What inspired you to do your research?
It was 2007 during a discussion with my sister that I first came into contact with K-pop and I did not understand its allure until years later. It was in a sociology of culture class taught by Dr. Matt Patterson that I started to dive into the study of popular culture. During this time, K-pop was taking the world by storm spearheaded by artists such as BTS and Blackpink, and it coincided with my fascination in popular culture. This led to my interest in understanding how K-pop’s traction can be understood through a sociological framework.

What is your research about?
My research seeks to understand how popularity in cultural products is maintained, and why a foreign product like K-pop, despite the language barrier has established itself as one of the most popular branches of music that is currently out there. As the literature suggested, music consumption is related to our tastes and identity, and how consumers choose certain genres of music to suit their taste profile is directly linked to their expression of their identity. What a person may like or dislike in regards to their musical tastes reflects their individuality and separates themselves from others. In this situation, I investigated how music (K-pop) in a presumably foreign language for most of the North American consumers, is incorporated into their cultural profile and how do they reconcile it with pre-existing facets of their identity within the broader picture of distinction.

How do you do your research?
To conduct this research, I relied on qualitative methodology in the form of semi-structured interviews to collect data. The usage of an interview script with prompts was required and it controlled the flow and order of the interview to answer questions I had regarding K-pop’s popularity in North America. These prompts were updated to address concerns that I had not predicted which added to the richness of the data. The data was recorded via audio and were transcribed onto a separate document to examine underlying themes amongst the participants. An important aspect of this research is that it includes a cross-sample comparison between English and Korean speakers, where previous literature only focused on one sample, which is the local population and its language. This comparison can elucidate differences in the appraisal of K-pop, and how Korean-speakers evaluate something more ‘suited’ for them.

What is the implication of your research?
K-pop’s migration to North America is uncharacteristic of a ‘non-major’ source as it is able to ‘reverse-diffuse’ into the North American metropole. This research hopefully will highlight the reasons behind K-pop’s success through the perspective of the consumer and what does this suggest about their consumption practices. K-pop’s success challenges the importance of boundaries as foreign products are able to diffuse over regardless of language barriers signifying the erosion of ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, consumption practices reveal a lot about a person’s character or cultural capital. Since K-pop is a relatively new phenomenon, this builds on pre-existing research by understanding the value of K-pop to consumers. This can display how they express and separate themselves from others within the larger picture of distinction.