racial relationships and inequalities that are obscured by terms like cultural appropriation, cultural appreciation, and piracy. In the fashion context, racial plagiarism occurs when a designer copies racial and indigenous styles, forms, practices, and knowledges without permission and without giving adequate (or any) attribution to the source model and community" (Pham 69). According to Pham, this practice not only disrespects the cultural significance of these elements but is also a form of theft, where the original creators are made invisible while the appropriators profit and gain recognition (69). Furthermore, Pham suggests that cultural appropriation and appreciation are not contradictory concepts but rather different interpretations of the same process. They both revolve around personal feelings and intentions, which can obscure the plagiaristic nature of what designers like Jacobs are actually doing (69). "Cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation—two interpretations of the same process rather than contradictory concepts—foreground questions of personal feelings and intentions, blocking from view the plagiaristic nature of what designers like Jacobs are actually doing when they create looks that look like other people's looks and then attach their own names to them" (Pham 69). This makes it easy for designers to dismiss the concerns of the communities from which they are borrowing, adding feelings of exploitation and marginalization (Arya 1). "A common occurrence in instances of racial plagiarism is the subtle or out-right rejection of the value judgments, feelings, and concerns that members of the source community have about the copy" (Pham 75). This disregard for the original community's perspective not only reinforces existing power imbalances but also minimizes the cultural heritage and experiences of marginalized groups (Arya 2). "Consumers can play a significant role in influencing the fashion industry. Educating consumers about the implications of cultural appropriation and their purchasing power can lead to more responsible consumer choices. Fashion media and influencers should also be engaged in cultural education efforts" (Chumo 70). While the fashion industry continues to blur the lines between cultural appreciation and appropriation, it is crucial to acknowledge the complex dynamics at play, particularly the inherent power imbalances and the ongoing exploitation of marginalized communities. As designers like Marc Jacobs push the boundaries of cultural exchange, it is important to engage in meaningful conversations about respect, recognition, and the ethical implications of borrowing from other cultures (Chumo 70).

2.2. Commercialization and Commodification of Cultural Elements

Rina Arya, the author of *Cultural Appropriation: What It Is and Why It Matters?*, points out that commodification is a key process in cultural appropriation, referring to the transformation of cultural goods or ideas into objects of trade (5). This process has profound social, economic, and cultural implications because it transforms the true value of cultural objects, separating them from their social history and context of production (Arya 9). According to Marxist interpretation, commodification involves replacing cultural objects' real value (costs of production) with their market value, or the price consumers are willing to pay (Arya 4). Through this process, cultural objects become items of consumption that are mass-produced and distributed, losing their authenticity. Therefore, a central element of this process is converting cultural value into economic units, where the focus shifts to market exchange instead of preserving cultural heritage (Arya 4). Unfortunately, people's cultural heritage is often used for profit. This happens in different ways, like with fashion. For example, a few years ago, tribal-patterned clothing became popular. But this clothing wasn't made or sold by people from that culture; it was mostly produced by those looking to make money from it. Arya discusses how "commodification is the means by which cultural goods or ideas are transformed into commodities, or objects of trade. In this process, the real value of the object, that is, the social history of production, is abstracted from as it enters the system of exchange" (4). The commercialization of culture becomes a serious problem because not only is someone else's heritage borrowed and appropriated, but also the person who does not belong to that culture earns a profit while the one who belongs does not (Rogers 486). Arya explains that "exploitation also comes from the damage it inflicts upon cultures through the commercialization of their goods and ideas" (4). However, it again raises the question of boundaries, namely whether the commercialization of culture can sometimes be acceptable. "Often, this exploitation occurs when a common practice in commodification is where the culture (artefacts and ideas) belonging to a marginalized group are used by a majority/dominant culture for aesthetic reasons" (Arya 4). In addition to the aesthetic use of cultural elements, commodification also portrays unequal power relations and reflects broader societal issues. As Rogers highlights, "commodification also plays a key role in perpetuating unequal power relations such as neocolonialism. In fetishizing and reifying 'artificial' meanings onto the elements of living cultures, the social relations and history involved in that act of commodification are obscured and neocolonial relations justified" (Rogers 488). In this way, cultural appropriation through

commodification not only strips cultural elements of their original significance but also reinforces power imbalances and demolishes the history and social context from which these elements arise, allowing dominant cultures to exploit and profit from marginalized ones (Rogers 486–88). In other words, the commodification of cultural goods and ideas, as Arya explains, is a complex process that has far-reaching consequences, not only economically but also socially and culturally (3).

