THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY: HOW HIPSTERS TRANSFORMED FROM A LOCAL SUBCULTURE TO A GLOBAL CONSUMPTION COLLECTIVE

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By

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ABSTRACT

New media technologies and the global exchange of goods have dramatically expanded opportunities for identity signaling. Previously hidden or distant populations are now seen through online search engines, and images of American culture are being exported to far reaching corners of the developed and developing world. Despite these significant social changes, however, familiar patterns of identity signaling persist. These developments raise questions of how cultures and subcultures are maintained in an ever more complex social landscape. Using the hipster subculture as a case study, this paper will examine the role of taste and of consumption in allowing subgroups to maintain internal cohesion and social distinction. Using theoretical and empirical analyses, including a survey to a mixed sample, the creation of a taste scale, and statistical analyses of the relationship between consumption preferences and attitudes about conformity and divergence, this paper examines how identity status is reified through collective expressions of taste.
This thesis is dedicated to my partner in life, J.R. Atwood.
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INTRODUCTION

In a world that grows ever more connected by the day via new media technologies and the global exchange of goods, the stage for identity signaling has expanded dramatically (McCracken, 2008). Over the last two decades of development, structural changes have meant that previously hidden or distant populations may now be seen through online search engines, and images of American culture are being exported to far reaching corners of the developed and developing world (Dowd and Dowd, 2003). In this global climate, opportunities for self-expression are richer and more diverse than ever before.

Yet, despite the expanding opportunities for social interactions and the resulting enhancement of larger social structures, familiar patterns of identity signaling persist. These developments raise questions of how, amidst increasing spanning of traditional boundaries and the growing complexity that ensues, cultures and subcultures are maintained. This paper will address these questions through theoretical and empirical analyses. In particular, it examines how changes to socioeconomic frameworks and digital technologies have altered the landscape for identity signaling, leading members of subcultures to reify status through narrow expressions of taste.

While the topic of subcultures and signaling is far from new for sociologists and cultural theorists, scant academic attention has been devoted to the subject since the information revolution transformed our everyday social interactions (Beniger, 1986). In the beginning of the twentieth century through the early 1980s, investigations of subcultures often centered around differences in taste or aesthetic preferences according to seemingly clear disparities in race, class, or educational attainment (Simmel, 1903, Veblen, 1934, Hebdige, 1979, DiMaggio, 1983,
Bourdieu, 1984). Many such theories were linked to the idiosyncratic elements of place, be it neighborhood, community, country, or social world (Hebdige, 1979, Fisher, 1984). While theorists recognized the often weighty influence of mass culture during this period, it was long before media corporations consolidated, use of online social media erupted, and divisions between the lower and middle class became less discernible in a country where 1% of the population controls 50% of its wealth (Saez, 2007). These economic and social conditions have led to an environment of paradoxical interconnectedness. While popular culture is perhaps even more ubiquitous, online communications technologies provide a plethora of channels for the circumvention of traditional boundaries (physical or social) and innumerable opportunities for self-expression.

In this current climate, any person with Internet access is free to share his or her most intimate experiences, learn about current events as they unfold, and access a wealth of information via online search tools and social networks. We must consider, then, that many previous assumptions about the social and physical boundaries that define cultures may no longer apply. Given the increasing connectedness of people and information, this paper argues that expressions of taste divergence, or “the act of moving away in different direction from a common point”¹, guide the emergence of contemporary subcultures in America.

Consider that culture is a kind of communication field in which human’s have the capacity to classify and encode experiences symbolically and to communicate those encoded experiences socially (Tyler, 1874). Ephemeral elements (interactions or experiences) and material products (goods) are both involved in a social process that produces shared meanings referred to as culture. While the amalgamation of symbols may result in nuanced interpretations and negotiations among actors (i.e. individuals, social groups, or institutions), there is a great

¹ Definition for “divergence” retrieved from www.thefreedictionary.com/
deal of evidence to support the notion that culture is the product of shared meanings produced through social interactions.

The pervasiveness of globalization, however, has caused once disparate cultures to assimilate toward a perceived or experienced “cultural center” (Dowd and Dowd, 2003). This center represents the products and images of American culture, be it fast food or film, exported and consumed around the globe. If similar representations of culture permeate our everyday experiences, we are given a reference point for *normality* or what is commonly referred to as mass culture. Many of our choices in terms of self-expression are thus situated in direct relationship to the perceived symbols and meanings of mass culture.

Subcultures evolve through interactions with these dominant meanings and symbols. The conventional definition of subculture has been a subgroup that is part of the dominant culture, but that differs from it in “some important respects” (Dowd and Dowd, 2003). Chinese immigrants who live in China towns, residents of Southern Appalachia, and the Amish are all examples that have been used in research on subcultures (Dowd and Dowd, 2003). Like a common culture, we can think of subcultures as dynamic, constantly changing as they respond to the influences of mass culture. As such, subcultures may become less pronounced over time given constant pressures to assimilate toward perceived norms (Dowd and Dowd, 2003).

The practice of theoretically distinguishing subcultures from countercultures is, however, somewhat convoluted. Scholars have argued that the difference lies in passive versus active forms of resistance. A counterculture, therefore, may invent means of differentiation to challenge values or norms of the common culture. Motorcycle gangs, hippies, and revolutionary political groups are all examples used to characterize this conceptual definition (Dowd and Dowd, 2003). The “otherness” of countercultures is thereby symbolic; countercultures cultivate difference
though intentional acts of distinction while subcultures may experience marginalization through religious or cultural uniqueness. However, these acts of resistance may be merely perceived by the researcher rather than experienced by members in real life (Dowd and Dowd 2003). As Dowd and Dowd (2003) suggest, it is difficult to discern, for example, how the hippies and the Amish are categorically distinct when both groups worked to create alternative agrarian lifestyles that do not rely on industrial or commercial systems. We cannot argue with any degree of objectivity that the anti-war demonstrations common among hippies during the 1960s were more “active” forms of resistance than the Amish’ collective choice to live off the grid in rural regions of America. Thus, to determine whether a groups’ actions are symbolically divergent, it is necessary for both members of the subculture and the common culture to perceive acts as confrontational or critical of dominant values, practices, or beliefs.

A strong indicator of how cultural categories are used, or how they move from conceptual to actionable activity by persons, is to investigate the more tangible measure of individual taste. Taste is the “system of practice through which individuals classify themselves by their… classification of consumer goods as more or less desirable, acceptable or valuable ([citing Bourdieu] Zukin, and Maguire, 2004). An expression of taste – what music genre, sports team, or literature one prefers – imbibes persons with opportunities for public expressions of uniqueness or individuality. By the same token, taste supports the human need to understand others through social categories. The physical expression of taste, the act of consuming goods, is thereby a heuristic tool for bypassing complexity and reifying social categories. Displays of consumption can communicate status or group affiliation, providing similar individuals the chance to “converge together” or dissimilar individuals the opportunity to diverge in order to “avoid signaling undesired characteristics” (Berger and Heath, 2007, p.123).
Clothing is, of course, the most immediate and accessible means for communicating group affiliation and status. Berger and Heath (2009) found, for example, that a “cause bracelet” popular among residents of a Stanford University athletic dorm was quickly abandoned when the same accessory came to be worn by residents of the neighboring “geek” building. Something as simple as a bracelet can therefore do much more than decorate the arm of the wearer; it can also carry latent and even patent messages about personhood.

Clothing and accessories thus act in two ways: to show conformity within a particular social group, and to distinguish an individual from other, less desirable reference groups. Hebdige (1979) was one of the first scholars to argue that styles may emerge for the sake of provocation – to present a subversion of what is perceived as normative or natural dress. In his much-cited book, \textit{Subcultures and the Meaning of Style}, he writes that clothing can serve as an expression of “normality” or “deviance.” Common style has a “relative invisibility”, “appropriateness,” and “naturalness.” With subcultural style, however, the wearer may have a very different set of intents: “[subcultural style] stands apart – a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read” (p. 101). In other words, the selection of clothing can serve as a display of conformity or resistance, allowing persons to express their desire to relate to or differentiate themselves from references groups involved in a field of communication.

Today, we see a variety of subcultures whose identity is expressed through consumption. While previous subcultural theories, born out the functionalist and Marxist traditions, recognized that display of goods reify subcultural categories, these theories do not explain some of today’s subcultures. With the growing interconnectedness of people, and the increasing expression of culture through global commodities, signaling no longer happens at the level of race, class or
gender. Signaling now occurs via online social networks. Online spaces invite new opportunities for signaling and surveillance across geographic and social boundaries, leading to the formation of groups that undermine previous theories of subcultures.

Hipsters provide one such anomaly. Theirs is a material subculture often symbolized by objects or styles appropriated from past eras, meant to appear ironic or novel with contemporary application. However, unlike previous subcultures or countercultures that used group labels to reify social distinction, hipsters defy being labeled as hipsters. They shun categorization and yet display clear in-group conformity through particular patterns of style and dress. The study of hipsters is further complicated by the popularity of their subcultural style, making group boundaries highly permeable and opportunities for participation and imitation ripe. Thus, group distinction for hipsters has becomes an act of marketplace competition.

These new social structures and the novel complexities that result from interconnectedness raise the following questions: First, how are hipsters able to maintain a cohesive subculture while denying their identities and constantly undergoing internal changes? Second, are they a new kind of subculture, and does their existence reflect larger socioeconomic changes? To address these questions, this paper presents the following hypotheses, designed to account for the presumed fluidity of this identity category:

\[ H_1: \text{Given the foundation of subcultural theory that subcultural status is achieved through acts of divergence from a perceived dominant class, I propose that people with high hipster taste will be more likely to express divergence, i.e., a desire to stand out with their fashion or style, than individuals with low hipster taste.} \]
I propose that blogs, websites, and social network tools serve as a means for maintaining group cohesion, despite the constant need for hipsters to innovate and differentiate themselves. Therefore, I posit that people with high hipster taste will be more likely than individuals with low hipster taste to use blogs and websites to seek out information about fashion.

As will be described in chapter two, these hypotheses are to be tested using a pilot survey to gather mixed sample data, a scale to identify thresholds of taste, and statistical analyses to identify differences of similarities between individuals with high hipster taste and individuals with low hipster taste. The thesis will be organized as follows: The introduction of this paper proposed a conceptual definition of culture as a dynamic process of communication, created and negotiated symbolically through consumption and display of goods. This chapter also provided some guiding definitions for distinguishing mass cultures, subcultures, and countercultures. It argues that we must overcome the traditional categories of race, class, or gender in our evaluation of cultures and instead consider networks as the guiding social structure for group signaling. Furthermore, it proposes that expressions of taste, which cohere at the group level, may serve as the best measure of emergent subcultural categories.

Chapter two will build on these concepts. In this section a multi-disciplinary framework for studying subcultures will be introduced, drawing on relevant research in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and economics. Concepts such as symbolic goods, boundary work, identity signaling, digital presence, in-group conformity and out-group divergence will be elaborated. It will also discuss recent economic and cultural shifts that challenge previous
theories in subcultural studies, including the ways in which online communications technologies are transforming traditional social structures and creating new spaces for creativity and self-expression.

Chapter three will present the hipster subculture as a case study. It will focus on the material objects of significance that the members of this group use to distinguish themselves from common culture or members of other subcultural groups. It will also discuss some of the spaces (virtual and physical) that allow hipsters to articulate and negotiate shared taste. This chapter will thereby provide a conceptual understanding of hipsters as a subculture to inform the hypotheses that will be later tested empirically.

Chapter four will outline proposed methods for testing my hypotheses, followed by analyses of the data. An online survey instrument will be used to gather data; analyses will include a one-tail Fisher’s Exact and one-tail Z-Tests to reveal in-group attributes and correlation among variables. Results of these tests will be presented, steps involved in data gathering and analysis will be further articulated, strengths and weaknesses of the methodology will be discussed, and future tests will suggested in this section.

