

Log

“Social media has become a place for diverse beauty expressions however these are easily co-opted by white capitalism .”¹⁰

The inspiration for this Personal Interest Project was my interest in human rights and racial discrimination towards minority groups and people of colour. My interest in the social issue heightened when I read a daily mail article ‘*The rise of 'Blackfishing'*’, where Twitter users were furiously calling out “white influencers who they claim are 'posing' as biracial women in order to gain more followers”¹¹. This introduced me to the concept of *Blackfishing* and its drastic impacts on the prejudice of those of colour, developed through media. This article gave me a realization of how some people viewed race as a costume and benefited from others' natural appearance and culture for their own commodity. The topic has become more current, as social media users have begun to question this manipulation of race and cultural boundaries. As *Blackfishing* and *Digital Blackface* borrow culture and aspects of race a clear sense of appropriation is introduced when it “reinforces historically exploitative relationships or deprived African”¹² persons of possible opportunities in which they are able to benefit from their own cultural material. This led to my hypothesis that states: “*The rise of digital technologies has developed concepts of black fishing which contributes to existing prejudices against peoples of colour, thus further perpetuating social exclusion.*”

Extensive secondary research was studied to allow for a substantial understanding of *Blackface* and its development into *Blackfishing* and *Digital Blackface* as well as their current effect on society. This research included but was not limited to “*Exporting Jim Crow: Blackface Minstrelsy in South Africa and Beyond*”¹³ written by Chinua Thelwell, which offered an in-depth explanation of stereotypes with racist intent which have ongoing ramifications on the perception of African Americans.

Primary research was conducted for further comprehension of secondary research providing a more coherent evaluation. First, a questionnaire¹⁴ was distributed online, generating 123 valid responses. However, it is important to note that the concepts of *Blackfishing* and *Digital Blackface* are very current specifically in America where persons of colour are directly impacted, therefore, my questionnaire which was distributed on a meso level is limited with only 4.1% of respondents being African American. Furthermore, 82.9% of respondents were aged 15-26, the results may have been distorted and unable to provide accurate generalisations.

An Interview was conducted with Dr Francesca Sobande¹⁵ a lecturer in digital media studies at the school of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University. This provided insights into the prejudice *Blackfishing* and *Digital Blackface* hold within society. However, as these interviews were conducted over email, questions or answers could not be expanded on as well as the clarity of tone was not clear.

A content analysis¹⁶ of Emma Halberg’s appearance after cosmetic manipulation in her personal Instagram post was critiqued in order to show the process of *Blackfishing* and the extent a person will go to in order to change their appearance to come across as more racially ambiguous. Furthermore, a second content analysis depicting an image of the social media platform Snapchat Snap maps enabled a deconstruction into how relevant the subject matter of *Digital Blackface* is with young students within Sydney. Australia is partaking in the trend for comical value in 2020. The information produced from the analysis showed the extent of discrimination those who partake in *Blackfishing* and *Digital Blackface* will go to for recognition. However, the content analysis was limited as personal perspective plays a large role in the analysis and there are no closed captions to examine within the photos.

¹⁰Muzondo, T 2020, *Black Bodies on White Women, Destructive Identity Play*, Debating Communities and Networks XI, Networkconference, viewed 3 July 2021, < <http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2020Curtin/2020/05/10/black-bodies-on-white-women-destructive-identity-play/> >.

¹¹Zoellner, D 2018, *One Twitter thread calls out white influencers POSING as biracial*, Mail Online, viewed 17 March 2021, < <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-6394265/What-blackfishing-Twitter-users-call-white-influencers-posing-biracial.html> >.

¹²Olufunmilayo Arewa 2019, *Cultural appropriation: when 'borrowing' becomes exploitation*, The Conversation, viewed 8 June 2021, < <https://theconversation.com/cultural-appropriation-when-borrowing-becomes-exploitation-57411> >.

¹³Chinua Thelwell 2020, *Exporting Jim Crow Blackface minstrelsy in South Africa and beyond* , vol. 1, Amherst Boston University Of Massachusetts Press, Massachusetts.

¹⁴ Appendix: A

¹⁵ Appendix: B

¹⁶ Appendix: C ¹⁷Zenebe, B 2020, *The Blackface Spectrum* , Northeastern University Political Review, viewed 26 February 2021, <
<https://www.nupoliticalreview.com/2020/11/23/the-blackface-spectrum/> >.