2.3. Depictions of Appropriation in Popular Culture

Arya provides a crucial perspective on the issue of cultural appropriation, highlighting the use of traditional clothing and religious symbols for commercial purposes. This misuse is especially prevalent among white celebrities, who often adopt "ethnic" elements as fashion statements (4). Arya emphasizes that this practice not only shows a blatant disregard for the original meanings of these cultural symbols but also distorts them into mere fashion trends, devoid of any awareness of their historical and cultural significance (2). For example, when a celebrity wears a Native American headdress as a fashion accessory, they reduce a sacred item to a costume, stripping it of its cultural and spiritual value (Wood 1). In the contemporary context, patterns of cultural appropriation are rapidly evolving due to globalization, digital technology, and the swift exchange of cultural goods (Wood 3). "In an era of globalization that accelerates the exchange of information and cross-cultural interactions, social dynamics are becoming increasingly complex and challenging" (Kapile 716). This environment makes it more challenging to discern the line between cultural appreciation and appropriation. However, Arya argues that it is vital to approach cultural exchange from an ethical standpoint. The ethical sharing of cultural elements requires an understanding of the context and significance behind them, rather than adopting them for aesthetic or commercial purposes (6). Popular culture provides numerous examples of cultural appropriation across various domains, such as fashion, music, and art. These examples often spark debates about whether certain acts constitute appropriation or appreciation (Wood 2). As Cattien and Stopford note, the distinction between appropriation and appreciation is not always clear-cut (1062). They raise thought-provoking questions, such as whether Led Zeppelin's music, which draws heavily from the blues, is an appropriation of the genre or a form of appreciation (1062). Similarly, they question whether Bill Evans's incorporation of European art music sensibilities into his jazz is a case of European cultural influence on African-American music or an act of reverence (1062). These examples illustrate

the complexity of defining cultural appropriation and highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the intentions and contexts behind cultural exchanges. In addition to these examples, Cattien and Stopford discuss how cultural appropriation can also occur in more subtle forms, such as a white person adopting dreadlocks, listening to dub music, and speaking in Patois (1062). While these actions may be intended as a form of cultural appreciation, they can also be perceived as appropriative, particularly if the individual fails to acknowledge the cultural and historical significance of these practices (Wood 1). This ambiguity further complicates the discourse around cultural appropriation and raises questions about the boundaries of cultural exchange and the responsibilities of those engaging in it. On the other hand, there are instances where artists intentionally engage in appropriation as a means of revitalizing or preserving cultural elements (Cattien, Stopford 1071). Heyd provides several examples of this phenomenon, such as rap musicians who breathe new life into mainstream songs or dancers worldwide who adopt traditional Gypsy flamenco dance styles (39). In these cases, the act of appropriation serves a purpose beyond mere aesthetic enjoyment; it involves a conscious effort to bring back and celebrate cultural elements that might otherwise be forgotten (39). "Visual artists like de Chirico and Mimmo Paladino, who incorporate classical imagery into their work, also exemplify this form of appropriation, using historical art forms to create something new and relevant" (Heyd 39). Moreover, Heyd highlights the concept of "appropriation art," a trend from the 1980s in which artists like Sherrie Levine, Elaine Sturtevant, and Mike Bidlo intentionally copied historically significant artworks to make a statement about art itself (39). This form of appropriation is not about exploitation or disrespect; rather, it is a deliberate act aimed at challenging notions of originality and creativity, revitalizing the art world (39). As Cattien and Stopford suggest, there can be value in simply recognizing and appreciating the aesthetic properties of cultural elements, as long as it is done with respect and understanding of their origins (1063). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the line between appreciation and appropriation is complex and depends on the artist. According to Young, the artist needs to be well educated and respectful of the culture if he wants to use it in his art ("Art" 470). "A work of art can be authentic in the sense that it is something to which the producing artist is fully committed. To say that artists are committed to their work is to say that they understand the significance of all the elements of their work and that they embrace their works' perspectives on the world" (Young, "Art" 470). Therefore, engaging in cultural exchange responsibly requires a careful consideration of the power dynamics, historical context, and potential impact on the source communities.

