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# Tragically Hip: Hipsters Psychological Development Irony and the Negative Backlash

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RUNNING HEAD: TRAGICALLY HIP

Tragically Hip: Hipsters, Psychological Development, Irony, and the Negative Backlash

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### **Abstract**

My thesis explores the psychology of hipsters, a modern American countercultural group. I explain the phenomenon of this group by first examining how they are like and unlike previous countercultural movements, as well as which of the classic tenants of “hip” contemporary hipsters have employed as part of their existence in the modern world. Finally, I focus on hipsters’ employment of irony as a tactic to subvert the mainstream culture and why being ironic has caused such a negative backlash on the part of the mainstream culture, as well as other countercultures.

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## INTRODUCTION

Countercultures exist to challenge the views of the mainstream and to provide an outlet for those who do not feel that they fit within the idea of what typical modern society is. In America, there are plenty of different groups that offer an alternative lifestyle to the dominant culture, but none has been more talked about in recent time than that of the hipster. By definition, hipsters use aesthetic, pretentiousness, and irony to defy the mainstream culture and assert their superiority. First emerging in its more modern form circa the year 2000, this group of individuals seems to do anything and everything they can to subvert the ways of not only the normal culture, but also other countercultures of this era. Everything from the way they dress to the music they listen to, the books they read, and the attitudes they hold show a complete lack of caring of everything that other cultures hold important. Their use of irony, which will be explained more fully throughout this paper, is the main tactic that hipsters employ to demonstrate that they are in no part included in the mainstream society, nor do they want to be. The interesting thing to note about hipsters as compared to previous American countercultural movements is the negative view and incredible discrimination they receive on the basis of their countercultural status. Mainstream individuals, as well as those from basically any other conceivable sub/culture in the United States, have actively gone out of their way, through acts such as writing articles and blog posts, to criticize and trivialize these individuals.

This paper will discuss the modern hipster in the context of other groups to explain why there exists such deep-seated negative feelings about them. I will first define what a hipster is and providing the history of both the modern and more historical movements of the group (the movement of hip). After that, I will delve further in to some defining characteristics of the modern hipster. From there, I will explain the psychological reasons for the attitudes of hipsters,

using Perry's theory on epistemological development, the tenants of postmodern thought and society, as well as Keniston's theory of the "New Youth." I will explain the main tenants of each theory, following up with their specific applications to the modern hipster. I will then show how irony has been used as a defining characteristic of hipsters by first showing how it relates to this specific generation (tying it to the three previously mentioned theories), and then looking at irony from a psychological perspective. I will then try to connect hipsters' usage of irony with the psychology behind the behavior in an attempt to explain why this particular counterculture employs irony to define themselves and their attitude towards mainstream culture, and in general, the world. The final section addresses the question of why this counterculture is hated more than previous ones.

## **THE NAUTRE OF THE MODERN HIPSTER**

Central to understanding the tactics used by hipsters as well as hatred towards them would be the question of what exactly a hipster is. While this term has morphed over the decades of American history, this section aims to separate what makes the modern hipster different from not only the mainstream culture, but also other countercultures and earlier versions of hipsters.

### **"Hip" Movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Hipster derives from the word "hip," which is not a modern term by any means, especially in considering countercultures throughout American history. John Leland's *Hip: The History* provides a comprehensive overview into to past uses of the word in American society. Although the modern hipster really started to develop after this work was published, many of the tenants proposed in Leland's book apply to this wave of counterculture.

Leland notes that the advent of the word “hip,” and along with it what it meant to be cool, originated in the Black community, tracing all the way back to the slavery era. The blend that came from white individuals appropriating elements of black culture into their own created hip. The earliest trace of the modern connotation of “hip” in America can be found during the 1910s and 20s. During this time period, those considered “hip” valued change and the quickness by which that change came (Leland, 2004). Their spirits appeared lighter: they danced what was formerly considered provocative dances and in general did not seem to care much for the future. The whole idea of the youth appeared to be changing: started to see themselves as indispensable members of the society in which they lived; not simply less intelligent beings in the larger family structure (Leland, 2004). Those considered hip subscribed to these ideals.

America saw the next wave of the hip movement during the 1940s. The hipster of 1940s America can be closest described as the gangster of today. Surrounded by a culture of the phonograph, jazz, and ragtime music (Leland, 2004), this genre of people had a predilection for violence and portrayed this image widely via cinema. Names like Al Capone and John Dillinger come to mind when thinking of the “gangster style” hipster (Leland, 2004). As time passed, this idea of hip faded in to different subcultures (such as violence being characteristic of gangster, and ragtime music characteristic of the early jazz movement more closely associated with modern African American history) and the idea of hip transformed in to something new. But one thing remained consistent: hip seemed to be centered on music and culture. Leland (2004) describes hip during this time period as a combination of “art, image, dope, clothes, celebrity, intellectual arrogance, and rebel grace.” Their personal style was lavish, and they kept about themselves a general air of pretention.

The desire to do what another group was doing made that activity more appealing and thus cool, which really came into view during the 50s and 60s. The media also played a big role in how notions of hip developed. It has long been known that “hipsters” of the 1950s and 60s idolized travel. According to Leland, this sprung from Kerouac’s famous book *On The Road*, which romanticized the idea of “ping-ponging across the country” (Leland, 2004). Moving around, not being tied to a lifestyle was considered in-style in the 1950s and 1960s. This love of travel led to the general distaste for work. Work would be associated with staying in one place and having a stable life and that was not hip during this time period.

### **The Modern Hipster**

In general, modern hipsters seem to take these tenants of what was traditionally hip to an extreme, thus making them different from previous hip countercultures. These tenants include: ambiguity, speed and transience, reinvention, questions of who they are, self-invention, non-conformity, contradictions, individualism, and creation (Leland, 2004). These are seen in the modern hipster, who takes these tenants to such an extreme that they are viewed more negatively than were past countercultures. Hipsters see themselves as being important parts of society, adding to it and bringing their own styles into the mix (Leland, 2004). Their way of being is constantly changing: they work to keep ahead of the curve and rejoice when they are the first people to discover something. They are intellectually arrogant to an extreme degree. The center of the hipster world revolves around being the first to know about things and flaunting it and separating the “us” of the hipster group from the “them” of the mainstream and keeping that distinction very clear. They pride themselves on doing their own thing: hipsters do not view corporate work or contributing to modern society in the traditional way as pleasing. This

disregard for work has long been a tenant of hip, and hipsters have perpetuated this in the modern age.

### **History of the modern hipster**

All this leads into the emergence of what is known as the modern hipster. This kind of individual first started becoming prominent around the year 2000 (Keifer, 2009). Mark Grief in describes the early movement of the hipster in his *New York Magazine* article as people “that defined itself by its rejection of consumerism” and came out of a clash between “indie bohemians” and “flannel-clad proto-businessman and dot-com paper millionaires” (Grief, 2010). Grief explains the creativity and art that flowed through the neighborhoods where these earlier hipsters lived (noted to be places such as the Lower East Side and Williamsburg- both in New York City- Capitol Hill in Seattle, the Silver Lake section of Los Angeles, and the Inner Mission in San Francisco).

While hipsters are different in a variety of ways from the mainstream culture, other countercultures, and previous versions of the word hip throughout American history, there has also been a slight change, aesthetically if anything, throughout the most modern advent of the hipster movement, meaning that hipster in its most modern form has undergone a few changes. This modern counterculture seems to appear and act unlike any counterculture has in the past. While the hipster has been around for what some argue to be more than a decade, this group has only very recently been thrust into the media and public attention. Hipsters can often be recognized vis a vis the clothes they wear. The graphic below comes from *Paste Magazine*, which aims at presenting news about music and culture to American life:



One can see how the hipster has evolved aesthetically throughout the past decade. While this graphic may have been made in slight jest towards this counterculture, the visual differences in this group of individuals as compared what is considered the mainstream culture is important. The descriptions accompanying each picture also display a characteristic that is commonly associated with the hipster movement: that they are superficial. The comments about each picture appear below (Keifer, 2009):

2000: The Emo
The proud hipster’s white belt and guyliner make for a soulful combination
2001: The Emo Redux
The skulls on her tour-only Death Cab tee don’t match the skulls on her Vans, so it’s not like she’s trying too hard
2002: The Ashton

His PBR trucker hat and faux vintage t-shirt reveal an obsession with “irony.”
2003: The Scenester A gaudy tattoo appears on her chest, and she is never spotted without her iPod.
2004: The Twee He adores his rare vinyl collection and tobacco pipe. Despite his 20/20 vision, he wears Buddy Holly glasses.
2005: The Fauxhemian She suffers for fashion, wearing a furry hat, boots, and keffiyah even during the warmest months. Her new wrist tattoo is the Japanese symbol for beauty- or at least that’s what the guy at the tattoo shop told her.
2006: The Mountain Man He seeks working-class authenticity, taking pride in his full beard and the fact that he’s often mistaken for a homeless person.
2007: The Vintage Queen She shops at retro boutiques and posts holga photos on her blog. She has said that the koi fish cover-up tattoo on her arm symbolizes “nature and love and peace and stuff.”
2008: The Williamsburg He thoughtfully hangs shutter shades in the deep-v of his white tee, and he’s often seen walking his fixed gear bike around town while texting with his iPhone.
2009: The Meta-Nerd By wearing the popular three wolf moon t-shirt, today’s hipster makes a mockery of herself. She has finally completed her full-sleeve tattoo.

A noted change for the modern hipster came when they started latch on to a cause: the “green movement.” Although it is famously noted that hipsters do not stand for anything, this movement was more of a way for hipsters to highlight their pretentiousness. By saying that they care for the future of the planet, they are conversely saying that anyone who does not engage in the same green practices is not worthy. Irony picked up again as a mode of communication and style in the culture through their pseudo-loyalty to the green movement. They also developed

during this time a fascination with nature and nature-related things. Grief described this period and the interest in “animals, wilderness, plus the occasional Native American” as the “Hipster Primitive” (Grief, 2010). These individuals also set the standard of appearing androgynous, a move showing the fluidity of gender and how hipsters view it as a social construct.

In 2003, there was a fear amongst the counterculture that it was coming to an end. According to Grief, it was possible that the anti-capitalist movement that bore the advent of the modern hipster was in direct response to the 1999 WTO protests (Grief, 2010) and that this was ending as the turn of the century was just getting started and larger issues were emerging, such as 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. This apparently fading culture turned way to a movement of nostalgia, which represented a desire to return to earlier days when things were more innocent.

But the culture did not die out, but instead got stronger in its use of irony, apathy, pretention, and aesthetic to separate themselves from others. In conclusion, all these phases that this group went through and nuances they picked up along the way makes them hard to define or difficult to conceptualize to those outside of it. In short, hipsters are everything that the mainstream and other cultures are not. They desire to keep their freedom and live their lives for themselves. As Mr. Jonny Diamond (2010) writes in his article “What We Talk About When We Talk About Hipsters,”

If we think of a city as an ecosystem, with economic and cultural niches in perpetual but equilibrium flux, the hipster occupies that particular urban space reserved for young people who escape to the city to make art, be beautiful, get fucked up, and subvert convention. From the Romantic Poets to the Lost Generation, the Beats to the Factory,

the hipster has been a catalyst of the counterculture, instigating through art, sex and rebellion the ongoing creation of life outside the mainstream.

Hipsters take alternative routes to express themselves. They rebel and use visual creations and taboo acts to let the mainstream culture that they exist and are not going anywhere.

### **Modern hipster style**

Ken Goffman in his book “Counterculture Through the Ages,” notes, “countercultures embrace individual and social change” (Goffman, 2005). As touched upon earlier, individuality for the hipster is one of the pinnacles of their existence. Standing out in terms of their dress, music preferences, political thought, or rather thoughts about anything, sets hipsters apart from the rest of society. Hipsters’ view on other societies is one of contempt, and change in hipsters’ minds involves the rejection of popular society because their ways are, in the minds of the hipster, wrong. To these members of the counterculture, all society cares about is making money and becoming “successful,” as defined by monetary and status markers. Hipsters project themselves to be incredibly important in a different way than mainstream defines important. They desire the opportunity to make others aware of their lifestyle and how it contradicts that of the mainstream in an attempt to undermine the mainstream’s supposed authority.