Finally, chapter five will review and summarize theoretical research and empirical findings. This section will also highlight any shortcomings or errors discovered in the conceptual model, data gathering, and analysis and will address any outstanding questions that remain.
CHAPTER II: SOCIOECONOMIC FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR ROLE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis uses hipsters as a case study to explore how new kinds of social collectives are emerging around shared taste. Given the increasing complexity of cultures and subcultures, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: How are hipsters, as an example, able to maintain a cohesive subgroup while constantly undergoing internal changes? Are hipsters a new kind of subgroup, and does its existence reflect larger socioeconomic changes?

In order to address these larger questions, this thesis will investigate the ways in which consumption patterns, tastes, and attitude expressions of a mixed sample to test the following two hypotheses: 1) People with high hipster taste will be more likely to express divergence, i.e., a desire to stand out with their fashion or style, than individuals with low hipster taste; and 2) people with high hipster taste will be more likely than individuals with low hipster taste to seek out information about their fashion or style online.

Before testing these hypotheses, however, we must first conceptualize the variables embedded therein. Building on relevant literature in sociology, cultural studies, economics, and anthropology, this chapter discusses the variables of signaling, standards, and boundary work, creativity and individuality, and social network structures. This chapter also attempts to links these variables together, providing a conceptual framework for modeling their relationships.
SIGNALING AND SYMBOLIC GOODS

In his discourse on Categories Aristotle wrote, “things are called relative, which, being either said to be of something else or related to something else, are explained by reference to that other thing” (Aristotle translated by E.M. Edghill). This doctrine reflects Aristotle’s belief that humans understand one another through categories, and that these categories can be socially created in opposition to inherent or experienced differences. Aristotle envisioned categories as an interacting set of “universals” and “particulars,” with universals acting as the patent categories known to everyone – such as race, or gender – and particulars emerging idiosyncratically in relation to universals. Following Aristotle’s lead, this paper will attend to the particular categories of culture in an effort to understand how humans relate to one another more broadly through consumption and expressions of taste.

The previous chapter introduced the notion that expressions of taste make categories of culture more real. How one dresses, for example, carries an immediate set of social cues about the wearer’s status and his or her affiliation or divergence with particular social groups. The process of making meaning from these cues is what economists (Spence, 1973) and biologists (Zahavi, 1975) have described as signaling theory. Economists use signaling theory to study market interactions, i.e., what market cues prompt individuals to buy, sell, adopt or reject goods flowing through a given market. Social scientists (Donath, 2007) apply signaling theory more broadly to study the ways in which social status is communicated and negotiated. Signaling involves the transmission of information embedded in objects, making the relationship between symbols and human qualities more visible (Donath, 2007). Symbols alone do not communicate status; the ways in which symbols interact with larger social structures leads to the creation and
communication of shared meanings. We intuit, for example, that a woman is engaged if she wears a diamond ring on her left ring finger, or that she is employed in the public sphere if she dresses in a two-piece suit. These inferences are not inherent to diamonds and suits; we assign social meanings to these artifacts through our interactions and observations.

The theory of signaling is particularly salient when dealing with complex cultures in which physical boundaries are low and opportunities for interactions are high. In such an environment individuals may rely more heavily on symbols to process otherwise indiscernible qualities about people. As Donath (2007) writes:

Whether face-to-face or online, much of what people want to know about other people is not directly observable. We rely instead on signals, which are perceivable features and actions that indicate the presence or absence of those hidden qualities. We cannot directly observe others’ beliefs, experiences, or what they really think of us; instead we rely on signals such as facial expressions, [and] consumption patterns… (p. 3).

Sociologists have studied the ways in which signaling works to reify social categories and bound social groups. This research suggests that taste, or expressed preferences for particular goods or experiences, may signal one’s class or political orientation. Building on Bourdieu’s (1983) theory of social distinction, Bryson (1993) finds that status is often communicated through expressions of dislike, with the rejection of particular commodities marking the rejection of an associated social category. Using general social survey (GSS) data, Bryson tested whether people of high status, i.e., individuals possessing higher education, income and occupational prestige, are more likely to express dislike of particular music genres than people of low status. Her findings suggest that negative attitudes toward social groups – based on class distinction – can result in negative feelings about the types of music associated with those groups, such as heavy metal. Like clothing, then, music taste may carry symbolic
messages that explain both conformity and divergence or what Bryson calls “social cohesion” and “cultural resistance” (p. 855).

Other researchers have used consumption habits to measure how social boundaries are created and maintained. In *The World of Goods*, Douglas and Isherwood (2000) argue that culture is ostensibly a set of “justifying principles” for bringing about “support or solidarity” (p. xxiv) among groups. Consumption habits, they suggest, evolved from the human need to relate others, with goods acting as “mediating materials” for signaling one’s position in society (p. viii). Goods thereby serve as markers of social alignments, communicating what you are for or against.

Decodifying the significance of goods on an individual basis has, however, proven quite difficult. On its own, an object may be meaningless. It comes to life, however, when it references social codes and conventions. A ring worn on a ring finger represents engagement through its relation to a set of supra-referents, or what Douglas and Isherwood (2000) call “the whole” (p. xiii). This whole is the contextual web of social meaning assigned to objects and goods, a web that constantly grows larger as the relationships between goods and codes evolve in relation to one another. Rather than studying goods individually, then, Douglas and Isherwood suggest that social boundaries should be measured through consumption patterns. By looking at consumption patterns as an overall metric, researchers may “strip away the materials in which social relations are constituted and see the bare patterns of the relationships which they cover” (p. xiv).

For a subculture to persist on a global stage, a set of mechanisms must exist to develop and communicate the standards – material, behavioral or aesthetic – that define these relationships. In *Globalization, Developing Countries, and the Evolution of International Standard Setting Communities of Practice*, Garcia and Burns (2005) describe the role of
standards-setting bodies in the business sector that function to “establish rules, norms, meaning and identity over time based on ongoing interactions and negotiations that accompany participation in a shared enterprise” (p. 1). While this article investigates standards-setting bodies with profit-seeking motives, the arguments apply to any community in which members participate and negotiate toward a shared goal. Like a firm, made up of various organizations and actors, hipsters are a subculture with a global presence. With all members interested in maintaining their subcultural identity, hipsters must collaborate to negotiate the standards of the group. As these standards and norms evolve, so do the commercial actors who supply the goods and objects used to reify the hipster identity. In this way, consumption patterns serve as the set of standards whereby which an aspirant, aware of the communicative power of these goods, can achieve member status through conscious consumption.

A methodology for evaluating consumption patterns is therefore a powerful tool for studying trends in American culture, where consumerism has made the boundaries between social classes more permeable and the standards, i.e., symbols of solidarity, easy to parrot or imitate. In such an environment, where cultural change is frequent, consumption demands will keep apace, providing a mobile means of marking social categories. The key, Baron and Isherwood (2000) suggest, is for individuals to convince other individuals that categories created around goods are real: “The individual needs compliant fellows if he is to succeed in changing the public categories, reducing their disorder and making the universe more intelligible” (p. 45). By studying group consumption patterns, then, we may better understand how new collective identities and even subcultures emerge and how they are maintained.

If consumption habits signal affiliation or solidarity with a social category, then knowing the signal associated with a certain good or set of goods allows an individual to choose which
status to embody. Donath (2007) writes of this awareness as being “in fashion.” She argues that fashions empower actors in an information-based society to adapt intuitively to changing social environments.

Being in fashion – whether via physical clothing or online linking – signals fitness in the continuously changing information world. It signals status in a society where “information prowess” – i.e., having access to information, the ability (often termed taste) to distinguish between good and bad information, and the willingness to adapt to changes brought by new information – is a fundamental part of culture (Donath, 2007, p. 1213).

This theory suggests that individuals may inhabit multiple identities simultaneously as long as they are aware of the appropriate signals associated with a given status or identity. Being in fashion, therefore, means having access to information, such that one knows the appropriate social meaning of an object or way of doing things at the right time. The point at which a person adopts or rejects a good or service is similarly meaningful: “what they adopt – the cars they drive, music they listen to, stories they link to – signals their affiliations. When they adopt indicates their status and commitment to those affiliations. (Donath, 2007, p. 1212).” Being in fashion is about staying ahead of the diffusion curve such that one is perceived as an innovator rather than a follower. This temporal element is another factor that allows individuals to signal difference, for if everyone adopted the same trend at the same time, their signals may be treated equally.

If categories matter, and signaling through consumption allows individuals to affiliate with particular social groups, then social information is a form of power. An adept individual may negotiate his or her status based on the changing signals about the significance of goods in proximity. Keeping abreast of these changing signals is, however, far from simple in a complex
culture. Donath (2007) argues that while industrialization has brought about a new universe of goods, it has further complicated life for the consumer. In order to stay in fashion in our current information landscape an individual must “run harder to keep in the same place” (p. 74).

Signaling through consumption and the display of symbolic goods play an increasingly significant role in expressions of personhood. By comparing the consumption patterns of individuals with high hipster taste to consumption patterns of individuals with low hipster taste, we will have better insights about how new social categories emerge and how they are used. In this subsection, the relationship between social signaling and the emergence or maintenance of social groups was discussed. The next subsection will not only present a framework for conceiving of changes within the larger socioeconomic order but will also suggest ways in which these changes are transforming opportunities for signaling and consumption.

**CREATIVITY AND HYPER-INDIVIDUALITY**

Social signaling in America is often guided by the element of self-invention. An American ethos promoting the power of the individual began when pilgrims emigrated from Britain to start a new society, and was reinforced as the pioneers struggled to settle unknown lands in the West (Weiner, 2000). Benjamin Franklin echoed these sentiments throughout the nineteenth century with his rhetoric of the “self-made man,” and his message still resonates in Obama’s call for change through self-actualization, i.e., “we are the ones we have been waiting for.” From the birth of our young country until today, the values of freedom, individuality, and
creativity have set a cultural standard. As Weiner (2000) suggests in *Creativity and Beyond*, much of our culture emerged from the ways in which these elements were negotiated and “played off against each other” (p. 80).

In keeping with this standard, every individual is trumpeted as having creative potential in America, and many of our marketplace interactions promote novelty as a positive attribute. Creativity in economic goods and services is often associated with innovation – products are made “better” or more desirable for a consumer based on the ability of that good to improve his or her life. Understanding how creativity is expressed and processed through identity and personhood is, arguably, a more byzantine endeavor.

Personifications of creativity, according to Weiner (2000), are often associated with rebellion and deviance. Creativity is frequently perceived as being in conflict with tradition. These elements are situated in a kind of ongoing battle, with one representing “a commitment to the past” and the other “a push toward the future” (Weiner, 2000, p. 80). This dynamic fosters tension; cultural identity and social stability “requires continuity” while a basic human need for “curiosity, imagination, and enthusiasm drive us to invent, explore, and express ourselves in ever new ways” (Weiner, 2000, p. 12).

American history has demonstrated that those at the margins of society are most often credited with bringing about social change and are later heralded as “creative” for doing so. Weiner writes that these people, “the outsiders, eccentrics, bohemians, nerds, gays and lesbians, maverick inventors and dreamers,” (p. 256) are reviled by their contemporaries and later celebrated by their successors. Many subcultural identities have emerged from this dichotomy of
“new versus old” or “typical versus creative.” Moreover, distinctions around whether a group is a subculture or a counterculture are often generated by the degree to which that group is seen as confrontational toward the values or status quo of a dominant culture (Dowd and Dowd, 2003)

Expressions of individuality evolve as people conceive of themselves in relation to others, and reinvent accordingly. While individuals may have the power to create their identity anew, determining which identity to signal and which social group to align oneself with can be an overwhelming endeavor. Marx viewed expressions of individuality as “dependent upon and conditioned by the social-economic material “base” (Weiner, 2000, p. 81). This was an early recognition of the symbolic power of goods to represent identity in consumerist cultures. Following the argument that goods act as markers of social distinction, Weiner (2000) posits that members of such cultures may conceive of themselves as a ‘text’ to be read and interpreted, with goods acting as the scripts. (p. 111).