2.4. The Role of Media in Criticizing or Promoting Appropriation

The role of media is crucial in discussions of cultural appropriation and multiculturalism because it is through media that we absorb most of the information that shapes our opinions, often subconsciously. Media's influence on public perception and understanding of cultural exchange is profound, as it both reflects and reinforces societal attitudes towards cultural elements (Happer, Philo 321). Arya notes that "the processes of globalization, including the development of digital technology, have increased access to other cultures and made the permeability between boundaries separating cultures more precarious" (2). This connection has heightened the need to think critically about the ethical implications of cultural appropriation and the importance of sharing cultures responsibly (2). With cultures more accessible than ever, media plays a big role in perpetuating stereotypes and misunderstandings or encouraging respect and appreciation for diverse traditions (Happer, Philo 322). In recent years, the rise of cancel culture has further complicated the discourse surrounding cultural appropriation. Originating in contemporary America, cancel culture is defined as "a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you" (Cambridge Dictionary "cancel culture"). "Public awareness has also increased because of the media exposure of cultural appropriation that debates issues about entitlement and the rights to culture" (Arya 2). This social issue has made people more aware of cultural appropriation, leading to reactions when actions are seen as disrespectful or exploitative. For example, celebrities who are accused of cultural appropriation often face a lot of criticism on social media, which can hurt their reputations or even cost them career opportunities. This increased awareness is good because it makes people think more about how their actions impact other cultures. However, it also has a downside. The fear of being accused of appropriation might make people afraid to learn about or engage with other cultures. This can lead to a situation where people are reluctant to step outside their own cultural boundaries and explore new traditions (Arya 2). New technologies and social media have amplified these dynamics, making it easier for public figures to be called out for perceived missteps and for these incidents to be broadcast widely. The concept of cultural appropriation itself is relatively new and has not been thoroughly researched, as it was often overlooked in the past. As our understanding of cultural appropriation evolves, so too does our understanding of the ways in which media both contributes to and complicates these issues. As Rogers points out, "the United States and other

(mostly Western) countries produce most of the media flowing through the international market while often importing little in return" (482). This imbalance means that the cultural narratives and representations promoted by Western media often go unchallenged, reinforcing Western perspectives and potentially marginalizing other voices. Furthermore, he states that Western media's influence demonstrates that the appeal of media products is always already structured in power. It shows that the popularity of Western media products is influenced by power dynamics, and that the political impact of appropriation isn't just about the intentions or motivations of the cultures involved. It's also affected by the dominant cultures that push their media on others (Rogers 483). This suggests that cultural appropriation in media is not solely about the intentions behind the act; it is also about the broader power dynamics at play and the impact that these acts have on the cultural groups involved. The case of Marc Jacobs's fashion show, where models wore dreadlocks, is a notable example of how media can amplify discussions around appropriation. The backlash Jacobs received highlighted a critical dialogue about cultural sensitivity and the ethics of borrowing cultural elements (Pham 77). Pham notes, "as many social media users have pointed out, Jacobs's/Counts's dreadlocks do nothing to increase the acceptance or reduce the surveillance of Black women and men who wear their hair in dreadlocks" (Pham 77). This incident underscores the importance of context and awareness when engaging with elements of another culture. Simply adopting cultural symbols without understanding or respecting their significance can reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to cultural misunderstandings. Matthes also emphasizes that due to cultural appropriation and the fear of offending other cultures, one should not completely avoid other cultures and their customs.