Countercultures typically like to brand things as their own unique styles, and hipsters are no different, even if other people have previously used some of the items that they currently sport. What makes the modern hipster unique from other countercultures is their re-appropriation of items that modern society has deemed worthless, something that will be explored in depth below. They take items (for example, polyester track suits and large, plastic framed glasses) that the mainstream culture considers out of date and gives them new meaning as a way to show

other cultures of society that hipsters do not care what those cultures think. They are making a statement that having an allegiance to anything is ridiculous: that “outdated” fashions could easily come back. They are less active than previous countercultural movements, which in this case means that they do not actively protest the mistakes that they think the mainstream culture is making. They simply defy them by employing styles and attitudes reminiscent of the past (or the very-forward future) to show that they are not part of any other culture’s life.

According to the “Evolution of the Hipster” graphic, hipsters’ usage of irony emerged in the year 2002 (Keifer, 2009). While more about hipsters’ employment of irony will be explained later, one can note that using irony really turned hipsters from walking that mainstream line to fully indulging in a countercultural lifestyle. In terms of fashion in describing the evolution of the hipster around this time, the following descriptions were employed:

trucker hats; undershirts called “wifebeaters,” worn alone; the aesthetic of basement room pornography, flash-lit Polaroids, and fake-wood paneling; Pabst Blue Ribbon; “porno” or “pedophile” mustaches; aviator glasses; Americana T-shirts from church socials and pig roasts; tube socks; the late albums of Johnny Cash; tattoos (Greif, 2010)

In thinking about these fashions, mainstream society, or really any other countercultural societies (i.e., gothic) definitely does not come to mind. These earlier form of hipsters were strikingly different from those people who led lives blending in with the general public. Greif likened this early movement to “an ethnicity- with its clannishness, its claiming of microneighborhoods from other, older migrants, and its total disinterest in integrating into the local populations” (Greif, 2010). This refusal to mesh with other populations coupled with incredible exclusiveness carries

through in even more modern incarnations of the hipster as a way to assure that they were defining themselves against everyone else.

A defining change in hipster fashion came in 2004 with the advent of the skinny jean. This drastic change in fashion was a defining moment for hipsters, as it forced them to show allegiance to the counterculture by completely switching their physical appearance (previous fashions of hipsters had included wide-legged or baggy jeans) (Grief, 2010). Hipsters arbitrarily made the switch to this fashion, and those who were going to commit to this counterculture needed to make the switch as well. Making such a visible switch would really call in to question the person's dedication to being part of this counterculture. And for many, it happened. As psychology has stated before, when someone is forced to compromise a part of themselves for the good of an organization or something to which they arbitrarily belong to, they justify their reasons for doing so by really dedicating themselves and forming very strong feelings towards the organization. In this case, hipsters became more resolute in their efforts to stand out and assert themselves as a legitimate culture within the United States.

New styles and a love for older things also emerged. Big thick-rimmed 1950s (or 1990s) style glasses emerged and were used as a functional pair of eyewear or just for fashion. Plaid flannel resurged in popularity, as did record sales. Grief noted that the first time in 2 decades, records actually increased in sales (Grief, 2010). Fixed gear bicycles were also incredibly popular. Ryan Semerad, a member of the Union College class of 2013 and a self-identified hipster, agrees that hipsters' use of out of date items are a means for their style. He cites pipe smoking, leather boots, old records, and generally looking like one is from the 1950s and 60s as key to hipster style. Semerad comments that as a community of hipsters, their clothes stand for their ideology, but it is something that they themselves will never comment on. It adds to the

hipster aesthetic; doing what they want to do, which is completely opposite of what everyone else is doing, and not feeling the need to explain themselves to anyone. They exist for themselves as a group that shares similar thoughts on those around them and they use clothing to stand out (Personal communication, 2011).

All countercultures “challenge authoritarianism in both obvious and subtle forms” (Goffman, 2005). This seems obvious, but it is worth pointing out just to highlight the way in which hipsters challenge authority in the modern world. As will be explored later, consumerism is really large in considering what makes a hipster truly hipster. They tend to subvert authority through their clothing consumption choices. Through their use of kitsch, especially that which the current mainstream culture has rejected, hipsters can tell the rest of the world that they do not care what everyone else thinks. They adopt fashions such as “old man” sweaters and track suits along with large, non-utilitarian glasses reminiscent of those worn in the 1980s. Modern day has rejected these sorts of fashions as outdated and not “cool” but hipsters, by taking these kinds of apparel and marking them as their own have shown that they do not care what the “authorities” of mainstream society (or anyone else) think, and are going to challenge other cultures by dressing and acting in their own ways.

In fact, the market in which hipsters practice their consumption habits is called the “indie” scene, with “indie” being short hand term for independent. The musicians usually labeled as “indie” are either unsigned or signed to local record labels. They claim to have true love for music and are not just playing to sell out, become famous, and/or make lots of money. This is something the hipster idolizes: not selling out and becoming just another member of the crowd, but staying true to one’s own wants and desires, even if they go against what is considered normal. Some hipsters will even go seemingly out of their way to reject the mainstream market.

Semerad notes that he does not like any kind of pop music and will not wear the same kind of clothes that those in the mainstream consider fashionable. Their markets are completely different, and the way in which things are marketed to different groups needs to be different. Hipsters will only partake in mainstream markets if they do so in an ironic way, to show that they are still not part of the market that they seem to promote. For example, Semerad talks about a popular hipster t-shirt: one with a Wal-Mart happy face on it, but the face is actually crying. He states that “it’s not what you expect,” and thus is appealing for hipsters (personal communication, 2011). It is a way to take something that is considered normal and acceptable by those in the mainstream culture and appropriating it in an ironic way as a response to what they think about the other cultures around them.

Goffman’s statement regarding going against social conventions to maintain individuality is true when considering the hipster. They reject places where most people go in favor of small, local hangouts where they can be themselves with other hipsters. This social space has even been redesigned to a large extent by the modern age and technology such as the Internet. Dylan Clark, in his article “Waker Cells and Subcultural Resistance,” speaks to this point when he defines what a waker cell is. According to Mr. Clark (2005), waker cells are spaces where these sub- or countercultures can go and have the freedom to be themselves within this space and with each other. With the advent of the Internet as a space where people with like-minded values can come together to share ideas, the idea of the waker cell as a physical space is rapidly changing. The Internet is a major way of transmitter hipster ideas and ideals in a rapid manner. Music and trends can be passed through underground hipster networks on the Internet. Blogging is big amongst hipsters. Making their voices stand out as something different from everything that has already been said speaks to the individual aspect of hipsters that they hold high.

### **Modern hipster values**

While tangible aspects are important in identifying at first glance hipsters from those in the mainstream culture, there are equally relevant personality characteristics. In short, the modern hipster is everything other cultures are not. The mainstream culture values hard work, dresses in a manner that blends in with everyone else, and does not like to make a scene. The modern hipster is quite the opposite. They do not value work in the same way that others do: they prefer to do jobs that make them truly happy. To those outside the group, this can appear as laziness and unwillingness to contribute to society. While former countercultures (for example, the hippie movement of the 1960s) may not have valued work in the same way that their counterpart mainstreamers did, the hippies had a motive for doing what they did, whereas the modern hipster has no apparent reason for not contributing to society in the way they “should.” Hippies in general protested the workings of the American government and thus did not take jobs in traditional American industries because they did not believe in the core concepts that those of their government did. Hipsters, on the other hand, employ a sense of apathy tinged with distaste towards modern society. They do not take work generally because they actively do everything that the mainstream does not. Not caring about what others find important leads them to not partake in activities that are important to the mainstream: i.e., they do not find purposeful work the same way that the rest of society does.

Goffman has explored three defining characteristics or tenants of countercultures. First, “countercultures assign primacy to individuality at the expense of social conventions and governmental constraints” (Goffman, 2005). Looking at the world of the hipster shows this. Hipsters are individualistic, concerned with not blending in favor of carving their own path. To be like everyone else would be a sin in the hipster world. To stand out means to wear clothes,

listen to music, and act in ways that others do not. Hipsters are marked by incredible pretentiousness when it comes to music and literature. They like bands and authors who are not widely known, and as soon as someone signs a large record deal or lands a book deal with a popular publishing company, hipsters tend to reject them as selling out. Hipsters have no interest whatsoever in becoming part of any other culture, despite the mainstream culture's attempts to try to isolate them to the point of humiliation. While sometimes the label of "hipster" cause people to shrink back and not admit to claiming that word as part of their identity, those who are part of this counterculture do not try to blend in and be like everyone else. They stress individual change in terms of assuring that they are still being true to their lifestyle and ideals.

Pretentiousness is a characteristic key to the modern hipster. They employ this air of pretention when describing their literary, cinematic, and musical tastes. According to Grief, "The hipster, in both black and white incarnations, in his essence had been about superior knowledge...Hipster...referred to an air of knowing about exclusive things before anyone else" (Grief, 2010). The pretentiousness hipsters exhibit comes from their desire to obtain exclusive knowledge before it becomes popularized. The hipster does not fight for a cause as did those in previous countercultural movements (i.e., the hippies), but rather strives to maintain his position as a knower of privileged information and to keep an air of exclusivity so the value of the information that he possesses can be retained. Nothing annoys a hipster more than when information he holds so dear becomes part of popular culture. They tend to stand for nothing yet still maintain feelings that they are better than everyone else. Earlier permutations of the hipster had nothing to do with pretention, thus showing a new type of culture emerging as a result of different psychological phenomena, which will be explained later. During the 1940s, when the term hipster had a connotation closer to the phrases "mob boss" or "gangster" (Leland, 2004), no

one connected the term with pretentiousness. Mainstream culture learns things from the media: they read about them in the papers and reading online blogs, or they find out new information on the evening news. The modern hipster essentially goes “underground” to discover the latest music or films to be ahead of the game and thus displays their winning attitude to everyone else.

Displaying apathy towards everything is characteristic of this counterculture: it is seen as a way of rebelling against the norm. By stating that they do not care about the causes and concerns of modern day, hipsters are going against the expectations set for them. As will be explained later, hipsters live in a postmodern world; they are discovering that there is no truth. With this discovery, it is natural to not want to invest energy in to things if they will not amount to a productive end. This apathy is a way in which hipsters can challenge the supposed authority of other cultures. To show apathy towards something that others have invested lots of care into is a sign of disrespect: it shows that one does not want to give the other the time of day. It gives them agency in determining how the balance of power will go between those that consider themselves hipsters and the rest of society.

In conclusion regarding the modern hipster, it can be seen that they are group of individuals interested in defying every other kind of society in every way possible. They take the traditional ideas of hip and exaggerate them to a great degree to get their point across. They appropriate styles that have long been discarded by other kinds of societies and make them their own to show their uniqueness. They display an incredible pretention when it comes to music, literature and art, and are quick to drop the things they just picked up as soon as they become popular. They are fast-paced in their fashions and tastes, but slow when it comes to doing the things that their parents did at their age. In short, this group exists, and it is clear that they have not gone anywhere in the past ten years and equally do not look like they will be trying to go

anywhere far in the future. But why do hipsters exist the way they do? Previous countercultures have exaggerated their behaviors and done things similar to hipsters, so what makes this group so unique? And what about this uniqueness causes such hatred on the part of other cultures? The following sections will attempt to explain the psychology behind hipsters: why their life stage makes them unique from other people/ past countercultural movements, and what about this causes the negative backlash.

## **PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MODERN HIPSTER**

Psychology has a lot to say regarding hipsters and their life development. Three relevant theories that will explain hipster behavior are as follows: epistemological development, postmodern thought and society, and Keniston's "New Youth" theory. These ideas are closely interrelated; what follows is a description of each theory and how it relates to the others, as well as how hipsters do (or in some cases, do not) fit into these paradigms.