In a cultural context where material changes are constant, fitness is achieved though adaptability. In The Origin of Wealth, Beinhocker (2007) describes the theory of fitness, first developed by the evolutionary theorist Sewall Wright, as the ability to respond appropriately to changing demands. We can think of a fitness landscape as the design for success in a given context, the rules for playing the game. In America, where there is a cycling menu of symbolic (and often disposable) goods, the fitness landscape for social signaling is constantly undergoing change. So, too, are social groups. Weiner (2000) credits these cultural changes to larger social and economic changes. He posits that American capitalism and Western technology have combined to unleash a ‘flood of novelty’ and a state of hyper-individuality.
Multiculturalism, globalism, the rise of women, social and geographic mobility, efforts toward democracy depletion of natural resources, the persistent threat of violence and destruction, genetic manipulation... All this is portrayed through film, television, and computers, which overwhelm us with images and information... These developments have greatly accelerated the social-cultural transformations of the past centuries which have undermined the seeming certainty of traditional values and pushed us into a global and relativistic context” (Weiner, 2000, p.98).

While the stage for social signaling has expanded through these larger changes in the socioeconomic order, particular patterns of human behavior persist. Individuals in consumerist cultures continue to rally around objects to create social categories, also known as Aristotle’s particulars, in relation to the larger socioeconomic social structures of capitalism, consumption, and information sharing. While the Western conception of creativity and the individual becomes an increasingly dominant global value, individuality can only be achieved through reference to larger universal categories. As the exportation of American culture leads to what Weiner (2000) calls a “global culture,” we can therefore expect global variations of culture to decrease over time.

As consumption of disposable goods increases worldwide, those new collectives that are emerging are doing so according to shared taste, and signals of affiliation and solidarity are achieved through the consumption of associated goods. Weiner (2000) describes this pattern as a global act of conforming to the American ideal of individual uniqueness. It is with caution that we consider this argument as it is only the case in cultures where basic human needs – food, clothing, shelter – are accounted for, and a certain degree of disposable income allow individuals the opportunity to consume non-essential goods. At this point, goods may become symbolic, and
identity comes to be expressed through acts of consumption (Douglas and Isherwood, 2000). If access to wealth and cultural complexity increases, and individuals in the developing world are provided opportunities for non-essential consumption, we can expect to witness new social collectives cohering around goods and shared taste.

This subsection discussed the economic and social changes that affect identity construction in contemporary America. The subsequent subsection presents a framework for conceiving of the relationship between economic and social change and the resulting transformation of social structure. The next subsection will argue that many individuals do not solely associate with mutually exclusive categories of race, class, gender, or geographic location; rather they select from and engage in multiple status affiliations through increasingly accessible social networks.

GROUPS TO NETWORKS

The Internet played a significant role in the move from universal categories of culture to an array of particulars. At the most basic level, online communication technologies “expand human social reach,” (Donath, 2007, p. 2) allowing fruitful interaction among individuals previously separated by geographic limitations. In addition to circumnavigating geographic boundaries, online technologies create a new sense of space that is no longer based in place.

In *The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism*, Wellman et al. (2003) argue that the Internet is merely facilitating social changes that have been decades in the
making. Before the advent of the Internet age “social, economic and technological phenomena affected the transition from groups to networks,” transforming the ways that people “contact, interact, and obtain resources from each other (p. 17). Wellman et al. contend, moreover, that individuals no longer rely on a physical community for social capital; more often they seek out a variety of “appropriate people and resources for different situations” (Pew, 2004, p. ii). In other words, with globalization and the expanding communicative capabilities brought about by the Internet, interactions have moved from localized groups to global networks, and people may switch between networks depending on the information-gathering task at hand.

A 2004 study conducted by Pew Research likewise offers evidence that the Internet reduces interest in local issues and expands interest at the global level. The study found that people’s communities are not disappearing, but instead transforming: “The traditional human orientation to neighborhood and village based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks” (Pew, 2004, p. i).

While the Internet is transforming preexisting community structures, it is also leading to new communities cohered around shared interests. Blogs, social network sites, and virtual worlds are all examples of the ways in which the Internet provides new spaces for social groups to align around information seeking habits (Wellman et. al., 2003, p. 9). Weiner (2000) suggests that the elements of creativity and individuality associated with American culture are now becoming global values due to changes within larger social structures. He writes:

‘Global culture’ is a culture of billions of individuals “experiencing the loosening of ties and therefore increased pressure to make individual decisions. The weakening of traditional communities pushes each individual to find traditions and communities where he or she can, because the clear social roles through which we are defined have lost much
of their validity. This might be seen as liberating or frightening – but is absolutely means that each individual bears a great responsibility for defining him or herself (p. 112).

The Internet and online communications technologies are also changing the rules of the game for being in fashion. Donath (2007) suggests that a girth of fashion signals is produced through social network sites, where “images, movies, and jokes” trace “network paths as they spread from user to user (Donath, 2007, p. 1212). Consider that the Internet provides any user with a new informational universe for signaling, full of digital “words, numbers, sounds, and images can be clipped and cropped, reframed, merged, melded, erased, and recreated” (Weiner, 2000, p. 107). With the convergence of technologies such as cell phone cameras and online sharing softwares, we have learned that where information starts and where is ends up on the web is often unpredictable. While some may credit these changing elements to the technology, this paper argues that online sharing tools support a longstanding human need to seek affiliation with others. The Information Revolution brought about by the Internet has merely changed the fitness landscape for affiliation, such that individuals may use online resources to find others with shared interests or tastes.

Social network research offers a great deal of insight into the ways in which social structures are changing as a result of increasing online connectivity. In social network analysis, ties represent the relationships among people. Depending on the context under investigation, researchers will categorize these ties as strong or weak, heterogeneous or homogenous (Wellman, et. al., 2003). While individual relationship are highly complex, individually categorizing ties is useful for understanding the ways in which technology may facilitate and
support linkage (Donath 2007). Donath (2007) describe strong ties as “close confidants, people relied upon in an emergency and with whom one is likely to share multiple interests (p. 7). A network of strong ties generally means that the resulting network is dense and homogenous (Donath, 2007). Weak ties, on the other hand, are “more distant acquaintances, people known in a specific context whom one feels less responsibility” (Donath, 2007, p. 7).

The benefits of a sparsely connected network of weak heterogeneous ties are that connected individuals are given access to “a great variety of ideas and experiences” (Donath, 2007, p. 7). Many scholars (Granovetter 1973, Burt, 1992, Cross and Parker, 2004) have found great benefits associated with weak network ties, from landing a job to innovating within an organization. The general thrust of this research is that connection to a diverse set of social contacts can often lead to positive outcomes.

Weak ties, however, are not always beneficial. The advantages of enclosure or openness may vary depending on the goal of the group. In an analysis of social capital and civic engagement, Putnam (2000) writes that social interactions can be viewed as “bridging” or “bonding.” Bonding groups tend to be inward looking with an aim of reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneity. Putnam uses fraternities, church reading groups, or county club members as examples. Bridging is what we would consider weak links in a network – bridging groups tend to be outward looking and encompass people “across diverse social cleavages” (p. 22). Bridging is better for “information diffusion” and discovering “external assets” while bonding is ideal for “reciprocity” and “solidarity” (p. 22). Most interestingly Putnam asserts that bonding is more likely to create in-group conformity, although it will also produce “out-group
antagonism” (p. 23). Sociologists most often view bonding groups as subcultures or
countercultures. But many of their studies were conducted before the Information Revolution,
and the resulting interconnectedness that has lead to the rarifying of traditional boundaries and
group practices.

Wellman et al. (2003) argues that communities and societies are now becoming
“networked societies” where “boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse
others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are flatter and more
recursive” (p. 17). This change in architecture allows people to interact across physical
boundaries and “cycle through interactions with a variety of others,” spurning what Wellman
calls “networked individualism” (Wellman, et. al., 2003, p. 17).

The theory of networked individualism suggests that structural changes are inspiring new
kinds of interactions that promote American individualism. No longer bound to the resources or
actors in a local community or place, individuals in a networked environment may jockey among
networks that fit their needs, harnessing the appropriate informational resources that will
promote their information seeking objectives. Online tools thus allow people “to be everywhere,
but situated nowhere” (Wellman, et. al., 2003, p. 17). Blogs, websites, and online social
networks, which give users the ability to read, post, comment and hyperlink, allow individuals to
collaborate, negotiate, and observe in ways previously impossible. Moreover, this kind of
networked connectivity provides an instantaneous feedback loop based on an individual’s
interactions and the observed interactions of others (Wellman, et. al., 2003). Current research
suggests that more people are “maneuvering through multiple communities of choice” (Wellman,
et. al., 2003, p. 19), and that actors may experience multiple affiliations based on a variety of tastes.

This research warrants a new model for conceiving of cultural categories, one that is no longer focused on place and one that accounts for the transcendence of previously universal categories. In this new cultural landscape we can expect to observe individuals engaging in multiple affiliation networks, or social collectives, based around interest areas of their choosing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the relationship between signaling and symbolic goods, individualism and creativity and outlined changes in social structures that have arisen from globalization and the ubiquitous expansion of the Internet. It described how signaling and symbolic goods serve to reify identity, and how capitalism and individualism have influenced the flow of marketplace goods and increased opportunities for signaling. This chapter also proposed that socioeconomic changes have initiated new social structures in which collectives emerge via networks of shared taste.

This thesis seeks to understand such collectives, and aims to do so by measuring hipster taste and communication patterns. The next chapter will provide a brief history and overview of the hipster subgroup, from their emergence in the late 1990s to present day. It will include an overview of the objects (i.e., symbolic goods) as well as the resources (i.e., online and offline spaces) used by hipsters to signal affiliation and shared taste. It will also discuss how acts of
divergence, in particular, allow this group to stand out as a distinguishable social category.

Hipsters have been chosen as a model case study because they are a contemporary subgroup that emerged amidst the sociocultural changes discussed in this chapter and, most importantly, they are a subgroup that continues to evolve today.
CHAPTER III: THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF MODERN HIPSTER TASTE

INTRODUCTION

This paper grew from a desire to understand how hipsters cultivate a highly popular aesthetic while maintaining a seemingly subterranean status. Thus, this thesis examines the ways in which consumption patterns facilitate the emergence and persistence of identity categories and whether, in the case of hipsters, these consumption patterns correlate to a heightened desire to express divergence or social distinction. Consumption patterns will be measured through the creation of a taste scale that features variables in the domains of fashion, music, and music (both physical and virtual). By locating a mixed population of survey participants on this taste scale (with thresholds for low, medium, and high hipster taste), we can ascertain: 1) whether high hipster taste correlate to a higher likelihood for expressing dislike or divergence in one’s style; and 2) the role of online resources in creating and/or reinforcing hipster style and consumption patterns.

Before proceeding with an empirical analysis of hipster taste, however, we must first understand who hipsters are and where they come from. This chapter presents the case study of hipsters as a subculture of consumption and is organized into three sections: the first which outlines the etymology of the hipster, the second which discusses the behavior and aesthetics of contemporary hipsters, and the third which details the impact of commercialization on the consumer preferences of this subgroup. The following chapter therefore serves as a primer for the subgroup under investigation before empirical analyses commence in chapter four.
A BRIEF EYTMONOLOGY OF THE HIPSTER

Like many local subcultures gone global, the origin of the contemporary hipster is difficult to trace. The hipster was first popularized in Jack Kerouac’s (1957) novel, *On The Road*. Kerouac portrayed the hipster as a wanderer inspired by Beat Movement influences of jazz, poetry, recreational drugs, and casual sex. These characteristics, celebrated by Kerouac, aimed to trade seemingly mundane elements of middle class existence for the authenticity, spontaneity, and vibrancy of urban living. Twenty years after the release of Kerouac’s now famous novel, British cultural theorist Dick Hebdige (1979) challenged this romantic, describing the hipster instead as a “radical, white intellectual” who appropriated elements of black culture’s dress, language, and music for his own novelty (p. 47). The appeal of the hipster, argued Hebdige, was a lifestyle offering whites a perceived “freedom-in-bondage” from the expectations of middle and upper class life (p. 48).