> More importantly, valuing a culture should involve increased sensitivity to the injustices faced by its members. If anything, a failure to acknowledge the harms of cultural appropriation should lead us to question whether someone truly values a culture, rather than leading to the mistaken judgment that concern about cultural appropriation stands in the way of cross-cultural appropriation. (Matthes 366)

The role of media in discussions of cultural appropriation and multiculturalism is both influential and complex. While media can serve as a powerful tool for promoting cultural awareness and appreciation, it can also create stereotypes and reinforce power imbalances. Media can play a big role in either supporting the actions of those in power or driving collective change. It can raise awareness and influence behavior on a larger scale, helping to shape how

individuals act and think. By providing information, media can encourage people to change their behaviors and contribute to broader social changes (Happer, Philo 333).

Conclusion

When dealing with multiculturalism and cultural appropriation, we need to be aware of how cultural exchange can both enrich societies and potentially cause harm. Multiculturalism should present a society where diverse cultures coexist and interact, and ideally an environment where varied traditions and perspectives are celebrated. It brings a diversity of human experience, encouraging respect and understanding across cultural boundaries. However, the reality of this ideal is complicated by the issue of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of one culture are adopted by members of another culture, often without proper acknowledgment or respect for their origins. As explained in the paper, this practice can lead to the commodification and trivialization of cultural symbols and traditions, transforming meaningful cultural elements into fashion statements or commercial products. While the intent behind borrowing elements from another culture might be rooted in admiration or curiosity, the impact can be harmful, particularly if it involves misrepresentation or exploitation. The challenge lies in distinguishing between cultural appreciation and appropriation, a distinction that is often blurred by different perspectives and contexts. The thin line between appreciation and appropriation is clear in multicultural societies like contemporary America, where the blending of cultures is a daily reality. The presence of diverse cultural expressions in public life can lead to instances where cultural elements are used in ways that may inadvertently offend or marginalize the cultures they originate from. For instance, wearing traditional attire or using cultural symbols in commercial products without understanding their significance can be seen as reducing these elements to mere commodities. This can lead to a sense of exploitation among the cultures being appropriated, as their cultural heritage is used for profit or aesthetic purposes without appropriate recognition or respect. To address these issues, education plays a critical role. By encouraging respect and appreciation for diverse cultures from an early age, we can help young people develop cultural exchange. Educators and parents have the opportunity to teach children about the importance of cultural sensitivity and the value of engaging with other cultures in a respectful and informed manner. This educational foundation can help prevent harmful stereotypes and promote a culture of empathy and respect. Moreover, the role of media and public discourse in shaping our understanding of cultural appropriation cannot be understated. In the age of social media, information about cultural appropriation spreads rapidly, often sparking intense debates. Being more aware of these issues can lead to positive changes, but it can also create a split where discussions about cultural exchange get heated. Cancel culture, which is a big part of this conversation, shows how tricky it can be to handle

cultural sensitivity in today's digital world. It underscores the need for a balanced approach and understanding, rather than promoting reactions or superficial judgments. In the world of fashion and popular culture, the commercialization of cultural elements has raised significant concerns. When designers and brands appropriate cultural symbols for profit, it often leads to the exploitation of marginalized communities, who see their cultural heritage commodified and stripped of its original significance. This process not only undermines the value of these cultural elements but also reinforces existing power imbalances. Addressing these issues requires a commitment to ethical practices, including acknowledging the origins of cultural elements and engaging with the communities from which they come. Ultimately, achieving a balance between cultural appreciation and appropriation requires reflection and sensitivity. It involves recognizing the historical and cultural significance of the elements we borrow and ensuring that our engagement with other cultures is grounded in respect and understanding. By creating an environment where cultural exchange is conducted with care and awareness, we can help create a more inclusive society. In conclusion, while multiculturalism offers the promise of a rich and diverse society, it also presents challenges in the form of cultural appropriation. To navigate these challenges effectively, we must strive for a deeper understanding of cultural dynamics, promote respectful and informed exchanges, and address the power imbalances that often underlie appropriation. Through education, thoughtful engagement, and ethical practices, we can work towards a society where cultural diversity is genuinely appreciated and celebrated, rather than exploited or misunderstood.

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