### **The postmodern self**

Postmodernism is important when considering the hipster world. Postmodernism refers to a societal view that adopts a freer thinking than previous eras. The ideas purported by postmodernism pervade nearly every aspect of the individual's thinking and reasoning: the way they make decisions and interact with others reflects how they think about larger issues, such as truth and individuality. There are tenants of this new style of thought that simply did not exist in past generations, which creates a gap between those that identify as postmodern and those that do not. There are four concepts central to postmodern thought:

- (1) The self is not, and cannot be, an autonomous, self-generating entity; it is purely a social, cultural, historical, and linguistic creation.
- (2) There are no foundational

principles from which other assertions can be derived; hence, certainty as the result of either empirical verification or deductive reasoning is impossible. (3) There can be no such thing as knowledge of reality; what we think is knowledge is always belief and can apply only to the context within which it is asserted. (4) Because language is socially and culturally constituted, it is inherently incapable of representing or corresponding to reality; hence all propositions and all interpretations, even texts, are themselves social constructions (Schanck, 1992).

Postmodernism encompasses a lot more fluidity than previous styles of thought. It purports the existence of multiple truths and recognizes the importance of understanding based on one's given situation. Everyone goes in to something knowing different things and having different experiences based on factors including, but not limited to: race, religion, gender, and family history. In a truly postmodern society, individuals take into account that everything is situational and the society where they live creates the reality and dictates what is true or not.

### **Epistemological development**

The development of forms of epistemological thought (Perry, 1970) is another psychological theory that is relevant in considering the development of youth. Perry (1970) described these different stages of development of thinking about the nature of truth and knowledge as individuals develop and change throughout the life stage around college. There are three levels to this thinking: dualist, multiplist, and relativist. Dualist thinking involves believing that things can be either true or false, black or white (Perry, 1970). People in the dualist view trust authority to be right and that truth can be absolute. The next stage is multiplist, which

comes about when people start to realize that there exists a difference in opinion about issues, which is entirely subjective, with no opinion being more right than any other (Perry, 1970). They start to realize that there can be multiple versions of the truth. According to Benack's (1982) explanation of Perry's theory, people entering the multiplist view first try to reconcile their dualistic beliefs with this new realization of opinions. The final stage, relativism, occurs when individuals realize that differing opinions result from a variety of perspectives that people from different backgrounds acquire (1982). Relativism involves the realization that nothing is exactly true, that everything can be relative. Situations and the "correct" solution can be contextual.

The evolution of societal thought and reasoning in America has gone progressively more diverse over the years. The theory of epistemological thought can help to explain the relevant thought process of hipsters. As was explained briefly earlier, epistemological thought purports three stages of development. The first stage, duality, is what most people come into college thinking. These beliefs start to switch as individuals enter college and start learning things in different ways. This style of thinking was more common in older eras of American history, where religion was dominant and God's word was rarely challenged. There were only a few individuals- those very well educated on worldly views- who were entering the multiplist view.

Multiplicity occurs when the individual moves in to college and starts learning from professors. This stage involves a breakdown in thinking that there are absolutes and that every question only has one right answer. This views start to change when they learn things in college in and out of the classroom that challenge this thought. They do not think anything is true anymore, and this creates huge internal questions for these individuals regarding how to reconcile what they have always known and what they are currently learning. The 1960s was a time where multiplicity was more accepted in academic circles of society. The professors in

universities were those who transcended the dualist view (which was still fairly common around mainstream and “average” individuals). These multiplist views came into conflict with those who still subscribed to the dualist view, thus creating a division of culture and thought.

As time went on, multiplist thought in the upper ends of society gave way to relativism. This involves the acceptance of multiple perspectives on an issue, which gives way to the idea that truth is constructed. What is “right” can be different depending on which perspective it is coming from. The fact that an individual can see something in different ways yet can only subscribe to one belief or realization that something is true can create discomfort and sadness for that individual. It can be very overwhelming- being able to see multiple points- but it is a path to realizing how the world works and will make navigating through life different. They start evaluating life on different levels, judging hard or soft standards set by questions, or how people are justifying their beliefs. Relativism is becoming more and more accepted as a legitimate style of thinking, especially in individuals who accept postmodernism.

### **Youth: A new stage in human development**

The advent of different styles of thinking brings about changes in human development. Different stages that individuals have to work through or decide to subscribe to would replace the traditional stages of development. As new ways of thinking emerge, new spaces must be created to distinguish their grappling with large issues. Kenneth Keniston’s 1970 article, “Youth as a Stage of Life,” has sweeping implications on perceptions of different ages. His observations on the stage of life that occurs between adolescence and adulthood, which he called youth, seems to be the exact stage that hipsters are in. Although this article was written 40 years ago, it has transcended time, as many points that Keniston makes are relevant to hipsters.

One major stage that Keniston (1970) says is a part of the youth culture is a **stress between the self and the culture in which they live**. The youth have a lot more problems accepting societal labels than do those in the adolescent phase, and this is due to the fact that the youth have a better sense of who they are as individuals than do adolescents. Keniston (1970) points out that the word “youth” typically describes someone in their 20s, so it would make sense that after going to college or having real work experience after high school, those in this stage would have a more solid sense of self than those in high school (adolescents), where hormones are unstable and the culture is conducive to cause people to question themselves.

A second theme characterizing the life of the youth is what Keniston (1970) calls a **“pervasive ambivalence.”** This can be characterized by the tension that the youth feel between wanting to exist one way and yet also wanting to exist in the opposite way. For example, youth may hold an allegiance to themselves to remain independent and always stand out, yet still have a desire to belong and have a group of friends to identify with. They are concerned with what Keniston (1970) calls the struggle “between the maintenance of personal integrity and the achievement of effectiveness in society.”

Keniston (1970) also explains the imagery of a **“wary probe”** to talk about how youths navigate their world. They are more sure of themselves than they have ever been, and this causes them to question and experiment with things with a more steady hand than when they were younger. They test the world in different and more legitimate ways than ever before and this includes testing themselves as well.

**“Alternating estrangement and omnipotentiality”** is a feeling that most youths experience, according to Keniston (1970). This is defined as feeling of being alone, of things not

being real, and feeling disconnected from the rest of the world, which is contrasted with a feeling of freedom and power to change the world. This contrast leads to uncomfortable feelings and strange behaviors. The youth do not feel as connected to the world as they did as adolescents, where they more willingly accepted labels and bonded with others their age. They do not realize their full potential as they are still trying to figure out who they are. Once they leave college and are no longer in the bubble of where they live, work, and study, they do not have that feeling of being in tight connection with people, nor do they feel like things are so dictated for them anymore. They feel they have the education to go out and do whatever, which can cause tension within the individual

The “**refusal of socialization**” that Keniston (1970) touches upon is important to note. He goes on further to explain that the youth adamantly do not want to accept the roles that they are supposed to. Before youth was formally defined, people thought that adulthood directly followed adolescence. Right after college, these individuals were supposed to choose a career, a city to live in, get a job, a family, and settle down. As time progressed, it became apparent that this was not the case. Due to what Keniston (1970) says are environmental factors, changing technology, and economic conditions, a new stage between adolescence and adulthood formed, one that rejected societal labels in favor of following their own path before becoming adults.

### **Relations to one another**

These three theories, in addition to building off and influencing the development of each other, have created the world in which hipsters have established themselves. The evolution of multiplicity and relativism shaped the mindsets of the individuals. These views became more prevalent, and it started to shape how people thought of society as a whole. Postmodernism

would not have emerged as such if people did not realize some of the thoughts of relativists and multiplists. Once people realize that truth can be different for different people, the idea of capital-T Truths disappears, which is central to postmodernism. Once a large enough group started to shape their worldview based on postmodern thinking and higher stages of epistemological development, the world saw a new stage of individuals develop. Keniston's "New Youth" were a groundbreaking in that they took these styles of thinking to a new level and became a tangible stage of development. These theories have not existed in worlds past, so people outside of the culture have not been exposed to the ideas that hipsters have and would thus not understand this new group of individuals. The next section explores specific applications of these theories to the behaviors of hipsters.

## **APPLICATIONS TO HIPSTERS**

### **Hipsters' epistemological development**

In terms of epistemological development influencing the postmodern thought of hipsters and their falling into Keniston's "new youth" theory, which of these stages do hipsters commit to? This stage is up for debate. It is my opinion that hipsters try to put on the air of those in the relativist state but are really multiplists themselves. They want to put on the face that they understand multiple perspectives on issues, but in actuality hold the belief that their ideas and perspectives on issues are correct. Also, while epistemological development has traditionally referred to the stages of one's thinking, hipsters have taken it to a different level and have made these stages part of their culture, interacting with others and projecting themselves as relativists, but in actuality existing as multiplists. Hipsters are characterized, among other things, by their pretentiousness, which makes one think that they do not believe that there can be truths from

different perspectives. This is also evidence that they accept and believe the world to be postmodern. It is likely that they do think about the perspectives of others and examine and evaluate their statements, but ultimately, maybe even secretly, hold true that their beliefs are the correct ones. This makes sense, because if hipsters subscribed and genuinely agreed with the thoughts, opinions, and perspectives of non-hipsters, then would their counterculture exist? Hipsters would not truthfully believe the opinions or perspectives of others, but would feign saying that things can be taken from multiple viewpoints. A central tenant of any counterculture involves having views that do not go along with the mainstream. By agreeing with mainstream society, it would almost contradict the whole existence of being a hipster. It is almost as if they are putting on the act of the relativist, and to some extent maybe being relativists themselves, but in actuality are far more in the realm of the multiplist. Putting on this air of pretending to understand the views of others while simultaneously maintaining that their views are actually correct warrents negative reaction on the part of the mainstream culture. Taking into account others' opinions and views on a subject manner can help people grow and learn more about the world around them. But when hipsters strive to maintain their pretentiousness and reject anything that the mainstream culture sees as true would be received very negatively on the part of the non-hipsters. To be at the cutting edge of things is important to hipsters, which includes styles of thinking. It is very much a thing of the past to be outwardly discriminatory towards other groups: hipsters realize that people come from different experiences and everyone is a human being. That is why hipsters are often for gay rights as well as gender and racial equality. But when it comes to thoughts on art, music, literature, fashion, and anything cultural, hipsters find themselves in an interesting position. They are well known and truly do believe in the kind of equality that has been mentioned before, but they somehow need to find a way to reconcile this with believing

that their culture and ways of doing things is the correct one. They adopt a relativistic view when dealing with others and pretend that they understand others' points of view and believe that it should be taken in to account. But, in actuality, their pretention regarding culture pervades their pseudo-relativist view and displays the multiplist view that they actually hold. Sometimes their pseudo-relativism comes off in an ironic tone, which will be discussed later. Their multiplist views in this postmodern society that they feign as relativist y causes a conflict with other cultures.

### **Hipsters as post-modernists.**

For hipsters, their thoughts, ways of expression, and ideas about life and the future are testament to the ways in which their minds operate, which fall in line with the tenants of postmodernism. This movement comes from a realization that hard and fast, capital-t Truths do not exist and that situations are relative. Le Corbusier in Gergen's book "The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life" speaks a quintessential postmodern quote when he says:

I like elements which are hybrid rather than pure, compromising rather than clean, distorted rather than straightforward, ambiguous rather than articulated...inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear" (Gergen, 2000)

This quote clearly speaks to the ambiguous and open nature of those that consider themselves subscribers to the postmodern world. The postmodern viewpoint accepts the realization of how different styles and ways of existence can affect one's worldview. A tenant of postmodernism is the **blending of styles**, old and new, to create an amalgam existence that reflects the diversity of the world. Hipsters certainly fit underneath this category. They take elements of different eras

and blend them with living in the present to create a hybrid of fashion as well as culture in general (including household items, music taste, and other things).