Marty Jezer (1982) went one step further in stigmatizing the mid-twentieth century hipster, casting him as a kind of trickster who cultivated an identity that daftly defied definition. In *The Dark Ages, Life in the United States 1945-1960*, Jezer describes the nonconformist habits of the hipster as follows:

Their language, limited as it was, was sufficiently obscure to defy translation into everyday speech. Their rejection of the commonplace was so complete that they could barely acknowledge reality. The measure of their withdrawal was their distrust of language…When hipsters did put together a coherent sentence, it was always prefaced with the word *like* as if to state at the onset that what would follow was probably an illusion. There was neither a future nor a past, only a present that existed on the existential wings of sound (p. 255).
Most writings on the early hipster struggle to define what are certainly ephemeral elements of this identity. All accounts, however, agree that members of this subculture were generally white and of middle or upper class status, guided by leftist politics and artistic sentiments, and eager to shun class expectations through voluntary poverty. The hipster identity represented an intentional divergence, and idealized escape, from the expected or associated norms of whiteness.

This pattern was not, however, unique to the hipster. Many white subcultures emerged in urban environments where interactions with recent immigrant or minority groups, whether harmonic or confrontational, created hybrid forms of music, dress, and language. Examples beginning in Britain and later spreading to America include the punks, hardy boys, mods, skinheads, and beats – all born from post-war social dynamics associated with the influx of immigrants from the West Indies to working class London neighborhoods. According to Hebdige (1979), the Rastafarianism aesthetic of dress, music, and dance lead to the emergence of all aforementioned white subcultures that either celebrated or repressed these convergent or appropriated cultural forms.

The dynamics of place, then, play a central role in the story of subcultures. As early as the 1880s, American artists, poets, and musicians flocked to neighborhoods of New York City for solace, cultural renewal, and artistic inspiration via urban life. New York has consistently served as a haven and even an incubator for Bohemianism. In Garrett & Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America, (1933 [1960]) Albert Parry traces some of these influential figures and elements of American Bohemia. Quoting poet George Sterling, he identifies two elements that are essential to Bohemianism, a love of art, and an idealization of poverty:
The first is devotion or addiction to one or more of the seven arts; the other is poverty. Other factors suggest themselves: for instance, I like to think of my Bohemians as young, as radical in their outlook on art and life; as unconventional, and, though this is debatable, as dwellers in a city large enough to have the somewhat cruel atmosphere of all great cities (p. 238).

Bohemianism, representing a kind of freedom from class expectations and moral restraint, continued in various permutations throughout the twentieth century. It was not until the early 1990s that the hipster resurfaced as a common label in a little known neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Nearly a decade later, the hipster has become a globally recognized identity, with countless newspaper articles, blog posts, and websites dedicated to ridiculing or celebrating the modern hipster. Ask someone to define a hipster, though, and it will prove difficult. Although there is no tangible definition, most attempts include common descriptions of dress, music taste, and a predilection for noncommercial spaces. Defining hipsters is all the more problematic because supposed members of the hipster subculture defy this very label. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the next subsection traces the recent evolution of the hipster by locating the patterns that make this group a discernible identity.

THE CONTEMPORARY HIPSTER: A UBIQUITOUS ENIGMA

Reporter Whitney Walker (1997) was the first to announce the revival of hipsters in Brooklyn. In an article for the New York Daily News entitled, “Brooklyn Bohemia,” she claimed that hip young artists were moving to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, after rent in Manhattan, Alphabet City, and the East Village became too costly. According to Williams, this move began the process of gentrification, pushing out the mostly Latino residents of Williamsburg while artists
and students, who could afford greater rents, moved in. Soon abandoned warehouses were converted into lofts and new forms of nightlife quickly followed.

In her book, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, sociologist Sharon Zukin (2010) supports this theory of gentrification as the explanation for Brooklyn’s social transformation. In her chapter, “How Brooklyn Became Cool” Zukin posits that the landscape of the borough changed, in large part, from the influx of New York’s creative class, who craved non-commercialized urban spaces. Frustrated by high rent and mass commercialization of neighborhoods like SoHo, the West Village, the Lower East Side, and Manhattan, many residents were eager for more authentic urban spaces. Meanwhile, according to Zukin, the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg, Park Slope and Dumbo, formerly industrial sectors inhabited by ethnic or working class residents, had largely slipped into decay and disrepair. These neighborhoods were further ignored as city policy focused on revitalizing New York City’s financial centers, leaving Brooklyn below the radar of city developers. Early movers to these neighborhoods were therefore able to convert warehouses and low-rent apartment buildings into lofts and galleries with little bureaucratic red tape or expense. As the presence of socially connected cultural “creatives” grew in Brooklyn, so too did articulations of these “new” spaces in local zines and lifestyle blogs. By the 1990s as many as “20 percent of the residents [of these three neighborhoods] worked in creative occupations, in contrast to 4 percent of all New Yorkers and only 2 percent of all Americans” (Zukin, 2010, p. 43).

A search for authenticity, quite ironically, led to mass gentrification and new kinds of artisanal, alternative consumption spaces. The bars, restaurants, and retail boutiques that soon followed offered intimate, publicly visible venues where locals could interact and simultaneously observe the activities of their neighbors. As the number of creative class residents increased, and
“authentic” consumption spaces were celebrated by mainstream media, entrepreneurs were suddenly invited to capitalize on a new market. The result, Zukin (2010) argues, was that contrived consumption of seemingly “more authentic” goods and spaces became the marker of belonging in Brooklyn neighborhoods such as Williamsburg.

Today, these consumption spaces include a bike shop where customers can learn to build their own bike from bamboo, a studio that trains locals to produce their own stain-glass windows, and a yarn store that sells yarns made from rare sources such as Alpaca (Marx, The New Yorker, March 8, 2010). This desire for authentic, noncommercial goods and activities helps explain many of the taste patterns that resound with hipsters.

The term *hipster* currently refers to a group of individuals who are recognized by a fashion aesthetic and music preferences perceived as divergent from the mainstream. Distinguishable elements of fashion often include objects or styles from past eras, meant to appear ironic or novel with contemporary application. Examples include Elvis Costello style horn-rimmed eyeglasses, 1970’s style facial hair such as muttonchops or handlebar mustaches for men, a-line haircuts and leotards or rompers for women, low-fidelity Holga or fisheye film cameras, retro style sneakers, and skinny jeans (Figures 1, 2). Hipsters are commonly stereotyped as championing indie rock and electronic music, cultivating obscure or eclectic hobbies such as home brewing beer or banjo playing, and seeking leisure time in subterranean spaces such as dive bars or local art-houses. They are also ridiculed for riding single-gear track bikes without brakes – known as “fixies” – even in the unfriendliest of urban environments (as is the case with the city of San Francisco, famous for its steep hills that demand gears and brakes).

Ask a person matching these descriptions if they are hipster, and they will likely deny the label. It has come to be a term of stigmatization used by those outside the subgroup – i.e.,
writers for publications such as The Atlantic, The New Yorker, The Guardian, and The New York Times – who most often lament the presence of hipsters in their neighborhoods, towns, or cities. The very notion that a group of people, clearly conforming to in-group standards while simultaneously shunning association with the subgroup, raises interesting questions about how we understand subcultural identity in a global era.

While the contemporary hipster may have emerged from Williamsburg, today hipsters are a worldwide phenomenon. Their style and identity is so ubiquitous that countless websites and Internet memes have been dedicated to mocking (lookatthisfuckinghipster.com, unhappyhipsters.com, hipsterpuppies.tumblr.com) (Figures 3,4) and supporting (freewilliamsburg, stuffhipstershate.com) (Figure 5) the hipster aesthetic. Situated on a global stage, hipster norms and codes – the artifacts and objects associated with being a hipster – must change constantly to remain distinct. If an artifact diffuses outside the boundaries of the subculture, hipsters must consider abandonment or innovation. This pattern makes identifying where the subculture ends and where it begins in a feat unto itself. As hipsters become less and less hidden as a population, it is all the more difficult to name what counts as being hipster.

Simply browsing through urbandictionary.com, a user-generated website dedicated to defining slang words and pop culture phenomena, one can see how quickly the embodiment of a hipster has shifted as a result of these cultural complexities:

From an entry dated August 16, 2004, for example:

[Hipsters are] a subculture of kids born in the 80's. It started with muttonchops & buddy holly glasses, but has now progressed into trucker caps, pointy shoes, and the god awful rehash of the mullet. [sic].

Two years later, from a post on May 28, 2006:
[A hipster] listens to bands that you have never heard of. Has hairstyle that can only be described as "complicated." (Most likely achieved by a minimum of one week not washing it.) Probably tattooed. Definitely cooler than you. Reads Black Book, Nylon, and the Styles section of the New York Times. Drinks Pabst Blue Ribbon. Often. Complains. Always denies being a hipster [sic].

Then on November 22, 2007, a user writes:

Hipsters are a subculture of men and women typically in their 20's and 30's that value independent thinking, counter-culture, progressive politics, an appreciation of art and indie-rock, creativity, intelligence, and witty banter...Although "hipsterism" is really a state of mind, it is also often intertwined with distinct fashion sensibilities. Hipsters reject the culturally-ignorant attitudes of mainstream consumers, and are often be seen wearing vintage and thrift store inspired fashions, tight-fitting jeans, old-school sneakers, and sometimes thick rimmed glasses [sic].

Finally, in a post dated February 15, 2008, one can see how the aforementioned hipster has become popularized. With many of their once defining features appropriated by the masses, former symbols of hipsterdom are no longer viewed as an alternative:

Today's 2008 hipster definition has flipped around. the hipster these days is the normal average everyday walmart/starbucks shopper... he drives a normal car, listens to normal mainstream rock and pop, hangs out at the mall and Starbucks, eats Mcdonalds and Applebees. [sic].

These changing definitions represent the complications that arise when a local subcultural style reaches global popularity. The next section will introduce some of the commercial actors involved in facilitating a global hipster identity. It also discusses the structure of the commercial network that developed to support the hipster aesthetic.
COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE HIPSTER AESTHETIC

As noted in the previous subsection, the identity of the hipster is constantly under surveillance, attack, and appropriation by nonmembers. Hipsters are criticized for being nonconformist posers, accused of judging the people and products of mass culture while simultaneously performing their own in-group acts of conformity. A hipster is only made visible through performative consumption, where expressions of taste via clothing, music, and activities, evince aspirational categories of identity.

The access provided by websites and blogs serves as a double-edged sword for members of this subgroup. A trend discovered on the streets of Brooklyn and uploaded by users to a photo-sharing website can become an instant meme. The cultural publications that support the hipster community – magazines such as Vice, Paper, and Nylon, websites such as freewilliamsburg.com, and email subscriptions such as Flavorpill – can transmit these memes through the promotion of particular fashion, music and art. Retail companies such as American Apparel, which has positioned itself as the official supplier of hipster uniforms (though a recent attack of the Williamsburg by “hipster bandits” suggests it may supply poser hipsters2), can use these street styles as inspiration for their next collection. Something worn by a twenty-something in Brooklyn can therefore become the ultimate fashion accessory among hipsters worldwide.

As soon as an artifact of a street culture becomes available to the “uncool” masses, hipsters must consider abandonment. The keffiyeh scarf is one example of this pattern. Originally a symbol of the Palestinian Nationalist movement, the scarf was a popular accessory

among hipsters two years ago, until it started to be sold at places like Urban Outfitters and Forever 21 (Kibum, 2007). While individuals who live in hipster enclaves – such as Williamsburg Brooklyn or the Mission District in San Francisco – may choose to abandon such an object at the point of mass popularity, this kind of diffusion provides aspirants, who are geographically disconnected from hipster neighborhoods, convenient access to elements of the hipster subculture.

