



FOR BLACK GIRLS ONLY? GSU STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

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When singer Miley Cyrus hosted the MTV Video Music Awards in August 2015 sporting blonde dreadlocks positive media coverage followed . In contrast, when actress Zendaya Coleman wore dreadlocks on the red carpet for the Oscars earlier in the same year, her hairstyle was interpreted negatively . This illustrates why people of color, particularly black women, oppose cultural appropriation. The stigma that often follows women of color for displaying their culture does not typically apply to people who identify as white. There is disagreement, however, as to whether cultural appropriation is an issue of importance. The goal of this research is to gauge GSU student perceptions of cultural appropriation.



Research Questions

Using a self-constructed survey I answer the following:

- 1) To what degree are GSU students aware of cultural appropriation?
- 2) To what degree do GSU students define it as problematic?
- 3) Based on student perceptions and attitudes toward cultural appropriation what may we conclude about respondent current racial identity?

Research Theory & Methodology

- Symbolic Interactionist Perspective- Suggests that human interaction and communication is learned by how symbols are associated with meanings given to them.
- Methodology- Convenience survey
- Fallacy- The probable misrepresentation of the entire body based on a small sample of individuals with a limited amount of examples given.

What is cultural appropriation?

- Cultural Appropriation- The use of parts of ones culture by members of a different culture.

- Why is it offensive?

 - All the Cool, No Consequence: seen as “trendy” and cool when the privileged group does it, seen as ghetto, unkempt, or worse when minority group displays aspects of culture

 - Often Play Off of Stereotypes: when someone “acts black” it is usually by utilizing stereotypes, such as “ghetto” hairstyles, dances, using AAVE (African American Vernacular English), becoming a caricature of what is commonly associated with that particular group

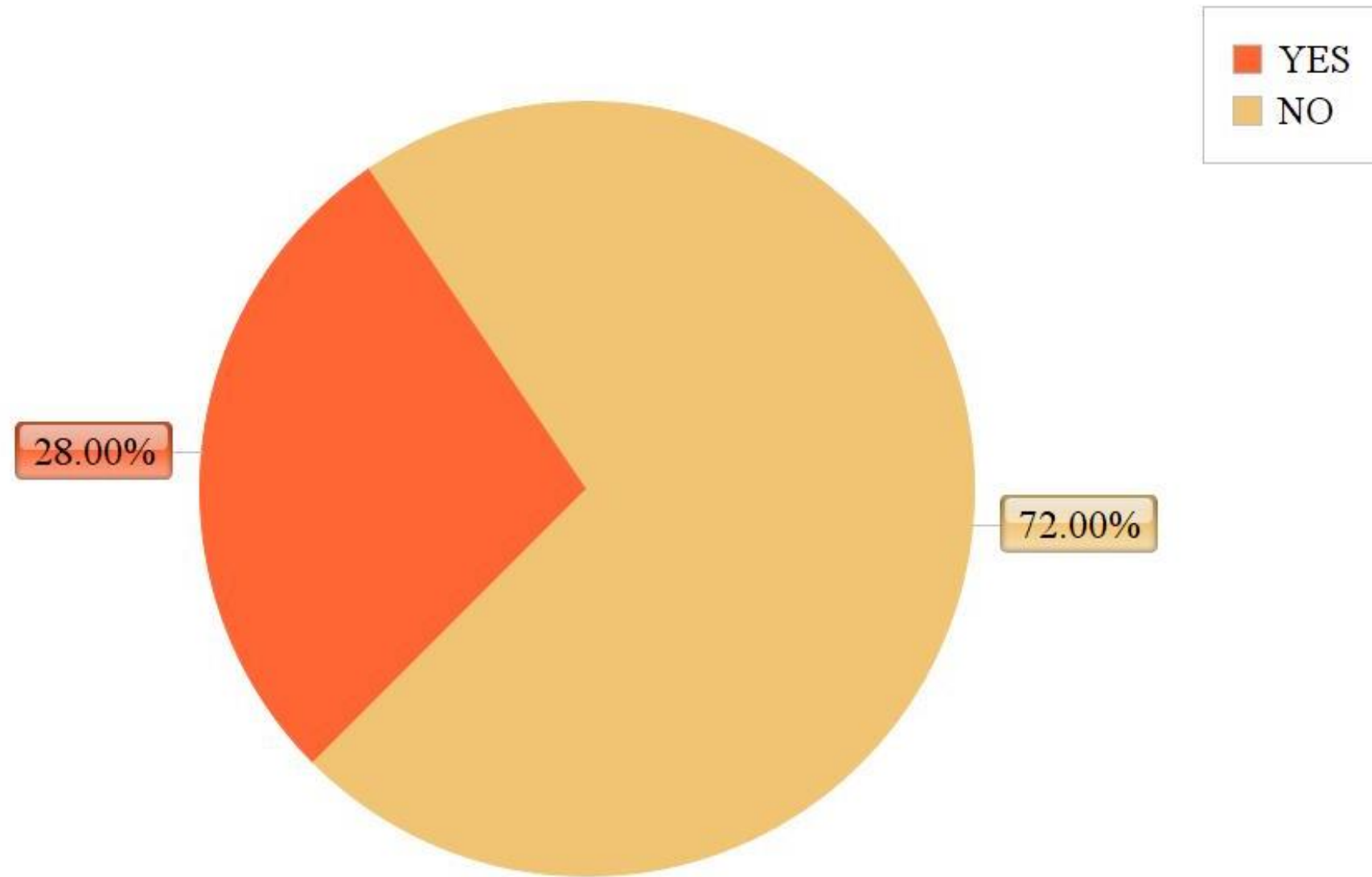
 - Trivializes History of Oppression: meaningful tools or customs being taken by the dominant group adds insult to injury for the majority of POC

 - Cash Crop: those in power often take parts of culture that is shared amongst POC (AAVE, dance crazes, fashion) and market it to other members of the dominant culture in order to make money

Is it bothersome or problematic when white people display symbols of black culture?