The use of kitsch among hipsters is incredibly common. Kitsch is defined by the article “Hip to be Square: The Failure of Pop Irony” as “imitations of high-end luxury products” (Thermider, 2002). These products can take on the form of nostalgic items, or items that have nothing to do with the time period in which the hipster lives. Because hipsters display contempt for anything that is considered popular, they take items from the past and use them to revolt against other cultures. The fact that the item itself is an imitation is a way that hipsters make fun of other cultures: it is not the real thing that they use- is fake and still functional. They blend old and new to create something wholly their own. The more distanced the item is from the rest of society, the more the hipster will appear to enjoy it.

According to the article, hipsters’ use of kitsch exists in three stages. The first stage employs the use of nostalgic kitsch (Thermider, 2002). They will own items from their childhood, using or wearing them in an ironic way to show rest of society they do not need to be subject to popular ideas of what is in style. The average “mainstreamer” may see the hipster using these items and find it strange and wonder why. This questioning would fall under the category of being “ambiguous rather than articulated” in the postmodern world (Gergen, 2000). Hipsters do not feel the need to explain themselves when they wear Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles t-shirts or play Atari: they do it to be ironic and show the rest of the world that they do not want what everyone else has.

The second stage involves enjoying kitsch from time periods which were never their own. The article used the example of the 1920s to 1970s. This is truly bringing in items far removed

from themselves and establishing them as essential to their identity in their modern lives (Thermider, 2002). This will probably cause others to perceive them as strange, using items from the distant past, but it adds to the element of variability that hipsters possess. They do not feel the need to be straightforward in their presentation of their lifestyle. This is testament to the fact that postmodernist thought greatly affects hipsters. Ambiguity is a tenant of postmodern thought, which stems from the realization that things can move and shift with different settings. Ambiguity is a huge part of the hipster lifestyle. Any image search of hipsters will reveal that it is difficult sometimes to distinguish males and females. Fashion and hairstyles make people second-guess themselves about others' gender identity.

The third stage in using kitsch is the consumption and subsequent usage of current items (Thermider, 2002). This must be done in an ironic manner. The article points out that not all hipsters reach this phase because it is difficult to achieve. If someone is wearing current fashions or listening to modern music seriously, hipsters would reject it. It is very tricky to actually reach this stage and it goes to show how deeply immersed hipsters are in postmodern thought. Be purposefully being hard to define and changing rapidly in thought and style, this counterculture can avoid being concretely defined. Hipsters feel no need to have a label on them; in fact, they shun being labeled, which is a very postmodern thought. They realize that nothing is real, so there is no point in having loyalties and being serious about things, so they employ irony to show that they do not have allegiance to anything, and the fact that other cultures do hold an allegiance is ridiculous, which will be explained in detail later.

**Self-reflection** is crucial in the understanding of postmodernism (Gergen, 2000). Exposure to make others aware of the reality of things is important. Movies are now being made with little or no attempt to cover up the camera or television shows that invite audiences when

they know that the audience can clearly see the set and production that goes in to making a show. “The Saturated Self” (Gergen, 2000) notes that there is some irony implicit in self-reflection, which is something that hipsters can connect with. Blogging is a way that hipsters employ this idea of self-reflection. By using the Internet as a free space to project their views to anyone with access, they show others how they want to be viewed. By being able to see their words written down and knowing that others are seeing them is a form of self-reflection. Hipsters do not take much seriously in terms of how they present themselves, so their self-reflection would be latent with irony. The contempt they show towards the other cultures comes through as sarcasm and apathy in their blogs and newspaper articles. In “Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization,” Douglass Haddow (2008) makes a relevant connection between the hipsters’ attitude and self-reflection when he speaks about their nonchalant attitude and how they see every situation as a photo-op. Their casual indifference towards society gets presented in photos they take and choose to upload to blogs or social networking sites. They make themselves look apathetic in poses and wearing clothes from the past as a way to assert their existence as a counterculture.

Rationality barely exists when it comes to postmodernism. **Traditional concepts of time as something linear do not exist** in the same way to the postmodern individual (Gergen, 2000). Music videos exemplify how reality is taken down, broken up, rearranged, and represented to an audience. Hipsters understand and embrace this concept. In defining what is popular for hipsters, what is cool or popular changes quickly. Popular for hipsters can vary from progressive, underground things, to kitsch that was popular in the 1920s. The fact that popularity of items do not move in a linear motion, but rather almost spiral or go back and jet forward give testament to the fact that this facet of postmodernism is present in hipsters’ lives. People do things that do not

make sense all the time, but to purposefully move back and forth in fashion, style, thought, and attitude just goes to show how invested hipsters are to the postmodern movement.

### **Hipsters and the “New Youth”**

Hipsters’ postmodernist thoughts affect their developments as part of what Keniston describes as “the new youth.” Post-modernity has had its effect on how hipsters are perceived by others as well as how hipsters perceive themselves. For this thesis, I gathered information from blogs and newspaper articles regarding hipster culture in general as well as perceptions about this counterculture. Andrea Bartz, coauthor of the book and Tumblr blog “Stuff Hipsters Hates,” offered a lot of insights regarding hipsters, which connect very aptly with Keniston’s article on the youth. She notes:

Hipsterdom is sort of a state of extended adolescence -- instead of settling down with a steady job, a 401K and a four-poster bed from Sleepy's, you continue living life like a freewheeling teenager, picking up cash on odd jobs, refusing to conform to societal standards of success and still sleeping on an air mattress in an unadorned loft room  
(Personal communication, 2010)

This idea fits into Keniston’s youth theory. This extended adolescence that Keniston purports throughout his article can also be interpreted as an unwillingness to enter into adulthood, which, as previously mentioned, is something that hipsters do not want. While they retain a lifestyle similar to that of a “freewheeling teenager,” they are very different from those who are actually teenagers. They have more education and experience the world in a different way than those in high school or who are just starting college. They are hesitant about doing anything that would tie them down or start making them live the life of an adult. By not holding a steady job or

having a 401K, they are ensuring that they are not creating ties with anything and are continuing to live their lives freely. This is exactly what Keniston was discussing when he talked about the reluctance the youth felt to growing up and becoming adults.

An unsolved part of the hipster phenomenon that may not connect so well with Keniston's theory on the youth is the idea of the future. His article states that the youth comprehend that that someday, they will no longer be in this youth phase and their identities may one again change (Keniston, 1970). Because the hipster phenomenon is still relatively new, it is uncertain as to whether or not hipsters truly recognize or understand that it is possible that someday they will no longer consider themselves part of this counterculture. Their strong alliance to this counterculture would lead one to believe that it will be difficult for them to outgrow it, difficult to the point that they would not want to do it. Hipsters feel a deep connection to other hipsters, which is something that Keniston talked about, but it is uncertain as to whether or not hipsters recognize their youth identity as something transitional. Daniel Roginski, Union College class of 2012 and self-proclaimed expert on hipster culture says that the movement is "stagnant." He believes this counterculture has been around for a while, and that from the 1980s version of the hipster to today's idea, not much has changed (Personal communication, 2010). These people are choosing to be and stay at the margins of culture in society. Although this does not answer the question of if these hipsters from the 1980s are still considering themselves hipsters today, the idea of stagnancy has some relevance. It would lead one to believe that hipsters are choosing to remain in this youth stage even though they are growing older.

The section on Keniston's "New Youth" (1970) addressed 5 specific points that were definitive of this stage. Below are how they specifically apply to the hipster phenomenon:

### **Tension between self and society**

Hipsters feel tension within society, especially if society is dominated by mainstream culture. They know themselves to be more individualistic than the masses that follow whatever the media tells them. This tension manifests itself in both hipsters and mainstream cultures attitudes towards the other. The negative labels that mainstream society places on hipsters only demonstrates that they do not think hipsters are part of their movement, and putting these stereotypes on them is a warning to others who try to step out of what is “normal.” Hipsters, in their apathetic way, are rejecting the labels that other have placed on them because ultimately, the only people who know hipsters best are other hipsters.

### **Pervasive ambivalence**

It is unclear as to whether or not hipsters feel this pervasive ambivalence. It has been established that hipsters hold individualism as something incredibly important to their existence. While they hold no desire to belong to the mainstream culture, they certainly come across as a very social group, so it could be concluded that they feel it important to be part of some kind of group, if not only to advance their social agendas.

### **Wary probe**

This aspect of youth can be seen within hipsters. In their rapidly changing world, hipsters test new fashions and music and are quick to drop them as soon as they are considered popular. They test their identities by changing styles and attitudes quickly. In Elise Thompson’s article “Why Does Everyone Hate Hipster Assholes,” she explains that although other people like the same things that hipsters do, hipsters make liking these things, and thus the actual things, “generic and meaningless” (Thompson, 2008). By doing so, hipster test the “coolness” and

legitimacy of certain fashions, music, literature, and other trends but are quickly willing to drop it and say that a certain record or genre has no merit within the world of hipsters. By doing so, they are also playing with their identity. From the outside, it would seem that because hipsters are so quickly changing tastes and trying to find something that is cool to them and no one else, that they have no identity and are thus a meaningless group. Yet hipsters are willing to take this risk because they do not care what others think and are doing things for themselves and testing the world in their own ways.

### **Alternating estrangement and omnipotentiality**

Hipsters are not immune from feeling this tension. They feel that society does not know anything and thus it is on them to be the impetus of change, to be the pioneers of what is cool. Their lack of caring towards others' causes only makes themselves invest more in their own and what they feel is important. Yet, a common complaint of hipsters is that no one understands them and they are alone in their fight against the world. While this may seem contradictory, it is simply a result of being in the youth stage. The stage is one of transition, where these people are coming out of the shell of their education but detest the lives that adults lead, so they are working through this and alternating feelings of compete and total agency yet isolation.

### **Refusal of socialization**

It has been discussed multiple times throughout this paper how hipsters are not fans of falling in to expected roles placed on them by others. They realize that the included group wrote history: those with the power, those who won wars and defeated whole groups of people. Hipsters realize that history is a holistic story: that to truly understand it, all sides of the issue must be presented. This counterculture, according to Roginski, has a strange obsession with

Native Americans (Personal communication, 2010). This is due to the fact that the Native American perspective is very absent from historical textbooks, although they were an important group of people during the story of the founding of America, as well as they continue to make significant contributions to society today. It would seem plausible that hipsters' fascination with Native Americans derives from the fact that they were not taught about them during school. This is their way of giving a voice and educating the rest of society about this underrepresented group of people. This is another way that hipsters are challenging their mainstream counterparts and telling them that they are in the wrong for all the years of oppression that society has inflicted on not only Native Americans, but other oppressed groups such as racial minorities and homosexuals. Hipsters are challenging history by speaking up for causes that those in the excluded group are trying to fight.

In Christian Lorentzen's *Time Out New York* article entitled "Why the Hipster Must Die," (2007) as well as Douglas Haddow's *Adbuster* article "Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization," (2008), they point out some reasons and ruminations as to why this group could be considered stagnant. Due to their incredible consumption of the latest "cool" items in an attempt to beat the mainstream in the most modern trends, they are killing any chance for progress to be made in consumption culture. They are not making anything that is cool; they are just consuming it. Nothing new is coming from this countercultural movement. In trying to stay on top of everything cool, they are making things old. If hipsters are not making anything new themselves, then the culture will stay as it always is. If people are so married to it, then they will remain in this phrase for a longer time than what Keniston described as the phase of being a 20-something youth.

Ironically enough, another identity that Keniston's youth seem to claim is a desire for change and a distaste for things that stay the same (Keniston, 1970). While outsiders see the hipster movement as not progressing or creating anything new, hipsters within the movement would argue the opposite. By constantly consuming and changing their tastes and styles, hipsters are not staying the same and always changing things up. The fear of not moving or going anywhere is real for youths in general, but specifically so for hipsters. To stay the same and settle down means to start entering the life of an adult. They feel that this would voluntarily put themselves in a jail cell; locked in a world of full time employment and having to provide and take care of a family. Having to settle down would be the worst possibility for people fresh out of college who feel that they have the world at their fingertips. They have the freedom to go anywhere and do anything they want: why would they settle down to a life of serving their jobs and families? They detest those that have sold out to mainstream society because they see them as all the same and not making any progress, just as those on the outside see hipsters.