For a subculture to persist on a global stage, a set of mechanisms must exist to develop and communicate the standards – material, behavioral or aesthetic – that define the group. As discussed in chapter two, Garcia and Burns (2005) define standards as the “rules, norms, meaning and identity over time based on ongoing interactions and negotiations that accompany participation in a shared enterprise” (p. 1). Like an organization, made up of various entities and actors, hipsters are a subculture with a global presence. With all members interested in maintaining subcultural identity, hipsters must collaborate to negotiate the standards of the group. As these standards and norms evolve, so do the commercial actors who supply the artifacts and objects used to reify the hipster aesthetic.

Current commercial actors include indie bands, cultural magazines, blogs, email subscription lists, and retail stores, as well as events such as the South by Southwest (SXSW) music festival, which provides a physical space to bring network actors together. Naturally, this network also includes consumers, the people buying the products created and promoted by these organizations, and these consumers negotiate the boundaries of the community with their dollars.

_Vice_ was a major actor in the early hipster movement, credited with helping to invent the hipster aesthetic (Haddow, 2008). The magazine currently boasts 1 million print readers across thirteen countries (Kamenetz, A., 2010) and features articles covering the independent arts, pop
culture, and more recently political topics such as the war in Iraq, written with an air of sarcasm and irreverence. Like many publications, the online version helps to increase readership. Upon entering the Vice website, users will likely encounter a homepage plastered with American Apparel ads, and a set of content mini-sites featuring information on fashion, music, and current events.

A popular and controversial part of the site is the “Dos and Don’ts” page (Figure 6), where photos of everyday people, captured on the streets, are uploaded and labeled according to whether they succeed or fail at “looking cool.” It is common for readers to comment on these photos, showing that users are not only spectators but also participants in the process of establishing norms and rules. This kind of participation allows users to negotiate the boundaries of the subculture, generating standards that readers can use to guide their consumption choices. Garcia and Burns (2005) describe how the act of creating standards can lead to the emergence of new communities:

[Standards are] the fundamental building blocks of society. For in any given context, they constitute an agreed upon set of meanings, scripts, and rules that guide behavior and govern relationships. Embodying critical information in a highly compressed and abbreviated format, they greatly simplify the environment. Signaling opportunities and constraining choices, standards allow for cooperation and coordinated behavior to take place. (p. 2)

The “Dos and Don’ts” section of Vice magazine is a fascinating space for social theorists; it displays negotiation of normative behavior in real-time. Posts serve as highly effective tool for communicating in-group and out-group status to spectators, essential for individuals who may be geographically isolated from the urban neighborhoods where many of these photos are captured.
Much like *Vice*, *Nylon* is another alt-pop cultural and fashion magazine that has taken its presence online. On its homepage (Figure 7) *Nylon* promotes hipster-approved activities such as films (which are always independent films or documentaries) music, and concerts. Currently the homepage features a *Nylon*-sponsored music tour of indie rock bands. There is also a section on the website where users can upload photos of people with good “street style,” serving as another point of participation for readers to define conformity within the community. By publishing this kind of content, *Nylon* provides readers with the cultural capital necessary to maintain hipster status.

The examples of *Vice* and *Paper* show how subcultural capital can be created: magazines promote bands through featured stories or by sponsoring concerts, and bands promote these publications by participating. Paid advertising on these sites by retailers like American Apparel support the publications and bolster the authority of their brand. Finally, readers serve to reinforce the cultural capital of all actors involved as consumers of these magazines and retailers.

As Garcia and Burns (2005) argue, this kind of coordination will keep standards current, as they must “change and innovate when negotiating with competitors, developing coalitions, and/or incorporating new members” (p. 1) Collaboration offers participants the opportunity to generate and exchange new information and ideas, creating new norms, rules and standards that combat the threat of diffusion.

Global level resources serve as the links over geographic structural holes, tying local network members, such as in Williamsburg, to a global network of aspirants. Thus, individuals who may not live in Brooklyn are able to participate in the construction of global in-group norms. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Putnam (2000) conceived of these network dynamics as the interplay between bridging and bonding. While core members in Brooklyn may
desire to bound their subgroup, global awareness and mass commercialization of the hipster aesthetic makes in-group norms visible to aspirational participants, slowly building bridges and breaking down boundaries.

Dov Charney, founder of American Apparel (AA), is an important bridging link in this now global network. Charney sought to create an “outsider” ethic with the AA brand (Walker, 2008). Originating in a Los Angeles warehouse, American Apparel is currently one of the largest domestic clothing manufacturers in the U.S. and their ads are a frequent fixture in *Vice* magazine (Walker, 2008). In her article “Building a Brand By Not Being a Brand,” Ruth La Ferla (2004) describes the business model of American Apparel and the role that Charney plays in cultivating the AA aesthetic:

Mr. Charney cultivates his faintly off-color persona, part garmento, part 1970's pornographer…preening in a snug polo shirt and white belt, his mustache scrolling from his upper lip to his mutton-chop whiskers. He is nearly a ringer for the photographer Terry Richardson, famous downtown for bringing the aesthetics of soft-core pornography to fashion photography. The image is meant to resonate with a target market of 20-somethings. Urban hipsters — and some of their elders, too — are scooping up Mr. Charney's form-fitting T-shirts, underwear, jersey miniskirts and hooded sweatshirts, sold in white-on-white stores that double as art galleries. On the walls of the 26 American Apparels…poster-size blowups of seedy Los Angeles storefronts, surfers, skateboarders and, not incidentally, scantily outfitted street kids vamping for the lens. The vaguely risqué vibe is offset by the company's well-promoted social agenda. A manifesto on a wall of most of the stores tells that the merchandise is ‘sweatshop free,’ made in America by workers who are paid a living wage ($13 an hour on average) and sold at a reasonable price (about $15 for a T-shirt). Shoppers also learn that the company eschews ties ‘with the corporate right and the politically correct left.’ Perhaps most important to younger consumers who have grown suspicious of corporate branding, there is not a logo in sight. (p. 6)

*Vice*, an online magazine, embodies this same mix of risqué and political with the commercial brands it promotes and the subjects selected for articles. Tim Walker, a reporter for
the Telegraph, argues that the similarities between Vice and AA are no accident; they resulted from a cultivated subcultural aesthetic developed though collaboration and imitation: “[It is] no coincidence that American Apparel’s often controversial advertising campaigns imitate the Vice look, nor that Vice photographer Terry Richardson is the principal photographer for Uniqlo’s in-house magazine, Paper…his style has countless amateur copycats worldwide, whose photos have found home on fast-growing photo-sharing websites such as Flickr and MySpace” (p. 3). This collaboration has allowed Vice and American Apparel to share resources (a fashion aesthetic) and contacts (photographers). In doing so, both sets of actors benefit from increasing the breadth of the network that inspires and supports hipster taste.

In addition to Vice and American Apparel, many user-generated websites exist to survey and promote hipster trends. On these sites users upload photos of fashionable people, and readers are encouraged to vote and/or comment on each look. LOOKBOOK is a blog that allows users to vote and rank images of street trends (Figure 12). Blogs like LOOKBOOK can therefore spread trends instantly: “Snapping away at a party in Portland, Oregon or in Harajuku, Tokyo, a global scenester can disseminate their local style worldwide before sunrise” (Walker, 2008). These sites function as the bridges connecting geographically dispersed individuals, allowing a hipster in Chicago to observe the behavior of a hipster in Helsinki.

As retailers such as American Apparel discover these sites and pay for advertising, they connect LOOKBOOK readers with the same aesthetic and tastes promoted by Vice, Paper and the other commercial actors that coordinate their activities. Of course, hipsters are not the only visitors to these sites. It is a common practice for marketing firms to survey sites like LOOKBOOK for cues about the latest fashion inspiration or innovation (Lopiano, 1997). Thus sites like LOOKBOOK serve as a double-edged sword, allowing members of the subculture to
learn about and participate in the construction of subcultural norms, while simultaneously providing access to retailers who cannibalize these trends for more mainstream diffusion. This, in turn, inspires continuous cycles of innovation with core hipsters, who see formerly authentic objects such as low-fidelity cameras and portable turntables sold at Urban Outfitters and Forever 21. Blogs such Face Hunter and LOOKBOOK thus provide two kinds of links: one set across geographic structural holes in the subcultural network, and another between the very thin divide that separates this hipster identity from the masses.

Websites and blogs, along with actors like Dov Charney, serve as the “social bridges” that function to “sew networks together” (Buchanan, 2002). Without bridges, local communities and individual hipsters would exist as isolated individuals or fragmented groups. When a hipster learns about a new band and attends their concert in Washington, D.C., that person uses a global resource to connect with other individuals in a local culture. As Schouten et al. (2007) write:

The building blocks of human social life are not to be found in abstract categories applied to the analysis of social life, but in the multiplicity of social groupings that we all participate in, knowingly or not, through the course of our everyday lives. These tibus or little masses (popularized as neotribes) are fundamental to our experience of life in general…the consumption of cultural resources circulated through markets (brands, leisure experiences, and so on) are not the sine qua non of contemporary life, rather, they facilitate what are meaningful social relationships. (p. 5)

The resources of user-generated fashion blogs, online publications, and niche retailers provide any individual with the tools to signal subterranean status. Key to the global popularity of the hipster ideal is the fact that these online resources allow consumers, i.e., the people on the street representing what it means to be a hipster, to serve as creators and collaborators of subcultural norms.
However, when a subculture like hipsters becomes millions strong, the boundaries between the subculture and the masses may quickly blur. Moreover, this kind of diffusion challenges the very notion of authenticity when readers cannot distinguish a commercial marketer from a member of the community.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed how the global hipster identity came to be and the role of consumption in signaling hipster status. Obviously, significant complications arise when studying the hipster subgroup. The first is that most members of this identity category shun the very label used to define them. The second is that the global popularity of the hipster aesthetic makes it nearly impossible to distinguish authentic members from commercial actors or posers. Insofar as it is impossible to identify true hipsters, the empirical analysis of this thesis will therefore investigate whether hipster taste correlates to greater expressions of divergence and a higher likelihood of seeking fashion and music information online. The subsequent chapter will introduce the methods used to identify and measure hipster taste. It will include a description of the survey instrument, distributed online to a mixed group of Georgetown graduate students and Facebook participants, as well as the scale developed to code taste categories. Finally, the following chapter will apply statistical analyses to correlate in-group behavior and results will be discussed at length.
CHAPTER IV: METHODS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

For the empirical portion of my thesis, a survey instrument was developed and released to a mixed sample to measure the relationship between expressions of taste, signaling patterns, and attitudes about conformity or divergence. I choose to analyze the data produced through this survey via a taste scale, which allowed me to test what differences existed, if any, between two extremes – individuals with high hipster taste and individuals with low hipster taste. By grouping survey participants into thresholds (low, moderate, and high hipster taste), I can ascertain how consumption preferences relate to one’s desire to conform or diverge and detect what differences exist, if any, among the information-seeking habits of these groups. The formal hypotheses tested through these methods were the following: 1) individuals with high hipster taste will be more likely to want to stand out with their fashion/style than individuals with low hipster taste, and 2) individuals with high hipster taste will be more likely to use blogs and websites to learn about fashion and music trends than individuals with low hipster taste.

The methods described, however, diverge from common practice. Frequently, scholars of culture will employ qualitative methods, such as ethnography, in studies of subcultures. Participant observation, as one example, was named by Hebdige (1979) as the most effective tool for understanding the behavior of subcultures. Researchers will often begin with ethnography of small groups before proceeding to quantitative analyses that aim for generalizable conclusions about populations at large. Such has been the case with many of my contemporaries who are studying subcultures generally and hipsters specifically.
With this research project, however, my goal was to understand the patterns that make hipsters a discernible subgroup. This makes quantitative analysis a necessary step, as hipsters are a demographic anomaly, categorically unlike other subjects of interest. First, hipsters not identifiable in terms of mutually exclusive categories such as race, class, and gender. And unlike most previous subcultures, hipsters did not create the label given to them, nor do they employ this label in practice. They do not overtly organize their activities around a particular cause or political objective, but rather through consumption acts. Moreover, unlike subcultures such as the mods or punks, members of the hipster subgroup are no longer contained in particular towns or cities and thus “hidden” from most members of the dominant culture. Quite the opposite is true. Hipsters are, in fact, a ubiquitous, fluid identity category. This reality makes the work of locating “true” members extremely difficult.