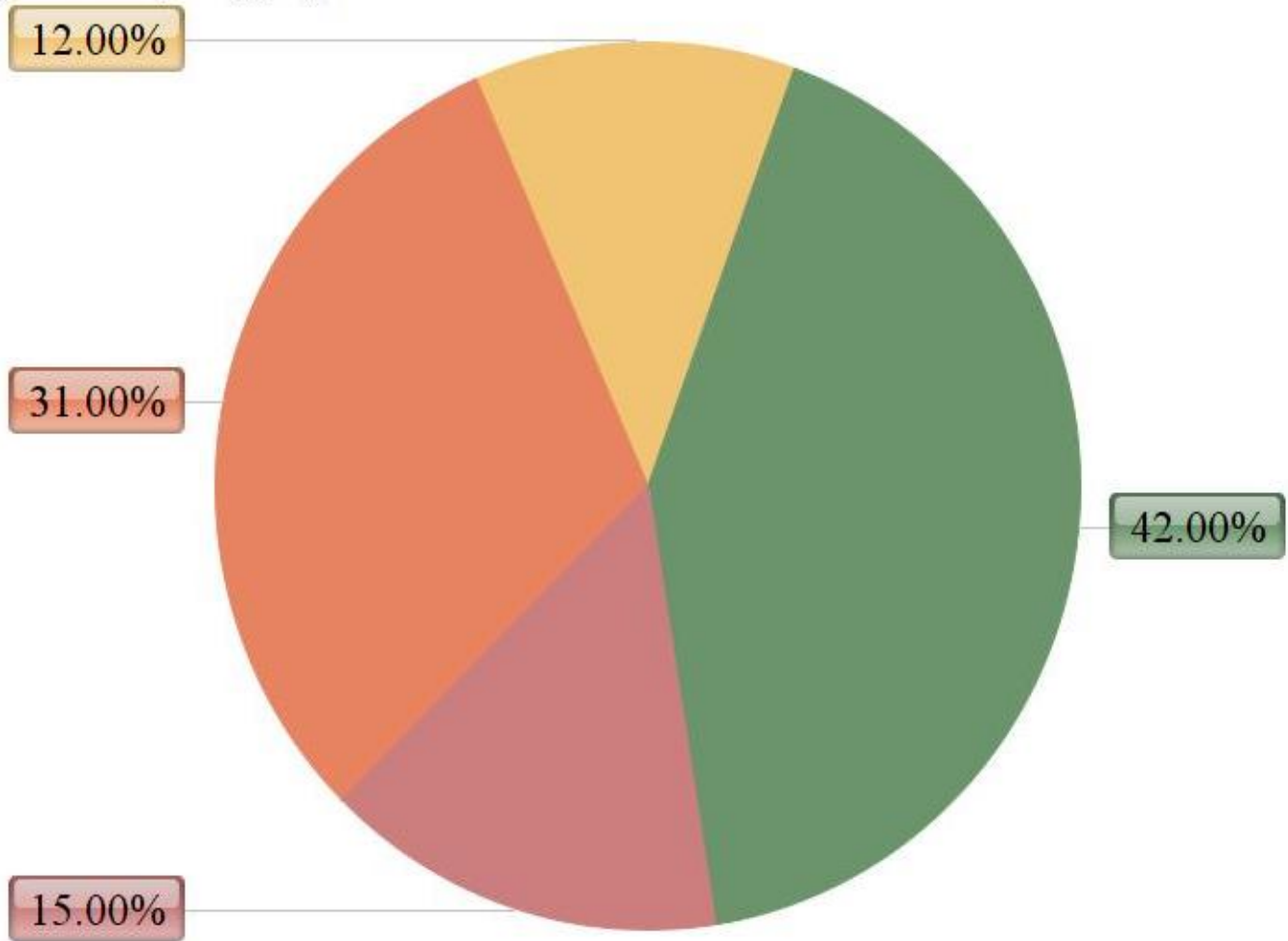


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- NO- "Only in certain situations"
- NO- "That's racist"
- NO- "That's free expression"
- NO- "That's appreciation, not appropriation"



YES- “When a white person copies us they are looked at as better than us when they don’t even know our struggle!”

NO- “Culture should be for every human. We shouldn’t give names to culture.”

NO- “If you care that much about it I think you have a personal problem with white people and should be considered as racist”.

NO-”I think everyone want to be black but they don’t really want to be black...if they actually had the chance to be black for a day I don’t think they would want to be.”

NO- “It’s appreciation, not appropriation”

What does this say about the current racial identity of GSU students?

- Pre-encounter- The individual internalizes society's messages about race from the dominant group. Unless there is some interference by parents or other significant others, there will be no critical evaluation taking place
- Encounter- Usually occurs in adolescence, an event or series of them may begin to impact the individual, causing them to question what it means to be apart of the group in question
- Immersion/Emersion- The individual begins to surround themselves with symbols they believe represent their racial identity.
- Internalization- The individual has a sense of security about their racial identity.
- Internalization-Commitment- The sense of security in turn makes the individual an activist for their racial group, as they become aware of the struggles and concerns of the group.

Discussion!



Future Research Ideas

- Does gender play a large role in the time it takes to develop self-identity?
- A Comparative Study of the Racial Identity of Black Students at HBCUs VS. PWIs
- When is cultural appropriation okay?

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