Hipsters employ a kind of skepticism when it comes to thinking about the future. Skepticism is a main tenant of post-modernism. Those who subscribe to post-modernist ideals understand that the world is not "simply mirrored in the human understanding of it," (Gergen, 2000) that statements and ideas cannot generalize across cultures or races, but places more of an emphasis on what exists and what is real to each specific group. How one interprets his/her given situation is the most important thing; and in this manner, hipsters can really tout their understanding of the world around them, which they make contradictory to the mainstream culture. Their interpretations reflect that they do not think anything is true and they know that their thoughts do not generalize towards the mainstream culture, so they act on that and make sure that those in the mainstream culture understand their interpretation. They claim they are

open to differing opinions (true to their multiplist/ pseudo-relativist existence), yet they know that the mainstream opinion does not generalize to them, as per the post-modernist way.

Another point that Ms. Bartz brought up regarding hipsters was the difficulty in defining exactly what a hipster is. She notes that there are many different definitions and it is hard to come to a consensus, especially when everything has been made confusing and particularly negative by the media, so when asked to describe hipsters in 5 sentences or less, she replied:

In general, it's a creative, urban 20- or 30-something who appears to hate everything except pain and art. Hipsterdom is a continuum, really. You can look at a resident of Williamsburg and say, 'Well, he's wearing plaid and he really digs cocaine, he must be a hipster,' but once you get to know anyone they tend to stray away from rigidly defined labels (Personal communication 2010).

Especially with the negative labels given to hipsters, it would make sense that they tend to stay away from labels, even when asked by people with the most innocent of intentions. Daniel Roginski offered that irony is one of the most important aspects when trying to decipher if someone is a hipster. If someone has the look and taste of a hipster, but does not have the air of irony surrounding their fashion or music interests, then they are not hipster (Personal communication, 2010). This goes along with Keniston's argument that the youth do not want to fall in to the prescribed roles placed on them by the rest of society. Especially when the roles come from a group of people with presumably more power than them, countercultures definitely do not want to listen to what they have to say to them. The term "rigid" used by Bartz is also something to call in to question, as people tend to want to stick labels on people and keep to them so that they learn how to interact with them. It is easier for people to place a label and stick

with it, which is why people are so apt to be so negative to those who are labeled hipster. As Bartz stated, people judge them based on superficial labels but when they take the time to get to know hipsters, they realize that their counterculture is based on way more than what is on the surface (Personal communication).

Bartz makes an interesting point when she says that she does not “think hipsters are defined by what they like; they’re defined by what they hate. That’s what makes them fascinating to people – it’s hard to pin someone down by an *absence*, by a dislike.” This only goes to add what people had been discovering before regarding hipster apathy or apparent dislike towards not only the mainstream, but also other countercultures, including previous generations of hip. People really base how they navigate the world on what they understand about things. Other cultures see how hipsters are apathetic or have hatred towards them and they base their attitudes on hipsters’ hatred or dislike of all things not hipster. All they know is their own culture, so they see hipsters based on their absence of liking things that do not fit in with their counterculture. It makes hipsters all the more interesting to people because it is a culture completely unlike their own.

Youths go through many different kinds of developments, in terms of their relationships with themselves, with their parents, and with the elderly, but an important developmental change that the youth go through that is worth noting is a kind of moral development. According to Keniston, among the three stages of development (which he defined as pre-moral, conventional, and post-conventional), youths tend to be in the post-conventional stage (Keniston, 1970). This means that they are very passionate about their personal goals and pursuits, which will often be placed in front of what modern culture dictates as a worthy cause. Because modern culture happens to be mainstream culture, hipsters will definitely put their own values above that of the

mainstream culture. Their countercultural views may be seen as controversial and offensive to those in the mainstream culture, it is seen from those within the culture that they are just following what they believe to be true. This is very difficult to connect. Hipsters are post-conventional in the sense that they put their desires and preferences above everyone else, but in terms of morality, hipsters do not engage in issues of morality, so it is difficult to judge. But in general, the way hipsters act fits in perfectly with what Keniston describes as the youth. In the article "Hip to be Square: The Failure of Pop Irony," hipsters are described as people who are "independent," "intellectual," and "cynical and mocking of pop culture" (Thermider, 2002). Their cynicism and mockery only comes across that way to the mainstream culture because hipsters do not hide how much they do not care or do not want to be with mainstream culture.

Keniston also points out some characteristics that youths are not. Keniston is adamant is stating that youth is not the end of any kind of development; that is more of a transformational stage (Keniston, 1970). As has been previously stated, it is really up to debate whether or not hipsters will fully grow out of this phase or remain hipsters forever. Bartz had something to note about this point when she states: "while the description [of hipsters] applies to 24-year-old men and women in about equal ratios, when you look at 36-year-old hipsters, the men far outnumber the women." While gender dynamics will not be explored much throughout this paper, no has it been researched much in general, it is notable to explore with this is so. Bartz goes on to explain:

Tickling biological clocks must have something to do with it -- women at some point feel compelled to get their shit together, give up their dreams of becoming installation artists (or at least stick their noses to the grindstone in terms of making it happen), and "grow up." Men, who don't have ovaries, feel no particular compulsion to start behaving like adults until much later. Hey, if the tragic starving artist act is still getting them laid, why

move to Park Slope for a premature living death rife with strollers and burping blankets?  
(Personal communication, 2010).

This statement has a lot of implications. It is saying that hipsters do not have a plan for their futures, which would make sense considering Keniston's statements about the youth feeling free and untied to the world. The women are more willing to settle down and start their careers and families because, above all their countercultural views and lifestyle, they ultimately want a family to raise and a stable job to provide for said family based on their biological needs (i.e., the window in which they can have children) more than anything else. Keniston did note that the youth stage was a transitional one, so at some point it may make sense that they start to move in to the adult phase. Maybe men just take a longer time to reach this stage, or maybe they never reach it at all. Like Bartz pointed out, if they can still have their carnal desires fulfilled, they may not feel the same need to settle down and try to start a family. But it all comes down to time and what the future has in store for this wave of counterculture individuals.

Hipsters are simply at a different stage of life that did not even exist for their parents and grandparents. This is something that frightens the older generations. Fear of the unknown is something very common; change can be a terrifying thing, and it is not uncommon for people to react negatively. Hipsters are very much so in this stage, and the perception that this group is lazy and unwilling to do anything productive just adds another layer of hatred about this group. Coupled with all the other reasons that hipsters are hated (their pretentiousness, fashion, ideals, and, as will be explored later, use of irony), this group has set themselves up for a hated existence.

As can be seen in this chapter, hipsters are dynamic individuals that are subject to a lot of criticism from those outside their world. This makes sense as they are considered (by both the outside and themselves) counterculture, so they are obviously met with some contention by those who are part of mainstream or popular culture. Psychology can explain a lot of the behaviors of hipsters, and some modern articles have attempted to explain why they have gotten such a negative vibe. Everything from their consumption practices to fundamental beliefs have been challenged, to which they often respond with apathy. The relationship between the mainstream culture and hipsters is one worthy of exploring, and as previously mentioned, psychology is very helpful in explaining what is occurring.

## IRONY AND THE MODERN HIPSTER

Hipsters assert their legitimacy as a counterculture against all other cultures through irony. Irony was made popular as a result of postmodern society. Darragh McManus, a writer for *The Guardian* newspaper says, “because of an ever-more self-reflexive culture and generational mores, we see everything through the prism of postmodernism...irony has been sweeping through the culture...to the extent that, by now, we’re never entirely sure we mean something or not.” (McManus, 2010). Those in the postmodern world appreciate the blending of the world around them, which includes attitudes regarding sincerity and irony. Hipsters take this to a degree where they make everything around them appear ironic. They make “everything [they] say and do...lacquered with the bitter patina of sarcasm. [They’re] ironic and infantile and don’t take anything seriously, yet...take everything seriously” (McManus, 2010). Because postmodernism is influenced by epistemological development, having a multiplist or relativist style of thinking will influence the way that irony is delivered. This is paramount among hipsters: they employ irony by taking seriously that which does not need to be taken seriously. It is done to show that the mainstream culture takes other things seriously that hipsters do not think needs to be. It is a circular motion, one that is aware of different styles of thought, but shows this in an ironic and sarcastic manner. McManus (2010) sums it up with the following example:

I'll enjoy Steven Seagal's Kill Fist of Death Punch IV as part of some knowing, ironic joke to myself – I realise it's rubbish, and that's the point – but at the same time part of me will genuinely enjoy it. We'll mock someone for trying to save the world but we truly want them to save the world.

Part of this hatred can be explained by saying that it is a case of generational misunderstanding: but if that were purely the case, then hipsters would not be considered as different from other countercultures as they actually are. Hipsters' use of irony is the other part needed to explain hipster hatred. It is a more sarcastic way of realizing that nothing is real and offers a way of dealing with that. Hipsters employ irony in their interaction with the world, and the following chapter will explain specifically why this group uses irony and why it elicits such a negative response from everyone else.

Irony is an intricate and hard to detect literary device. It was once said that "the ability to recognize irony is one of the surest tests of intelligence and sophistication" (Tanaka, 1973). Indeed this is true as the definition of irony itself can vary. For example, Jim Macaroni's article states irony as "incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected results" (Macaroni, 2006), but in "The Ironies of Students' Recognition of Irony" by Joseph Milner, Elisabeth Lynch, Frederick Carter, Judy Coggins, Karen Cole, Elise Hodson, and Lucy Milner, the authors choose to employ Holman's definition, which states "a figure of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning" (Milner et al, 1999). These two definitions do not necessarily contradict each other, but they do not mean the same thing upon first glance, and thus would take some degree of intelligence and knowledge of how language functions in order to realize this. This is especially so with verbal irony and the ability to recognize that someone means the exact opposite of the actual words he or she is saying. While there exists a cornucopia of theories regarding irony and its multitude of forms, this chapter will focus in on irony in conversation as well as appearance, as that is how hipsters employ this social tactic in their interactions with not only other hipsters, but also people within other cultures.

The way things are presented and interpreted and the many audiences that can receive the message blurs emotions and creates confusion for any party involved in conversation. This is a symptom of a larger issue that exists as the world shifts into postmodernism. Anata Giri (1993) in her article “Psychology and the Challenge of the Postmodern Condition” argues that this creates instability and a world where everything is constructed, as laid out in her article. She argues that lines everywhere are blurring and that this transformation is moving quickly. She states how people are starting to express their individuality through changes in their surroundings (Giri, 1993). This in and of itself would seem contradictory, but in the hipster movement, it is another way that this groups is completely immersed in the postmodern world and how they use irony to display this. Their community values the importance of individualism and does things to keep them insulated and their culture distinctly unique from the rest of mainstream society. The bands they hold so dear, the filmmakers and culture that they have built for themselves also serve as a wall for keeping others out. By treasuring kitsch from the past, these individuals are blocking out anything that mainstreamers would like to see, do, read, hear, or own. Once something gets popular and starts moving towards a popular existence, it is thrown over that protective wall. Hipsters stress individuality and the importance of not following everyone else, so by rejecting things that are popular, they are in fact fostering this individuality within their community. It is a new take on thinking about their lifestyle, especially in the postmodern world in which they exist. They do so to show that they have an alliance to things that people no longer have alliance to, which is a shot at other people who hold certain things so important. Hipsters take seemingly meaningless things very seriously, demonstrating the ridiculousness of the mainstream culture deeming something important and then taking that something seriously.