In light of these challenges, I had to identify the patterns that make hipsters visible before proceeding with interviews or ethnographic methods, a process that required gathering empirical evidence to identify subjects. Secondly, I wanted to know whether these patterns support or contradict popular assumptions about what it means to be a hipster. (Please see chapter three for more description of these popular assumptions). The decision to use a survey instrument therefore aims to go beyond conventional methods that are generally limited to the study of local, rather than global subgroups. One must understand the social landscape of a global group like hipsters more broadly before asking questions of the specifics therein.

My methodology – a survey to a mixed sample, the creation of a taste scale, and statistical analyses of results – seeks to reduce cultural entropy, or randomness, by detecting the patterns among influences that are often overlapping. Hopefully, these methods will reveal patterns of quantity, allowing for a glimpse of how a mixed population, containing those with
high hipster taste and those with low hipster taste, coordinate an activity differently or similarly.

In an effort to limit the universe of influences (i.e., variables), I began with archival data and observational research. I created a google alert for my email account, using “hipster” as the keyword. This allowed me to monitor all relevant information put forth on the web. By monitoring the blogs, websites, articles, and retailers speculating on, championing, disparaging, or marketing to hipsters, I was able to discern common aesthetic conventions, objects of meaning, music, and spaces most often associated with the hipster subculture.

By monitoring the shifting goods sold by the retailers targeting hipsters, I was able to develop a list of indicator variables organized by domain. The three domains that I adopted for my research were fashion, music, and spaces (both physical and virtual). Building on the subcultural theory supporting the notion that dress can serve as an expression of divergence from, or refusal toward, dominant cultural norms (Hebdige, 1979, Willis, 1993, Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), I decided to combine these taste variables with overall attitude measures. This allowed me to determine whether expressions of dislike or divergence correlate with scores of my hipster scale.

**DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

Using observational research as a guide, I devised a series of survey questions targeting the taste domains of fashion, music, and spaces (both physical and virtual) for my taste scale variables. To show that hipster taste was different in form from other kinds of taste, I had to develop a survey instrument that would work for a mixed group of participants – hipsters and
controls. Survey research suggests that designing surveys in which all participants feel that their answers matter reduces the likelihood of abandonment (CASRO, 2009). The survey design was therefore a balancing act between taste variables for two very different groups.

**Initial process: pilot survey, validation test, and scale creation.**

The first step in the survey construction was a pilot survey, released in hard copy on the ground to graduate students in the Communication, Culture and Technology Program at Georgetown University. Through this process, I learned which variables might be missing, and which variables were unclear in my articulation (please see the appendix for examples). This was especially helpful for defining the control group, where my research on general trends in fashion, music and spaces was less thorough. With the data collected through the pilot survey, I was able to code responses based on what I knew about the pilot participants, i.e., whether they were part of the hipster group or the control, and thus detect whether my survey was properly measuring the status of participants. This process provided me with sound data to develop the initial taste scale and thresholds therein.

The taste scale was created by dichotomizing answers to hipster variable questions: a value of zero was assigned to a participant’s scale scores when they chose a non-hipster response, and a value of one was assigned when they made a hipster choice. Because there were more options in the fashion section for women than men, I adjusted the taste thresholds by gender. There were three thresholds in total: low hipster taste (a score of 1-5), moderate hipster taste (a score of 6-14 for men or 6-16 for women) and high hipster taste (a score of 15 or greater for men and 16 or greater for women). More detail on the questions and variables involved in my taste scale will be described in the variable domain section below.
Following the pilot test, which provided initial data for the scale, I released another set of surveys to validate the predictive strength of the data. Validation was achieved by asking contacts in my network to send the survey (which had now been built out online through Survey Monkey) to individuals whom they thought were hipsters, and to an equal number of non-hipster controls. This information was hidden from me until the surveys were coded. When the surveys were complete, I coded each without knowledge of participants’ status. To confirm whether my scale measured what was intended, I asked my contacts which participants were hipsters and which were controls. In all cases – with ten hipsters and ten controls – my scale correlated the presumed identity category of hipsters with high hipster taste, and the controls with low or moderate hipster taste.

The survey also contained a set of attitude questions employed to test my hypotheses. Whereas the variable questions located the taste of a survey participant on a spectrum, two other attitude questions tested whether high hipster taste or low hipster taste associated differently toward a desire to stand out with one’s fashion and the use of blogs and websites for information seeking. The next subsection will more thoroughly describe the variables used in my scale, organized by variable domain.

**Variable domain I: fashion.**

As described in chapter three, fashion is a central component in the hipster aesthetic. I chose hipster goods based on my initial observational research, which included observing people on the ground and online monitoring of blogs, websites, and the catalogues of stores such as Urban Outfitters and American Apparel. Hipster fashion items, such as fixie bikes or skinny jeans, were combined with non-hipster items or accessories, such as khaki pants or pearl
earrings, to provide a broad spectrum of choices for hipsters and controls. Objects were displayed in the survey in a matrix form that featured a corresponding likert scale. Participants were asked how they felt about an object, e.g. low-fidelity camera, with a spectrum of choices: 1) *I don’t want this*, 2) *I want this*, 3) *I own this but don’t use or wear it often*, 4) *I own this and use or wear it all the time*, 5) *I don’t know what this is*. (Please see the appendix for the complete survey instrument).

This scale was designed to deal with the rapid diffusion of hipster fashion trends into the mainstream. As chapter three discussed, hipster fashion trends that begin on the ground are often rapidly appropriated, and then sold to the larger public by national retailers such as American Apparel and Urban Outfitters. Because of the rapid diffusion of these significant objects, I used this scale to take into account that an individual may own an object that had reached mass popularity, even if they no longer use or wear it. The options *I own this but don’t use or wear it often* and *I own this and use or wear it all the time* represent aim to address these complexities.

Data for each question was dichotomized, such that an answer of 2, 3, or 4 for the hipster variables received one point, and an answer of 1 or 5 received zero points.

**Variable domain II: music**

Much like fashion, indie music is a major influence in the hipster subculture. The universe of indie rock or indie electronica bands and groups is, however, quite vast. It would be impossible to construct a variable index that accounts for the wide range of musicians in this space. Therefore, I followed the lead of Bryson (1993) who used GSS data to examine the relationship between music preference and socioeconomic status. The matrix in music section of the 1993 GSS survey inspired my matrix. Much like the fashion matrix, the music matrix...
included an extensive list of music genres with a corresponding likert scale. Participants were asked how they felt about a particular music genre: 1) Dislike very much, 2) Dislike, 3) Neutral, 4) Like, 5) Like Very Much, 6) I don’t know. The only hipster variables in this matrix were indie rock and indie electronica, and answers were dichotomized such that a response of “like” or “like very much” for these two variables generated one point, with all other responses receiving zero points.

Variable domain III: spaces.

The final domain relevant to hipster taste is space, both virtual and physical. The assumption that spaces matter to hipsters is largely supported by Zukin’s (2010) research on Williamsburg and her findings that the desire for authentic living lead to the gentrification of Brooklyn and new kinds of consumption spaces (Please see chapter three for more on this theory). Physical spaces included in the survey were modeled after Zukin’s findings and virtual spaces were identified through observational research and tested through the pilot study.

As was the case with the music domain, it would be unfeasible to identify all physical spaces – bars, restaurants, and stores – relevant to participants, especially given their geographic diversity. Instead of selecting individual venues, I chose to identify venue genres. These genres included entertainment spaces, with hipster options, such as art-houses and dive bars, and more mainstream options, such as movieplexes and fast food restaurants. I also included a question asking where a participant is most likely to shop for groceries, which featured “authentic” options – co-op markets and Farmer’s Markets – and commercial options – big box retailers (e.g., Costco or Walmart) and national grocery chains (e.g., Safeway or Giant).

Much like the domains of fashion and music, space variables were associated with a
likert scale offering the following answer choices: 1) Dislike very much, 2) Dislike, 3) Neutral, 4) Like, 5) Like Very Much, 6) I don’t know. I coded “Like” or “Like very much” with a value of one; all other scores and all other variable answers received a score of zero.

Sample.

In this thesis, I aimed to recruit as many survey participants as possible, so as to see the differences that exist between individuals with high hipster taste and low hipster taste. The survey was first sent via email to graduate students in the Communication, Culture, and Technology Program at Georgetown University, of which there are approximately 120 students. The survey was then sent to 250 additional contacts on Facebook. Through these channels, I asked my contacts enrolled in other graduate schools to send the survey to their friends, creating a snowball sample that increased my overall sample size. Whenever a contact offered to distribute the survey on my behalf I created a new version of the survey, labeling it appropriately to keep track of the various participant sources. Although I was unable to generate a universe of people that was representative of the overall U.S. population, the survey included participants from multiple regions such as Washington DC, the San Francisco Bay Area, and New York City.

Roughly 50% of the CCT population – 60 students in total – participated in my study, and an additional 336 participated through other channels. In total, 396 unique individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 completed my survey. A large majority of participants fell within the mid-range threshold for hipster taste. 80 individuals met my threshold for low hipster taste, and 35 met my threshold for high hipster taste. This sample of 125 extreme cases was used to test my hypotheses that individuals with high taste would be more likely than individuals with low hipster taste to express divergence and to use blogs and websites to learn about fashion.
To test these hypotheses, I numerically coded all participants’ responses and summed their points in excel. By converting responses into scores, I was able to place respondents into one of the three thresholds in my taste scale: low, moderate, and high. As mentioned in the description of my survey instrument, there were multiple variables coded as “hipster” within the domains of fashion, music, and spaces. Answers to these variables of interest were dichotomized, such that an expressed desire or preference for a hipster good or space received an associated score of one, and no desire of preference for a hipster good received a score of zero. For example, if, in the fashion objects domain, a participant responded that they want, own but do not use or wear very own or own and use or wear very often a hipster variable they were assigned a score of one. If a respondent answered, don’t want or don’t know what this is, they were given a score of zero. Responses to all other non-hipster variables, no matter the answer selected, were assigned a value of zero. I then summed each variable to determine where a respondent fell in the spectrum of hipster taste.

Because there were more hipster fashion variables for men than women, I adjusted the scale to account for gender difference. Male respondents whose taste score totaled 1-5 were labeled low, totals of 6-14 were labeled moderate, and scores of 15 or greater were labeled high. Female respondents with scale totals 1-5 were labeled low; totals 6-15 were labeled moderate; and totals 16 or greater were labeled high.
RESULTS

Of the 396 participants, 35 were found to have high hipster taste, and 80 were found to have low hipster taste. Because my hypotheses were designed to test the differences in expressions of attitude between these two extremes, participants with a mid-range score were not included in the analysis. After these 125 individuals were identified, I compared their answers to two attitude questions.

The first attitude question measured a participant’s desire to conform or diverge with their style:

Please note the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I STAND OUT WITH MY FASHION/STYLE

1) Strongly Disagree
2) Disagree
3) Somewhat Disagree
4) Somewhat Agree
5) Agree
6) Agree Strongly

The second attitude question measured whether blogs or websites influenced a participant’s style:

Which of the following inspires your fashion sense or style? Check all that apply:

1) People on the street
2) My friends or family
3) Blogs or websites
4) High fashion magazines
5) Retail stores
6) Celebrities
7) Musicians
8) Icons or styles from past eras
9) No one, my style is all my own
10) None of the above

My first hypothesis presumed that individuals with high hipster taste would be more likely than individuals with low hipster taste to answer that they agree or strongly agree with the statement that it is important to stand out with one’s fashion or style. My second hypothesis presumed that individuals with high hipster taste would be more likely than individuals with low hipster taste to answer that blogs or websites that inspired their fashion sense or style. Using SPSS software, I analyzed answers and compared them to see what difference, if any, existed for people between the populations of low taste and high taste. I used two kinds of tests to do this: Fisher’s Exact test and Z-Score tests of all variables in the second attitude question. Descriptions of these tests and the results gleaned from them are described below.

