

## **It is Okay to be a Hipster**

You almost always know hipsters when you see them. The recognition is instant. Yet of all the American sub-cultural youth movements that have originated in the twentieth century, whether it were the hippies, the beatniks or the punks, the hipster scene is the most differentiated, if not elusive of all.

As such, coming up with a uniform, encompassing characterization of "the hipster" is quite the challenge and will very likely not suffice. Ultimately, what defines the hipster? And more so, why has the hipster become the subject of so much mockery, if not sheer vilification?

Originally the term "hipster" was first coined in the 1940s, when the word "hip" came into view as a qualifier to describe aficionados of the growing jazz and blues scene. Hipsters then, usually white middle class youngsters, began to adopt the lifestyle of the largely blackamoor musicians they admired. After this sub-cultural scene slowly subdued just a decade later, it quaintly took quite some years for the American hipster to come back into colloquial vernacular use.

While fraught with historical meaning, it was by the end of the twentieth century that the hipster would return to the limelight. As such, the first flurry of "modern hipsterism" rose up as a quirky avant-garde trend, referring to young bohemian artists, most of who were living in the Brooklyn neighbourhood of Williamsburg, New York. What all the more united these artsy denizens was their appreciation for offbeat, non-mainstream fashion and culture. In view of this, the redefined hipster culture began to signify a miscellaneous group of young city-dwellers, highly 'in the know of' the more obscure alternative music styles like indie

rock and unconventional, independent cult films and magazines.

Through the rise of online photo blogs and social networking sites, insights into the re-born hipster scene started to reach the more sheltered suburban audiences at an exponential rate. These once intricate levels of 'connoisseurship' of a niche culture were becoming increasingly snapped up, if not shamelessly copied by the larger crowd. In a matter of a few years, hipster tribes (or what it appeared to be) had begun to spread like zombies. Hence, from Seattle to Philadelphia, New Orleans and San Francisco, the former fringe culture had become omnipresent in virtually every cornerstone of urban America. By consequence then, the modern hipster has demoted in lingo to resort to a somewhat ill defined and pervasive general taste culture. Hence, the contemporary hipster has come to embody a highly diffused group of young, more or less hip people. Furthermore, in one decade the hipster has incarnated from being an exclusive marker of 'underground' cultural marginalism, to a subculture that has diversified and matured to move beyond these stern borders.

In effect then, the hipster has gained many faces. In spite of what is persistently stated by its adversaries, there is no such thing as a unified "hipster look" or a prototypical hipster. The stylistic variations in incarnation are plenty. That said, there certainly are several commonalities to be drawn in terms of appearance. For one, hipster aesthetic commonly tends to approximate a thrift store inspired, low-key, ironic and increasingly eco-friendly style. Accordingly, all things remotely odd, 'boho' or vintage are easily linked up with hipster style. If anything then, it can be concluded that hipsters are inclined to have absolute superb fashion sensibilities.

Even more so, the hipster is generally courted to be creative, well educated, (part-time) vegetarian, politically progressive and in view of this, tends to discard the culturally ignorant attitude of the mainstream consumer. Hence, first and foremost, hipster ethos is a liberal 'state of mind', carried through by a composite of independent individuals, rather than just some 'meaningless' fad or trivial image thing.

Taking all this into account, it shouldn't have to feel like an insult to be a hipster, on the contrary. Yet, what is up then with all the disdain and derision that is unceasingly dumped on hipsters?

By result, the general debate on hipsters has become so laden, almost caricatural with hollow stereotypes and pejorative assumptions that it is to argue on what ultimately defines a hipster. Detractors and critics claim that the modern hipster has come to refer to an air of knowing about exclusive things before anyone else. Elitist youngsters are said to act with a pretense of superior knowledge, as some allege, "hipper than thou." Furthermore, it is regularly assumed that hipster culture is devoid of substance and originality. Hipsters would merely re-appropriate and copy-paste, but not actively contribute in creating new things. For these reasons, many people wouldn't mind seeing the hipster go the way of the dodo. Unjustly, the hipster word has become a derogatory phrase.

In comparison to the much larger mainstream mass, hipsters are culturally highly cultivated and as such, often pioneers and leaders of the finest cultural trends and ideals. The hipster is a savant at picking up the tiny changes of rapidly cycling consumer distinction. And think of the witty banter hipsters have inspired in fashion. More so, there is ample artwork, music and clothing being made by

young urbanites. Many hipsters occupy eminent positions in the music, art, and fashion industry. If anything, it is absolute fiction that most hipsters live off their parent's trust funds or are unemployed yuppies and gentrifiers (which are in itself contradictions in terms). So next time someone qualifies you as a hipster, consider it a flattering remark and just hang loose. Really, it is okay to be a hipster.