Giri (1993) discusses further “the challenge of the postmodern condition.” She describes this as “the crisis of representation and the crisis of social organization it entails.” The author is talking about self-representation and how the way one projects him or herself on to society dictates how social structure works. This affects how anyone tries to code the world around them. As demarcations become less distinct, it makes it difficult for people to try to categorize things and thus a reorganization of the social world occurs. For hipsters, it creates an interesting conflict. While people are actively working to deconstruct everything that they thought was real and rigid before in society, hipsters maintain that it is important to retain their individuality and work to keep as separate as they can from anything mainstream. Yet at the same time within the culture, hipsters blend the lines of many aspects about themselves. Walton (2009) discusses gender fluidity as a key marker of style within the hipster counterculture. Indeed, androgynous fashion seems to be important to this particular group of people. Men buy women’s skinny jeans, women wear vintage, “grandfather” style cardigan sweaters, and hair for all people involve a short-ish, shaggy style. This statement makes the mainstream culture, who has subscribed to the idea that gender exists and that men and women should follow strict, pre-prescribed roles, uncomfortable, which is something that the hipsters would be proud of.

Hipsters perceive those outside their culture to be uptight, capitalists who are concerned with their income and how they can make the most money. Insofar as this is true, that would put those in the mainstream in a higher socioeconomic class than hipsters, whose jobs are seen as lower status (Grief, 2010). Thus, any statement that hipsters make to the mainstream culture that could be construed as negative or sarcastic will be amplified. Katz et al (2004) also found that people are especially prone to reading into a statement as being ironic when the person listening to the statement believes that the person making the statement is making an incongruent one, and

also the person listening to the statement acknowledges that there is some outside, third party of people (not related at all to the speaker or those listening), is not under the impression that the person making the statement is being ironic. It traces back to the idea of audience and the privilege they receive as being able to recognize an ironic statement. There may be some people who do not understand why hipsters employ certain fashions or adopt particular ideologies, but to those that recognize and understand the irony, they see that hipsters are trying to make a statement to those outside their culture. They are reappropriating fashions of those not in the mainstream, also known as those without as much status, and making it their own.

While hipsters are functioning members of the modern world, other cultures argue that they are not productive members of society. According to Robin Marantz Henig in her New York Times article “What Is It About 20 Somethings,” individuals are taking much longer than was considered normal to start their adult lives. This idea ties in with what Keniston had to say about the youth as a transitory stage. Henig states:

The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life (Henig, 2010).

The article points to “cultural changes” in modern American society that cause people in this age bracket to delay becoming actual adults: issues such as a failing economy, less entry-level jobs than in the 1970s, technology that allows for pregnancy to happen even after peak fertility years, and more helps to create this new stage in which hipsters take part. Being aware of this, hipsters

choose to take the route of irony and show that they are not going to take anything seriously when their peers are making a fruitless attempt out trying to survive in the real world. One criticism of hipsters is that they do not get “real” jobs that would make them productive members of their communities. They end up working at record shops or hipster clothing stores such as American Apparel and Urban Outfitters, so say their mainstream counterparts. According to Katz et al (2004), occupation has a large role in determining whether or not people perceive others as ironic. They categorized a few occupations as being in either high or low irony classifications. Those in the low irony category included: teachers and clergy members, and among the high irony group, factory workers and comedians (Katz et al, 2004). Following this logic, those with higher skilled jobs (or rather, jobs that required some advanced schooling) would be categorized as low irony, with the opposite being true for jobs that required less education. If it is true that hipsters never take on productive jobs but continue to settle for almost minimum wage employment (even if they are happier doing so), then it would follow that jobs hipsters have would fall under the high irony category. Thus they are perceived to be more ironic than others. Insofar as irony is considered negative and insulting to the recipient of an ironic comment, this would make people outside of the hipster culture react negatively to this group. According to Katz et al (2004), the occupation of the person amplifies the perception of irony in statements being made. So even though hipsters employ irony as their source of showing superiority and trying to undermine the ways of other cultures, the extent of their irony can be misinterpreted and amplified by the others based on social cues such as their occupation and status (Katz et al, 2004).

Ambivalence and uncertainty are present in the minds of hipsters as they navigate the world. Recent neurological studies have shown that the brain keeps maturing well in to the 20s. According to Henig's article,

Some scientists would argue that this ambivalence reflects what is going on in the brain, which is also both grown-up and not-quite-grown-up. Neuroscientists once thought the brain stops growing shortly after puberty, but now they know it keeps maturing well into the 20s. This new understanding comes largely from a longitudinal study of brain development sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, which started following nearly 5,000 children at ages 3 to 16 (the average age at enrollment was about 10). The scientists found the children's brains were not fully mature until at least 25 (Henig 2010).

So, it may not be the complete fault of the hipsters that they delay adulthood or act in a way that benefits only themselves: their brains have not matured yet. This group is countercultural, yet still feel the pressures from popular culture to conform. The fact that their brains have not fully matured, in conjunction with the aforementioned combinations of developmental stages and their use of irony creates the unique situation that is the hipster lifestyle. Their inner conflict manifests itself in irony towards all other groups. Inner conflict is difficult to deal with, especially when it makes sense that, as one gets older, they need to be able to support themselves-and possibly a family- financially and be able to live independently from their families. Yet there are other principles that guide hipsters; principles that include doing what they want to do and not caring what others think of it. When one has a strong conviction towards what they believe in, even if they receive pressure on the outside, they will listen to what they want to do, especially in an age where they are still maturing. They stick with their group and adopt an ironic lifestyle to show

that they do not care. They prefer having an elitist attitude towards a group that dominates everything around them so they can show power. Feeling opposition, even if it creates conflict within, strengthens one's resolve to be different. The cognitive dissonance theory would say that because hipsters are doing something that goes against the will of others, they justify their doing so by saying what they are doing is important. This only makes the hipster movement grow more elitist and willing to employ any means necessary to keep their pretention and legitimacy. Their irony shows that they are against those who do not employ the same ideologies as they do, as well as how ridiculous everyone looks trying to be serious all the time.

Henig (2010) also pointed out parallels between this life stage in general and what the hipsters are experiencing. She discusses how many cultural influences and postmodern thought patterns have played a part in the development of this new life stage. This makes it difficult for older generations to understand the behaviors of these twenty year olds: life was different back when they were in their twenties, so it would follow that older generations would expect the younger ones to act the same way, but the world is changing and the younger ones are not exhibiting the same actions and attitudes. This puts a strain on both the relationship between the older and younger generations as well as the stability that older generations have planned for. According to the article, parents of children moving back home after their college and post-graduate years can be expected to give roughly 10% of their income towards that individual (Henig, 2010). This ruins plans that parents had carefully laid out, hoping that their children will have jobs after they graduate just like they did when they were recent college graduates. But economic and cultural times have shifted mentality so that new graduates are having a harder time trying to find employment. This, combined with the appeal of traveling and taking time for self-discovery, creates a strain on the parents and makes them think that their children are not

going to be productive. This strain is indicative of where hipsters are in life. Hipsters do not like to find meaningful employment and are content living off their parents' salaries even though they are old enough to start making their own salaries. They do not want to take part in the capitalistic society because capitalism equates to mainstream. They keep up on trends that are contrary to what is popular, thus making their look unsuitable for the professional world. They generally seem unmotivated to want to participate in any aspect of life that one would consider normal.

Hipsters are a phenomenon that are popping up in the more developed, industrialized parts of the world, such as the United States. Henig argues that that in developing nations, children have to learn to grow up quickly so they can help to provide for their families the basic survival necessities (Henig, 2010). Yet in America, where the culture moves very rapidly and everyone wants everything right in an instant, there seems to be no rush on those in their twenties to start forming an adult life. Their development is a completely different one. Henig's article also discusses skills that people learn at certain ages that help them progress throughout their lives. According to Henig, "If you don't develop a skill at the right stage, you'll be working the rest of your life to develop it when you should be moving on" (Henig, 2010). Hipsters and their countercultural ways are holding them back from ever maturing in to proper adults. Their apathy towards doing things that traditional adults have done at the time they were the hipsters' age comes across as a slower development than the current adults went through, and then the adults start to worry that this group of individuals will spend forever trying to catch up on the skills they need to be productive. The irony that hipsters display comes off as immaturity to those not privy to information about hipsters. This immaturity will cause hipsters to give off the perception that they will never progress beyond the stage they are in now.

Irony is a form of humor, especially when people use irony for comedic effect to make people think. Literature exists on humor as a psychological phenomenon, and much applies to hipster behavior. According to L.W. Kline in “The Psychology of Humor” (1907), there are multitudes of feelings that explain why humor exists. The first idea is the feeling of superiority and how that explains why people find objects, situations, or other people humorous. The main reason, according to Kline (1907), that the feeling of superiority exists is that it creates an unequal relationship between the different parties. This happens between those that understand a joke or recognize that their situation is humorous and those that do not; or between those that can laugh at a situation and those that are targets or “butts” of jokes. Either way, the feeling of superiority is oftentimes pleasurable, and this is why humor continues to exist. People feel good because they feel they are better than others.

This is true when considering the hipster. As had been discussed in chapter 1, hipsters are characterized by an incredible pretentiousness when dealing with those outside of their counterculture. This idea fits into Kline’s idea of superiority as motivation for humor with hipsters. Their form of irony is used humorously to show that their taste in things such as music, literature, and art are superior to those of the common culture, but that they engage themselves in non-hipster cultural practices (especially ones from the past) in an ironic way to show how ridiculous it is, which in turn shows the mainstream culture that they are being ridiculous in subscribing to fads that will not last. From an outsider’s perspective, it is strange that a group of people would be walking around in polyester tracksuits with a desire for kitsch and listening to bands that they will soon reject as soon as said band become popular. It is some kind of joke, and those that participate in the counterculture are those in the know, that are away of the irony of it all, and thus find it funny, and those that do not participate in the culture in the vulnerable

position. The description at the beginning of this paragraph alluded to two ideas of superiority: superiority over those who do not understand the joke as well as superiority over those who are the targets of the joke. In the case of hipsters and other cultures, the latter can be either the people who do not understand the humor or those who are targets of the jokes. Hipsters employ their ways to show that they are an inclusive group of individuals who use irony in their mannerisms to keep other people outside of their group. Also, as a way to be superior to the mainstream culture, a culture that can be very dominating, hipsters are ironic in their ways to poke fun at how normal the mainstream culture is. They see that group as those that follow the rules to the letter and are only doing things to “be normal.” Hipsters, in their ironic ways, dress strangely to show the mainstream how mindless they are. They assert their superiority by being ironic in their existence because they know something that others do not realize: it is futile to hold allegiance to anything.

Kline’s article (1907) also discusses feelings of contradiction in humor. In the article, Kline (1907) discusses how humans compare what they think is normal or accepted to things that happen outside of the norm. This statement in and of itself already displays the parallels with the definition of irony. When something does not go the way it is supposed to, this can often be very humorous. Especially social situations, where there are often unwritten scripts for how one is supposed to act, a faux pas often elicits laughter from those around. Kline (1907) says that individuals’ “conception and everything different from it” is what makes the situation humorous. One can easily see where irony, in all its forms, has its place within this conception of humor. When something happens different from what is expected, that can be humorous as well as ironic. Hipsters are aware of the contradiction they make when they display irony, but normally people that act contradictory are aware of their faux pas and thus show embarrassment to atone

for their transgressions. Hipsters do not; they proudly show that they are going against everyone else and doing so in an ironic way, playing off the contradictions between what is cool as deemed by mainstream society and what they appropriate as cool.

This also depends on the person observing the situation. Research on irony has been done in regards to the audience that receives the irony as well those who it. This would make sense, as irony would not exist without people to recognize it. Whether individuals intend irony or not in writing or speech, if it is interpreted the opposite way then that emotion is also added into the reader's (or listener's) perception of what was written or said. According to "The Ubiquity of Moods" by Matthew Broome and Havi Carel (2009), personalities and moods are a reflection of people trying to understand themselves. This desire, according to Broome and Carel (2009), dictates actions. Hipsters play off their transitory state by reflecting an unpredictable and contemptuous mood and style on the rest of the world. They see the irony in the world as they figure out their place in society. They are no longer children, yet they are not ready to face the world as adults yet. Their allegiance to nothing popular and desire to engage in consumption practices to appear cool reflect their inner transitory state and understanding that nothing lasts forever. They recognize that the norm will not be that way forever and they actively participate in projecting themselves as being different from what is considered normal. This contradiction between the norm of society and seeing someone such as a hipster living in the same world can often create a humorous effect.