**Fisher’s exact tests.**

Using these two attitude questions as my independent variables, I performed two two-tail Fisher’s Exact tests to analyze whether differences between people with high taste (the hipster group) and low taste (the control group) were statistically significant. Fisher’s Exact is a test of significance for small samples using contingency tables. Unlike most other statistical tests, Fisher’s Exact Test uses the discrete Hypergeometric Distribution to produce an exact p value rather than approximating a p value based on the Chi Squared, t, or Normal Distributions. By
examining the relationship between two sets of dichotomized variables, this test examines whether significant association exists between the two kinds of classification (Agresti, 2002).

In this case, I considered taste scores of high or low were one set of variables and the use of blogs and websites and expressions of divergence to be my independent variables. Answers were dichotomized such that a non-hipster answer was coded as zero, and a hipster answer affirming the variable under investigation was coded as one. The first test revealed that people with high hipster taste name blogs and websites as a source for fashion inspiration more often than people with low hipster taste. This difference, though, was not statistically significant. 25.3% of low taste individuals said that blogs or websites inspired their fashion sense as compared to 34.3% of high taste individuals. This difference was not significant at the p < .05 level with a p-value of .223. Below are two charts that further describe the results of the test.

**Table 1**

*Crosstab analysis for Fashion Inspiration Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>Not blogs or websites</th>
<th>Blogs or websites</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: low taste</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: low taste</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: high taste</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: high taste</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant at the p < 0.05 level.
Table 2

Chi-Square Tests for Fashion Inspiration Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>0.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum count is 9.82. Computed for a 2x2 table.

The second test revealed that people with high hipster taste were more likely than people with low hipster taste to agree with the statement *I want to stand out with my fashion or style*. This difference was approaching significance. 20.3 % of low taste individuals said that they desire to stand out as compared to 31.4 % of high taste individuals. This difference was not significant at the p < .05 level with a p-value of .146. Below are two charts that further describe results of the test.
Table 3

*Crosstab Analysis for Divergence Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is important that I stand out with my fashion/style</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: low taste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count % within STATUS</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: high taste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count % within STATUS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count % within STATUS</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant at the p < 0.05 level.

Table 4

*Chi-Square Test for Divergence Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is important that I stand out with my fashion/style</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum count is 8.29. Computed for a 2x2 table.

**Additional tests.**

Subsequent to tests on the blog variable related to my hypothesis, I conducted a series of one-tailed Fisher’s Exact test to determine whether significant differences between groups could be detected for other fashion inspiration variables. The attitude question under investigation –
which of the following influence your fashion sense – included the following multiple choice options: 1) people on the street, 2) my friends or family, 3) blogs or websites, 4) high fashion retailers, 5) celebrities, musicians, 6) icons or styles from past eras, and 7) no one my style is all my own. The first series of tests determined that only a marginally significant difference existed between groups for the variable of blogs and websites, so additional one-tailed Fisher’s Exact tests were performed to detect any differences between groups with the six other fashion inspiration variables.

Two of these tests yielded significant results for the variables of musicians and icons or styles from past eras. The first, a one-tailed Fisher’s Exact test on the variable of musicians, revealed a significant difference between groups. 40% of people with high taste (hipster) named musicians as a source of inspiration for their fashion or style, while only 12% of the low taste (control) group named this as a source of influence. This proved to be a significant one sided association p = .001.

Table 5

Crosstab analysis for Fashion Inspiration Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>STATUS: low taste</th>
<th>STATUS: high taste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count % within STATUS</td>
<td>Not Musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: low taste</td>
<td>69 87.3%</td>
<td>10 12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: high taste</td>
<td>21 60.0%</td>
<td>14 40.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense? | Not Musicians | Musicians | Total |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Count % within STATUS</td>
<td>90 78.9%</td>
<td>24 21.1%</td>
<td>114 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant at the p < 0.05 level.

Table 6

Chi-Square Tests for Fashion Inspiration Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum count is 7.37. Computed for a 2x2 table.

Similarly, there was a significant difference between groups for the variable of icons or styles from past eras. 63% of people with high taste named icons or styles from past eras as a source of inspiration as compared to 34% of people with low taste. This proved to be a significant one sided association p = .004. This finding suggests that there are significant differences between groups with signaling sources, although this difference did not match my formal hypothesis.
Table 7

**Crosstab analysis for Fashion Inspiration Question**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>Not Icons</th>
<th>Icons</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: low taste</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS: high taste</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>% within STATUS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant at the p < 0.05 level.

Table 8

**Chi-Square Tests for Fashion Inspiration Question**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense?</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum count is 15.04. Computed for a 2x2 table.

Finally, I conducted a Z-Test on a question from the demographic section, in which participants were asked if anyone had ever identified that participant as a hipster. Z-Tests are most often used to compare proportions from two independent groups to determine if the behavior of one group is significantly different from the other group. 21% of the low taste
(control) group said that they have been called a hipster, while 43% of the high taste (hipster) group said they have been called a hipster. This difference was significant at the p < .05 level.

DISCUSSION

Findings.

The finding that there was no significant difference between hipsters and non-hipsters’ use of blogs and websites and expressions of divergence does not support my hypotheses. A caveat, however, must be kept in mind. Differences between these groups were detected, with directionality that supported my hypotheses, i.e., there were more hipsters than non-hipsters who indicated that blogs or websites inspire their fashion sense, and there were more hipsters than non-hipsters who agreed that they dress to stand out rather than to fit in. The lack of statistical significance may result from my small sample size for hipsters, n=35, as compared to non-hipsters, n=80. Future research should aim to increase the number of hipster participants to see whether a larger subgroup sample provides statistically significant differences on attitude measures.

The two-tail Z-Tests revealed some unanticipated findings between groups. The fact that people with high hipster taste are more likely to name icons or styles from past eras as a source of inspiration for their style fits with the observations of Zukin (2010)—that hipster consumption represents a search for authenticity and a romanticism of the past. Further research might therefore include interviews with survey participants to examine what particular icons or styles influence the hipster aesthetic. Knowing the individuals or eras that influence hipsters today may
make it possible to predict what kinds of fashion trends that will take hold in the future. This kind of data would significantly strengthen the already strong predictive power of my taste scale.

Similarly, the fact that people with high hipster taste are more likely to name musicians as a source of inspiration is an important finding. This data suggests that music is indeed a significant influence in the hipster identity, and it adds further support for the inclusion of music taste as a scale measure. Future research might aim to develop a more finite list of musicians and groups that influence hipster taste so as to understand what patterns, if any, exist among these sources.

In addition to these statistical findings, the scale that I created for my research proved to be immensely powerful at identifying hipsters and non-hipsters. Much to my surprise, a majority of participants fell within the moderate threshold range for hipster taste. This finding, along with the finding that 20% of non-hipster participants have been called a hipster, reveals that the hipster identity category is perhaps even more fluid than I had anticipated.
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In one of the survey questions, not included in my scale, participants were asked in an open-ended fashion to name the blogs that inspire their fashion or music taste. Reviewing participant responses in excel, I could detect clear differences between the answers given by high taste and low taste individuals. From this cursory review, it appears that there is a much greater concentration of hipsters naming the same blogs or websites than non-hipsters. This observation suggests that there may actually be particular hubs, or spaces in which many users connect, that create or reinforce hipster preferences and tastes.
Limits of survey instrument.

The survey instrument did present some limits in terms of measuring taste and identifying hipster status. The fashion object matrix was particularly problematic. Variables in this matrix were quite time sensitive given the nature of the diffusion curve. Often, by the time something was detected as being of significance to hipsters it had already reached a point of mass diffusion. Discovering these trends before they appear in the catalogues of large commercial retailers proved difficult, because a greater number of people were likely to know about the object and express a desire to own it by the time I surveyed them. This complication may have introduced confounding variables into my scale, which perhaps explains the large majority of participants who scored in the moderate taste range.

Limits of the sample.

Results from this study should also be considered in the context of the survey sample. A convenience, snowball sample of 18-35 year olds was used to ascertain what associations if any, existed between and among groups. No doubt certain biases are inherent with this sampling method. By seeking out mostly graduate students in the Washington DC, New York, and San Francisco Bay Area, my sample was likely skewed toward more highly educated individuals from middle or upper class backgrounds. This may be less problematic than in order studies, as a great deal of theoretical research (see chapter three) supports the theory that hipsters are more likely to be found in a context with highly educated urban dwellers.

While a representative random sample is always the best-case scenario in any statistical analysis, such a sample was impossible given my limited resources. As a pilot study, these kinds of confounding variables are not uncommon or unexpected. Future research would require a
sample with more socioeconomic and geographic diversity to ascertain whether these patterns hold up in a larger, more heterogeneous population.

**Future tests.**

Future statistical tests would include a factor analysis, which reveals the interdependencies of variables in a data set. Such a test could show which of my scale variables hang together and would illuminate which variables are strong predictors of other variables (i.e., whether a preference for a particular object is more strongly associated with a preference for particular music than other variables). A factor analysis could also provide another measure of the strength for my scale. This test can detect whether the variables chosen for my scale are in fact the variables influencing taste, or whether other variables not previously considered are contributing to the predictive value of my scale.

Further statistical tests could also analyze demographic data to see what differences, if any, occurred according to gender or geographic location. These variables were not controlled for in my analyses of the data, and arguably, distinctions with location and gender could introduce divergent, or more nuanced, findings than an analysis of the overall sample. Rerunning a one-tailed Fishers Exact and performing a Gamma Test of Monotone Trend and stratifying by gender or location could reveal whether any demographic differences exist.

Finally, I would also consider computational social network analysis as a future test to examine patterns in the data derived from the open-ended survey question on which blogs and websites influence a participant’s fashion or taste. Such a test would reveal differences between groups in terms of the kinds of blogs visited and whether blogs visited by hipsters are more densely connected than blogs visited by non-hipsters. These findings could prove highly illuminating for understanding how signaling occurs and whether there are particular tastemakers
in this space who wield more significant influence in the development of a mobile hipster aesthetic.
CHAPTER V: A CANARY IN THE CULTURAL COAL MINE: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM HIPSTERS

This thesis began with two guiding questions about the nature of contemporary subcultures: How are hipsters, as one example, able to maintain a cohesive subgroup while constantly undergoing internal changes? Are hipsters a new kind of subculture, and does their existence reflect larger socioeconomic changes? The pursuit of these grand ideas was no doubt ambitious. While the present research does not answer them entirely, it does offer significant findings on hipsters and sociocultural shifts more generally.

In terms of the first question raised, I find that the aesthetic standards shared, negotiated, and promoted through blogs and websites allows hipsters to achieve a highly stylized, hybrid aesthetic that responds rapidly to the threat of diffusion. Many of the fashion innovations described in this paper represent contemporary appropriations of retro or class-based objects of significance. Examples include buddy holly style glasses, now a common hipster fashion accessory in addition to serving as a visual aid, and the keffiyeh scarf, once a symbol of solidarity with peasants in Palestine, later a highly popular hipster trend.

Bricolage (Hebdige, 1979), or the veritable use of objects from different sources in one’s wardrobe, provides hipsters with an immediate set of cues for expressing divergence in a landscape of growing goods. Hipster style evolves for the sake of provocation, to present a subversion of what is perceived as normative dress and to “give itself to be read” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 101). Hipsters, then, must become hyper consumers of fashion in order to remain socially distinct.