Another effect that Kline (1907) noted is self-reflection when observing human qualities in non-human beings; i.e., animals. Kline (1907) categorized that smaller animals are more humorous than larger ones, and this effect is amplified when these animals are engaging in acts typical of human beings. When humans trace these acts and realize that they are watching

themselves engage in their normal behaviors animals, it can seem humorous. It is well known that hipsters have a fascination with cats. A simple search on any Internet search engine on the subject will produce millions of results, including the popular website [www.hipsterkitty.com](http://www.hipsterkitty.com). This website features pictures of cats dressed up like hipsters in counterculture fashion, or posing in contemplative ways that make them look like humans. The site also has captions under each photo explaining something relating to the hipster lifestyle. For example, one caption reads: Penny thought Yeasayer's live show was an "iTunes ripoff" and is "totally over electro" (N, 2010). It is easy where the abundant hipster references are in that statement, but the important aspect to note is the idea that the cat itself can even conceive these thoughts. The thought of these cats with human fashion, thoughts, and emotions makes hipsters laugh. This ties in to the idea of irony. Hipsters are making fun of themselves by making the cats dress up and act in ways that are stereotypically hipster. Making fun of themselves and pretending to see what those in other cultures make fun of in hipsters and then portraying that on something completely random, such as a cat, is a dose of irony on everyone else. Individuals' responses to irony vary depending on the circumstances where the irony presents itself. Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) have found that if the irony is warranted (i.e., if someone does something and the other person responds to them in an ironic way), the recipient of the irony is more understanding than if the other individual is being ironic for no reason. This is why other cultures react negatively to the irony portrayed by hipsters. It seems unwarranted to everyone else: hipsters are displaying pretention and outwardly making fun of what is important to other cultures for no other reason than to simply stand out, which elicits negative response from everyone else. They do it to show that they are above other cultures that are bringing them down. Hipsters are the creators of this kind of irony and thus fulfill the superiority aspect that comes with humor.

Using irony for dramatic effect to poke fun at the world seems to be a motive of hipsters. This counterculture takes a negative view on the world and often points to its many problems as created by uptight mainstreamers, yet at the same time do not offer a solution for these problems. Clothing and music is the medium by which hipsters get their message of ironic apathy towards the world's ailments. The hipster band Vampire Weekend in their song "The Kids Don't Stand a Chance" sing: The pin-striped men of morning/The partners in the dance/The paper's shot to pieces/The kids don't stand a chance ("Vampire weekend," 2011). These lyrics make a potent statement to society regarding what this counterculture thinks. The pin-striped men of the morning represents the suits that run the corporate world, partnering in their dance of power over the economy and government. The paper is a symbol of all the work that those of the mainstream culture slave away at; jobs that hipsters call meaningless, jobs that do not have passion, jobs that are only done for the money, jobs that create rigid lives. The kids are symbolic of the new generation; those that understand new ways of doing things; presumably the hipsters. This band is saying that due to the issues that the mainstream culture have brought upon the world, the new generation has no choice but to inherit these problems, and this inheritance would prevent them from living the lives that they want to live. By using dramatic metaphors such as dance and being shot to pieces, the band lays out dramatic irony. When one hears the word kids, he/she thinks of carefree individuals who do not have the pressures of modern society weighing them down. But contrasting that with the pin-striped men shows how their lives are anything but carefree, so these lyricists have employed irony to get their message across. This irony is apparent to those not only inside the counterculture, but also outside as mainstream individuals listening to hipster bands. Thus the irony works twice as well: the hipsters are upfront in their statement of how popularity and single-mindedness is ruining the world, yet they use

words such as dancing and present images of children to make a jab at those that do not subscribe to their culture. The exaggeration is key as well in getting the hipster agenda across: music reaches a larger audience in general, and that, coupled with the image of violence contrasted with the image of children, is shocking to those that do not understand why this group would portray things in such a way. The mainstream hears this and do not feel positive towards how they are perceived by others, and thus the irony works in a potent manner because both the speakers of the irony and the audience perceiving it are understanding and interpreting the message in the same way.

Through their fashion or other visual cues, hipsters also portray their message of irony. Kate Walton in her article “I Like Your Old Stuff Better Than Your New Stuff: Neo-Bohemians, Hipsters, and the Issue of Authenticity in Subcultural Identity” (2009) discusses how hipster re-appropriated fashions that were no longer considered to be in style and made them their own. By doing this, in conjunction with an equal obsession to be on top of the latest fashion and to consume everything considered hip as well as to drop an interest in it as soon as it becomes popular, hipsters make a dramatic statement to the rest of society. Hipsters care about appearance and place great importance on ensuring they have the latest fashions, but the argument could be made that hipsters are making the ironic statement that having allegiance to anything is ludicrous. They quickly change tastes in fashions, music, and literature to show others that things in this society change so rapidly that it is useless to cling on to something when in the next instant that will change. They focus on being sincere in their consumption practice of things that the mainstream thinks is out of style. The irony is presented in such a dramatic way that people often end up just being annoyed with hipsters and their take on the world. According to Douglas Haddow (2008), the “cursory and stylized lifestyle” of the hipster is what sparks aggravation in

other people. Hipsters appear not to care about anything and display that by wearing clothes that make them seem like they will never fit in to society, and thus never be productive in it. While hipsters would agree that they would not want to be considered part of mainstream society, they would not agree with being unproductive in society. It is their mission to show the world that life does not have to be as serious as the pin-striped men say that it is; it is okay to act in a ironic way. Hipsters believe that life should be about pleasing one's self, and thus they adopt styles and tastes in music and literature that reflect the way they want to live: a way contrary to the rest of society.

Sarcasm is a form of irony (Krueger & Glucksberg, 1989). The vein of psychology research relating to responses to ironic or sarcastic statements has been gaining popularity recently. The reason that authors cite that this kind of discourse has not been well researched in the past is due to the fact that it is dependent on other cues and "social contexts" for it to be recognized (Katz et al., 2004). But delving deeper into this form of communication has produced relevant results, especially when thinking about applying it to the behaviors of hipsters and how those outside of their culture perceive them. Incongruence is a marker of people's recognition of irony and sarcasm. In research performed by Katz et al. (2004), participants in a study were more likely to remember a sarcastic statement if it was made outside the bounds of normal social context; i.e., if someone from a lower class spoke a certain way to someone with higher social status. In the same article, it was found that those who made use of sarcasm and irony in their statements were thought to be insincere, impolite, non-instructional, and ambiguous (Katz et al., 2004). Hipsters fall under this category of using irony offhandedly. Grief in "What Was the Hipster" classifies this group of individuals as "rebel consumers" and states there is a negative connotation to the word hipster- almost as if it was an insult to be called one. He states that it is

“an insult that belongs to the family of *poseur, faker, phony, scenester, and hanger-on.*” (Grief, 2010). *These individuals, seen as fake by the rest of the modern world, react with irony and sarcasm, showing apathy towards others’ opinions.* Sarcasm is a form of directed irony, aimed at a person or thing, whereas irony is the more general form (Katz et al, 2004). Insofar as hipsters’ irony is directed not only at the mainstream culture, but anyone else who is not part of their group, it should be noted that hipsters tend to employ the more general irony in their appearance and manner of living, but are not exempt from making sarcastic remarks when dealing with people outside of the hipster lifestyle.

Much of the hipsters’ usage of irony comes from the attitude they display towards each other and non-hipsters. Mark Grief details the history of the term and does point to one characteristic that has been constant within this subculture since its inception. “The hipster, in both black and white incarnations, in his essence had been about superior knowledge...Hipster... referred to an air of knowing about exclusive things before anyone else” (Grief, 2010). Hipsters’ desire for not only knowledge of these exclusive things, but to be the first to know this knowledge would result in having an ironic or sarcastic attitude towards everyone else. Knowing something first can create an air of pretentiousness, as being privileged to have this kind of power would only make one want to keep it for themselves. Having this kind of knowledge shared would make it commonplace, and thus less attractive to these hipsters. So when music or authors become popular to more than just this countercultural crowd, it gets rejected. There is nothing special in knowing something that everyone else knows. But by maintaining this energy for learning about what is hip or what is still “underground,” hipsters are able to keep their essence of being cool and having something that no one else has. This comes off as pretentious and rude to those outside of the counterculture. Hipsters love to scoff at those who have not

heard of the same bands or read the same books as them, thus showing their sarcastic side to those not in the know.

Irony takes this one step further in hipsters' reappropriation of well-known things and their ability to turn those items cool. Grief cites a list of items that are popular within the hipster counterculture:

trucker hats; undershirts called "wifebeaters," worn alone; the aesthetic of basement rec-room pornography, flash-lit Polaroids, and fake-wood paneling; Pabst Blue Ribbon; "porno" or "pedophile" mustaches; aviator glasses; Americana T-shirts from church socials and pig roasts; tube socks; the late albums of Johnny Cash; tattoos (Grief, 2010)

While some items are commonplace today (i.e., tattoos), others make one stop and think where the interest in these items or fashions lie. They have long since gone out of style (or, in the case of "porno" or "pedophile" mustaches, were never in style), and society as a whole has moved on from these looks. That is why hipsters take them and make them their own. In an ironic twist, they take these old items that are considered un-hip to those in the mainstream and make them cool within their group. They wear them with a sense of irony, knowing that those outside the group think this way about the items, and showing that they just do not care and this is the way they are going to express themselves. This just makes those in other cultures more apt to not want to participate in any aspect of the hipster lifestyle, and thus the cycle continues.

Individuals are predisposed to believing a statement that another person makes (Krueze & Glucksberg, 1989). According to what Krueze and Glucksberg (1989) call the "cooperation principle," people assume that others are being truthful and are not doing anything to purposefully deceive them. Bringing in ironic statements turns this idea of the cooperative

principle into something that confuses those who are listening to ironic or sarcastic statements. In the case of irony, where both parties recognize that the person making a statement is not being truthful, one of two things can happen, according to Kruez and Glucksberg (1989). The person listening either recognizes that either the speaker is indeed going against the cooperative principle and is breaking social norm, or that the person is trying to say something by creating the illusion that they are breaking the cooperative principle. Irony would come in to play with the second idea. The tone that one takes when employing irony is key so that the person listening understands it. The individual speaking tries to tell someone something that they do not really mean in order to get the person listening to try to change their behavior. This holds true with hipsters, who through their seemingly out-of-date fashion and wild amounts of consumption, show the mainstream culture that what they hold important in terms of material possessions may not be so meaningful. They do it in a seemingly rude way to subvert the artificial power of the mainstream and show them that the hipsters consider their actions to be ridiculous.

The implicit display theory posits that there are three categories that must be fulfilled in order for someone to consider a statement to be ironic (Utsumi, 2000). The first is that the situation that the individuals are in must be considered ironic. The second is that the statement itself must implicitly describe the ironic situation at hand. Thirdly, the idea that irony is prototype-based must be present, and that statements that show more implicit reference to the ironic situation are determined to be more ironic. This theory rests on the fact that irony is always implicit: no one states directly that they are being ironic (Utsumi, 2000). The echoic reminder theory of verbal irony states that it does not take in to consideration why the speaker of the ironic statement elected to use irony or why it was even applicable to do so (Kruez & Glucksberg, 1989). This differs from the implicit display theory in that the implicit display

theory implies that the ironic statement is made in regards to the ironic environment in which the speaker and listener are in (Utsumi, 2000). The implicit display theory falls in to what hipsters are using irony for, even though the echoic reminder theory also holds value. Hipsters could be using irony to describe their situations. They live in the modern world whether they like to or not, so ironically wearing and employing kitsch from the past is a way to show the rest of the world how quickly things change and there is no use in keeping one way. Using items from the past while living in the present shows the irony of everyone's lives: these individuals are still functioning human beings, but with a different lifestyle than most.