My survey results support this theory, as a one-tailed Fisher’s Exact test showed that more individuals with high hipster taste (31%) expressed a desire to stand out with their style
than individuals with low hipster taste (20%). While this difference was only marginally significant, it is enough to suggest that a larger sample might reveal even greater differences between groups and a stronger desire on the part of people with high hipster taste to signal distinction with their style and dress.

While my survey data did not support the hypothesis that people with high hipster taste are more likely to use blogs or websites to learn about fashion, the difference was marginally significant for the independence $p = .223$. This means that a greater number of people with high hipster taste are taking cues about fashion online, and, perhaps, a larger sample size of individuals with high hipster taste might show a significant difference between these two groups.

Even more interesting in this exploratory analysis are the significant differences found with the types of blogs and websites listed by people in the high taste category. The data further indicates that a greater concentration of survey participants with high hipster taste visit the same blogs and websites, and that a high density of connections exists between the commercial producers (such as American Apparel) involved in this space. Such data supports my theory that identity signaling happens in large part online, a new finding amidst previous theories which credit subcultural styles or aesthetics to the particulars of geographic spaces.

While at one point in time hipsters were a subculture located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, online information sharing via zines and blogs provided an outsider’s view of the activities of this subgroup. Enterprising entrepreneurs were therefore able to introduce elements of the hipster aesthetic into a global marketplace, offering up local elements of this subculture to a much larger net of American consumers. But what explains the hipster aesthetic, aside from its seeming divergence from typical or normal dress?

I believe the romanticism of the past extends far beyond wardrobe—what one eats, where
spend one spends their leisure time, and what kind of music one listens to are all variables involved in the construction of hipster taste. The kinds of goods and experiences sought out by hipsters – a preference for fair trade coffee over Starbucks, a desire to spend time in dive bars rather than chain restaurants, and a love of indie rock over all other music – reveals a unique motivation in the consumption patterns of this subgroup; what I call a search for authenticity. “Authenticity” suggests at once idealism of the past and an appreciation for the creative. My finding that individuals with high hipster taste are more likely to cite icons or styles from past eras and musicians as the inspiration for their style supports this theory.

Consider the relevance of this pattern. In our globalized world, where the same menu of goods and services (think Starbucks, Walmart, McDonalds, or the Gap) is offered to an increasingly large universe of consumers, consumption itself has become a political act. The activities of the hippies, or beats, who attempted to drop out or opt-out from standard ways of life, may no longer be possible given the level at which capitalism has taken hold in the developed world. Thriving local economies are rare in a now behemoth global marketplace of mass-produced things.

In this environment, consumerism is an entrenched way of life. Like it or not, the food one eats, the laundry detergent one buys, the car one drives, have all become symbols of who and who we aspire to be in the world. It is through acts of consumption, or anti-consumption, that we conceive of our identities and the identities of those around us. Consuming provides an immediate tool for self-expression, individual uniqueness, or affiliation with other reference groups in a particular cultural context.

The hipster aesthetic, dismissed by some as style rather than substance, represents a yearning for authentic things, and perhaps sadly, a more authentic life. While this may seem
difficult to comprehend given the diffuse nature of hipster trends, further research could reduce this confusion. First, I would attempt to study the differences between producers and consumers in this space, to see how they conceive of their consumption choices and identities similarly or differently. Most likely the motivation of mere consumers, i.e., people who just buy hipster goods, is different in form than the individuals who are also involved in the creation of those goods, albeit micro-brewed beers, recycled vintage t-shirts, or bamboo bike frames.

The pattern of authentic consumption among hipsters falls in line with what is largely happening in other corners of the marketplace – a greater desire for artisanal, locally produced products. Hipsters, then, may be the canary in the cultural coalmine, harbingers of larger generational shifts. This requires that we move beyond questions of who hipsters are and how they came into being toward broader investigations about the changing nature of global cultures.

So what would future research attempt to ascertain? First: are there difference between the behaviors, and the self-conceptions of the producers and the mere consumers in this space? And second: are there particular online hubs serving as the nodes through which hipster taste is presented, negotiated, and promoted?

The first question could be addressed by following up with high hipster taste participants to collect data such as job titles and hobbies. Did they score higher on my taste scale because they happen to work in creative industries, as painters, artists, writers, or bloggers, or are they merely people who like to shop at Urban Outfitters and buy organic produce? Parsing these distinctions through the richness of interview data could reveal important differences between consumers and producers in this movement.

If another survey were conducted, I would also aim for a more precise attitude question about conformity and divergence. Through my analyses I have come to realize that the
interpretation of whether one desires to stand out for fit in with their fashion is largely linked to unknown reference groups. One interpretation of this question could be, *do you desire to stand out from your boss and/or your co-workers*, which could cause one person to respond affirmatively, while another interpretation, *do you desire to stand out from your friends*, might lead the very same individual answering “no.”

In addition to these next steps, future research would attempt to trace the diffusion cycle of hipster objects – such as fixie bikes and Holga cameras – to understand the elements, in addition to vintage appeal, that drove the popularity and marketplace success of these goods. By identifying the point at which fixed gear bike frames began selling on eBay, or when the Holga camera was revived in Urban Outfitters’ catalogues, we may have a better sense of who the actors are driving demand and taste in this space.

The second question outstanding question – *are there particular online hubs serving as the nodes through which hipster taste is presented, negotiated, and promoted?* – could be examined through a social network analysis of survey data. An open-ended question, which asked participants which blogs inspire their fashion or music taste, revealed discernable differences between the kinds of websites and blogs visited by people with high hipster taste and low hipster taste. There much more overlap with the sites named by high taste participants than low taste participants. A social network analysis could reveal the number of ties, and density of connections, among these websites to determine if particular bloggers, marketers, retailers, etc. are driving the consumption preferences of hipsters. It would also reveal how much bridging and bonding, i.e. links within or between the hipster subgroup and outside the hipster subgroup, happens online.

Future research would also examine more of the categorical data, to see what differences, if
any, explain trends among participants. Examining demographic differences based on gender, or geographic location would be two ways in which to do this. Such analyses could ascertain whether taste measures differ according to location, and whether there is any association between the kind of neighborhood one lives in, i.e. a city or suburb, and the blogs or websites they visit to learn about fashion and music.

The findings of this paper also urge us to consider Wellman’s (2003) theory of networked individualism more broadly. If it is true that individuals switch between multiple online resources to meet their information-gathering objectives, so too should we consider that information allows us to inhabit multiple identity statuses simultaneously. The finding that 271 of my survey participants fall within the moderate hipster taste category supports this theory. As Donath (2007) writes, knowing the changing meaning of signals may serve as the ultimate form of power in information based society. As globalization increases, we can expect more subgroups to use expressions of taste as a signal of uniqueness amidst landscapes of sameness. Perhaps, then, we should move beyond treating hipsters as a vapid subculture of cultural appropriation and recombination. Instead, we should consider hipsters as the canary in the cultural coal mine, the latest example of a local subculture gone global, and the first to do so largely through online interactions. Given the transcendence of place brought about by the Internet, we should expect to see many more subgroups emerge as hipsters have – from a local subculture to a global consumption collective.
APPENDIX

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2. Image captured on Look at this Fucking Hipster lookatthisfuckinghipster.com. Retrieved online March 26, 2010.
Figure 3. Image captured on Look at this Fucking Hipster lookatthisfuckinghipster.com. Retrieved online January 5, 2010.
Figure 4. Image captured on Hipster Puppies http://hipsterpuppies.tumblr.com/. Retrieved online April 17, 2010.
Figure 5. Image captured on Stuff Hipsters Hate http://stuffhipstershate.tumblr.com/. Retrieved online April 17, 2010.
Figure 6. Image captured on Vice Mag Online http://www.viceland.com/. Retrieved online April 17, 2010.
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Informed Consent

This survey asks a set of questions to better understand the relationship between consumption, style, and taste.

Pilot studies suggest it will take **approximately 10 minutes to complete**.

As one of 120 participants, your answers will be used as part of a master’s level research project at Georgetown University. All personal information will be destroyed once the data is collected. Any published results or data will only contain aggregated response and will be completely confidential.

**Participation in this survey is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time.**

Your participation is greatly appreciated and constituted consent to use your responses for research purposes.

At the end of the survey, we will ask whether we may contact you via email for further research. You are not required to leave your email address if you do not wish to be contacted.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact the lead investigator, Lauren Alfrey at lma55@georgetown.edu

Alternatively, you may contact the Georgetown University Institutional Review Board if you have concerns about your privacy as a participant — email iboard@georgetown.edu

**Thank you for your participation!**
1. Please note the level to which you agree with the following statement: *It is important that I stand out with my fashion/style.*

   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

2. How would you describe your fashion sense or style?

3. Which blogs or websites do you visit regularly to learn about fashion, music, and art?

4. Which of the following inspires your fashion sense or style? Check all that apply:

   - People on the street
   - My friends or family
   - Blogs or websites
   - High fashion magazines
   - Retail stores
   - Celebrities
   - Musicians
   - Icons or style from past eras
   - No one, my style is all my own
   - None of the above

5. If you were given $300 to shop at ONE store only, where would you go?

   - Anthropologie
   - American Apparel
   - Banana Republic
   - Bloomingdales
   - The Gap
   - H&M
   - J. Crew
   - Macy’s
   - Nordstrom
   - Old Navy
Urban Outfitters
Target
A vintage or thrift store

6. Do you visit any of the following websites to learn about fashion, music, arts or culture? Please check all that apply:

- Brightest Young Things
- Pitchfork
- Fecal Face
- LOOKBOOK
- Paper Mag
- Vice
- Free Williamsburg
- Flavorpill
- Stuff Hipsters Hate
- I don’t visit any of these website regularly

7. Do you have any tattoos?

- No
- Yes. If yes, please briefly describe the location and design of your tattoo(s):

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Please review each item on this list and check the category that applies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>I don’t want this</th>
<th>I want this</th>
<th>I own this, but don’t use or wear it often</th>
<th>I own this, and use or wear it often</th>
<th>I don’t know what this is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bike messenger bag (e.g., Chrome)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixie or track bike</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluorescent leggings</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keffiyeh scarf</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leotard (not for dance class)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-fidelity camera (e.g., Holga, Fisheye, Polaroid)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moleskine notebook</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plastic neon sunglasses</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Check the option that best describes how you feel about each music genre:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Dislike it very much</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>I don't know what this is</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Western</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance/Trance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy Metal</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swing/Big Band</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oldies</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indie Rock</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indie/Electronica</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop/Top 40</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rap/ Hip-Hop</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reggae</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Check the option that best describe how you feel about each of these food and entertainment spaces:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Dislike these places a lot</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Like these places a lot</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art houses</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling alleys</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billiards halls</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Dislike these places a lot</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Like</td>
<td>Like these places a lot</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chain restaurants (e.g., TGI Fridays, Applebee’s)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dive bars</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fast food restaurants (e.g., McDonalds, Burger King)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local galleries</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large movie plexes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports arenas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steak houses (e.g., Morton’s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetarian or vegan restaurants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Where do you most often buy your groceries? Please check only ONE option:
   - Big box retailer (e.g., Costco, Walmart)
   - Farmer’s market
   - Local co-op or organic market
   - National supermarket chain (e.g., Safeway, Giant)
   - Whole Foods

12. Do you think of yourself as a hipster?
   - Yes
   - No

13. Has anyone else ever called you a hipster?
   - Yes
   - No

14. How old are you? _____________

15. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
16. Which political party are you most aligned with?

   Democratic party
   Republican party
   Green party
   Independent party
   Other
   I’m not aligned with any political party

17. Did you graduate from or are you currently attending college?

   No
   Yes. College or university: ___________________________ Major: __________________________

18. Do you live in Washington, DC?

   No
   Yes. Neighborhood: ______________________________________________________________________

19. May we contact you if we have follow-up questions? (Note: we consider this information to be private and will not share it with anyone.)

   No
   Yes. Name and email: ______________________________________________________________________

This concludes the survey. Thank you so much for participating!
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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