Bronislaw Szerszynski in his 2007 article "The Post-Ecological Condition: Irony as Symptom and Cure" presents a different point of view on irony as it helps to explain how this method has helped cause the slowdown in the movement towards a more sustainable environment as well as how that same irony can be used to pick the movement back up and help the public work towards a more sustainable future. While this thesis has little to do with the environment or sustainability, the base ideas of irony can be applied. According to this article, in order for a statement to be ironic, there must be two levels of significance, and there must be an opposing dichotomy between the two (Szerszynski, 2007). Also, important but not necessary for something to be ironic is a sense of innocence on the part of the person listening to the ironic statement, or on the part of the person making the ironic statement, pretending not to know what they are saying (Szerszynski, 2007). This interpretation of how irony works can help to explain the behaviors of hipsters. They are aware of what they are wearing and that it contradicts with what is considered fashionable or socially appropriate, but they do it anyway. They know the irony of what they are doing, but those looking in on this counterculture are confused and have no idea what is going on. It is a way to confuse and appear dominant to other cultures.

Hipsters use irony to convey their message and to make humorous what everyone else takes so seriously. While different forms of irony do exist and have been discussed, Rebecca Clift in her article “Irony in Conversation” (1999), discusses aspects of irony that exist in all its different forms. She first notes that framing is crucial when using irony. Limits must be set and understood so those employing irony know when those limits are being crossed. Framing irony, according to Clift, creates “inside and outside meanings,” which depend on what and how something is being said, as well as who is saying it and who the recipient of the message is (Clift, 1999). It all goes back to the idea of the performer and the audience. Clift acknowledges that it is easier to show irony in its written forms, and that much more needs to be employed to get the message of irony across in verbal communication. People need to be more animated to ensure that their message gets across. This is what hipsters do. They do not just speak their irony of what they think about the world; they show it in the music they listen to, the films they watch, the books they read, the poetry they write, and the clothes they wear. The only way that hipsters do become active or participate in mainstream life is through tinting their doing so with irony. This would fit into Clift’s discussion of echoic conversation and how it relates to irony (Clift, 1999). According to her, the way someone repeats back what is being told to them has an effect on how that repetition is interpreted. Hipsters listening to modern hip hop or watching mainstream films but putting their own take and commentary on it all is one example of how this echoic conversation creates irony. The mainstream culture make take any Roman Polanski film and watch and truly appreciate the message being conveyed, but a hipster would watch the same film and trivialize it by criticizing the director’s vision or downplaying the message that the movie is saying about society. Clift (1999) would say that this “offers an interpretation of a thought of an opinion while at the same time dissenting from what is echoed.” While the

hipsters' interpretations of different aspects of modern society are legitimate, the way they present it and the intent behind the interpretations teems with irony.

## **HIPSTER HATRED**

The modern hipster embodies many styles from the older (older here being defined as the pre 1999/2000 versions of the hipster) generations, with special attention paid to their consumption practices and employment of irony. Known as the “rebel consumer” (Grief, 2010), this individual will purchase anything and everything as long as the mainstream culture has deemed that something unpopular or not in line with how that culture wishes to present itself. Grief (2010) argues that this is where the negative views of hipsters come in. If they were constantly consuming the latest items to stay ahead of the trends, or conversely, consuming items considered useless by the mainstream culture, then how do they stand for anything? How do hipsters define themselves if they are constantly changing? That is how this group got labels such as “*poseur, faker, phony, scenester, and hanger-on*” (Grief, 2010). These labels are used to show that these hipsters do not mean anything if they cannot clearly have allegiance to anything, then how do they function as a unified group? These out-group opinions stayed strong and today, the stereotypes and labels attached to hipster are so negative that people consider it a great insult to be called one. Being seen as an exclusive group has turned everyone off from the word. In this way, the mainstream culture has used outlets like the media and advertising to show how bad for society hipsters are, and this in turn has caused people to have negative stereotypes about hipsters. Part can be attributed to media attention. There are entire websites dedicated to picking apart the habits and fashions of hipsters in order to trivialize them. The attitudes of hating towards hipsters spread across the Internet and magazines and thus became popular among other cultures to bring them down. This is a back and forth movement between the attempts that

hipsters make to stand out and have contrasting attitudes and the attempts of the mainstream culture to put them in their place.

Another part of the hatred comes from the extreme to which hipsters take their countercultural lifestyle. While other countercultural groups throughout history have stood out from the mainstream, hipsters take their attitudes and style to another level, which creates negative feelings on the part of the mainstream. Their fashions are those either discarded from the past or are so fashion-forward that no one in the mainstream culture has heard of them, and as soon as that fashion item (or any other cultural item) hits mainstream markets, the hipsters completely shut it off. While to some degree the mainstream does do things that is considered outside of their culture and “hip” (for example, getting tattoos), the hipster reaction to such actions made by the mainstream only irritates non-hipsters even more. Hippies wanted others to join their cause and subscribe to their ways because they believed it would make for a better world; hipsters despise anyone who tries to enter their culture. Those individuals would be regarded as fake and just posing as hipsters to try and be considered cool. Ironically enough, it is the mainstream culture that considers hipsters poseurs because they do not subscribe to a set goal or belief system.

Semerad comments that hipsters set themselves up to be hated, and that is why they are reacted to as such. Hipsters are “condescending, pretentious, self-righteous, and ironic” (Personal communication, 2011) and no one enjoys interacting with people who are going to act condescending, pretentious and self-righteous towards them. According to Semerad, hipsters embrace these qualities about them and do not try to hide them, as other groups with similar qualities, like Christian evangelists, do. It is a cycle of hatred though, as Semerad discusses how hipsters do not really care what the mainstream thinks because they do not want the mainstream

to like them anyway. They are outward in their attitudes, even if those attitudes attack those around them. In the following sections, the psychology of the hipster will be explored to try to explain the reasons hipsters have these certain attitudes and why they display them as such, especially the attitude of being ironic.

Attitudes are reflections of belief systems. Being that there are phases in epistemological development, it would follow that one would move from one stage (duality) to the next (multiplicity) to the final (relativist). Hipsters are multiplists disguising themselves as relativist, and only time will tell if they form into those who hold the relativist view. However, it is the opinion of this author that they will not. Being truly relativist involves accepting that there are differing views depending on the group observing the experience and the background that they have that shapes their views. Hipsters, in true post-modern way, accept the fact that there exist multiple points of view, but still hold true that their beliefs are the ones that are correct. This ties in with Keniston and his idea of post-conventional development, which holds that youth put their own interests above anyone else's. So while they hold all these tenants of being post-modern and post-conventional in their thinking, which implies that they have developed beyond the traditional forms of societal thought and opinions, they do not possess the true realization and acceptance of other kinds of truths. This is another cause for hatred on the part of other cultures. Hipsters accept the reality of post-modernism, which is a belief held by many people, but their conceited attitudes and long-held belief that they are always correct causes the negative reaction even from other postmodernists. To others, it seems that hipsters live somewhat in the realm that everyone else does, but at the same time practice isolation that make them appear standoffish, unfriendly and unwelcoming, thus eliciting negative emotions on the part of the outside groups.

Annoyance is an emotion that those outside the hipster cohort feel towards this group. The youth are obnoxious to other groups, according to Keniston (1970). Adults see them as a group refusing to grow up and accept the roles and responsibilities that they need to in society. They are the next generation to take over power, and as adults see them, they are not in any place emotionally, attitudinally or developmentally to do so. This creates struggle and tension between groups. This has been seen many times with hipsters. Countless magazine, newspaper, and internet article are complaints about how this group of educated individuals, who presumably should be ready to take on steady jobs and advance in being productive in society are not doing any of those such things. They are quoted as being called “UNHIP, CULTURELESS, spoiled adult-toddlers” (Bill, 2011). The idea of an “adult-toddler” has much relevance to what Keniston was saying about this new youth and how others perceive them. The fact that hipsters are full grown adults yet do not to do the same things that adults have traditionally done receives criticism from those on the outside. They prolong what their youth and adopt an apathetic and nonchalant attitude. Generational differences come in to play here. As noted before, Keniston (1970) said the reason for this emergence of a new stage of life was due to environmental, economical, and other factors that were not present in previous years. While this makes sense to those within the culture, those who are older who may not be so keen to view these changes would blame the youth (and especially the hipsters’) attitudes and behaviors on laziness and other negative reasons, which is cause for annoyance.

Living a life that is contrary to those in the mainstream culture will receive backlash from that dominant groups. Later in Goffman’s (2005) book, he discusses what the mainstream culture does to countercultures that threaten and challenge the ways of life of the mainstream. Feeling threatened, they try to strip the counterculture of their power or trivialize everything they stand

for. This can most certainly be seen with what American culture is doing to the hipster (Goffman, 2005). Hipsters are labeled as obnoxious, uncreative, terribly elitist, and unwilling to listen to outside opinions. According to anonymous (2011), hipsters are “masses of unwashed, gender-puzzled, pseudo-creative type, carbon-copied, suburban white people.” Being seen as an exclusive group has turned everyone off from the word. In this way, the mainstream culture has used outlets like the media and advertising to show how hipsters are bad for society, and this in turn has caused people to have negative stereotypes about hipsters. Even in doing research for this thesis, looking for literature on hipsters have turned up articles titled “Why Does Everyone Hate Hipster Assholes,” “Why the Hipster Must Die,” “Hipster Hatred,” and “Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization.” Having titles like these for articles in major newspaper paints an image that the mainstream public will see, and thus the stereotype will be propagated, taking away the power or legitimacy of this counterculture.

Irony must not be discounted as a major source of the hatred that is felt towards hipsters. Hipsters use irony as a way to show the mainstream that what they are doing as a counterculture is no different than what they are doing as a mainstream culture. The hipsters’ love of things that were revered in the past as well as their avid interest in knowing things before everyone else does is a rather large display to everyone else that things change, that there is no use in pledging allegiance to anything. The irony that they display in their use and love of these items shows that they have no regard for other cultures, and the feeling of being put down is a negative one, so those put down would not feel positive towards that group. Nothing is meaningful, which is something novel and scary to those who truly do not realize it. In their postmodern ways, hipsters employ this use of irony to get their message across; a message that is not well received. Their attitude reflects pretention, apathy, and irony, which is a combination of undesirable

characteristics: if, as stated earlier, personality is reflective of them trying to understand themselves, then it seems like they are not trying to become good people. They are becoming different people than adults and this new way of living angers the older generations or the current generation who do not listen or understand the lives of hipsters. If mainstream individuals took on wearing the same fashions and used irony in their daily interactions with people, they would feel embarrassed or strange for acting so differently. The fact that hipsters do this yet are unashamed of the way they act causes a negative response from those in other cultures. They do the opposite of what others think or expect them to do and carry about a pretentious attitude about doing so, which is obnoxious. They, in the postmodern world, recognize that other viewpoints exist and play off relativism like they actually believe it, but their irony and pretention cause them to display the dualistic view that they actually hold, and that tension is just another reason for them to be hated.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is much to be said about the lifestyle of the modern hipster and how they have used tenants from the past as well as modern attitudes and ideas of today to create a counterculture truly their own. They are a counterculture unlike any other, and the combination of their style, attitude, developmental stages, style of thinking, and use of irony has created for them one of the strongest backlashes against their counterculture that has ever been received to a group of individuals who have ever went against dominant society. While not physically violent, this anti-hipster attitude has pervaded throughout any kind of media possible: whether print, television, or Internet, the hatred towards hipsters has spread into a kind of norm, thus being a way for every other culture to try to subvert this groups of individuals, who, through their irony and other tactics, try to show other cultures how meaningless having allegiance to anything really is. The

combination of being pseudo-relativist multiplists that identify as the youth stage in this postmodern society in conjunction with their use of irony to insult other cultures is a combination that has never been seen before, and one that has been proven to elicit a negative response.

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