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### How Subcultures Effect Identity

Today, nearly everyone is connected to mass media, such as through pop music.. American philosopher and professor Alva Noë writes about the relationship of pop fans to music in the essay *Air Guitar Styles*. Famous American science author Steven Johnson also writes, in *Myth of the Ant Queen*, about mass culture, not from the perspective of media, but rather through patterns, structure, and emergent behavior. By examining subcultures, such as Punk, and the Gay Village of Manchester, it can be seen that music and social groups can have a significant impact on an individual's definition of self, to the extent that they become the defining aspect of the self.

Especially in America, mass culture is divided into many subculture. These subcultures regularly articulate themselves through music. By examining this, it can be seen that music becomes the means by which the individual defines themselves as belonging to the group. About music subcultures, Noë says that “pop music is concerned with personal style in a more direct way. This is why, we sort tribes by their music. The hippies, the punks, the jocks, the mods, the rockers, etc. Black music, white music. These differences matter.” (Noë 178). In other words, pop music is so intertwined with style, that it acts as shorthand to refer to a whole groups of people. Considering each of the tribes, or subcultures, its easy to connect their music and stereotypical images of them; Hippees conjure images of the Grateful Dead, tie dye and free love, and punks bring to mind the Dead Kennedies, patched battled vests, and antifascism. Individuals express themselves with their choices of music, fashion, and politics. When these people do so,

they put themselves into the group's model of an individual. Answer why quote supports my thesis. This process works simultaneously in both directions: the individual's expression to outsiders, and as a way define themselves from outsiders. Both use the signs of music, and thereby fashion and politics. Noë considers this use of music, to express style, as the quintessential element of pop. This kind of music is more than just pretty sounds; it forms a language of style. The definition of ones self is written in this language of style. Johnson also writes about social groups, but takes an approach that is more focused on the group. They write: "Neighborhoods are away of measuring and expressing the repeated behavior of larger collectivities-- capturing information about group behavior, and sharing that information with the group. Because those patterns are fed back to the community, small shifts in behavior can quickly escalate into larger movements" (Johnson 194). That is to say, when decisions are repeated on the level of an individual, there is a feedback loop that determines what happens on the level of the group. Music subcultures share this feedback behavior: the group has music that expresses a particular style, members preform that style, which feeds back into the group. Consider punk music: it is typically loud and fast, using minimal if any studio work, as well as loose, shrill vocals. These auditory qualities express the style of punks, such as being self-made, tough, iconoclastic, and having a strong, rebellious attitude. Punks participate in their music by preforming the style. Then that style becomes part of the ideal of punk.

The perspective of an individual is often too narrow to personally see this whole process; that is to say that internalizing the influence of a social group to ones immediate experiences is a cognitively difficult task. However, the result on a macro-scale are obvious. Johnson says about the emergent patterns of cities that "This sort of complexity lives up one level: it describes the system of the city itself and not its experiential reception by the city dweller" (Johnson 194).

Complexity is a phenomenon that happens on a grand scale, and when looking too closely, one can miss the forest for the trees. Because the influence of subcultures on their members is a complicated process, those members don't always realize the extent to which they are effected. Even as an member may value their originality, they may not recognize the unoriginality of expressing themselves with pop music, or how that same paradoxical original feeling is experienced by many of their peers in the same subculture. Analyzing this, Noë writes "Because style is an abiding and defining facet of our perceptual and cognitive lives, pop music's concern with style should not be construed as superficial or trite" (Noë 178). Noë agrees, pop music is so entwined with the sense of style as to alter ones ability to perceive. This element is in fact the defining aspect of pop. When a pop fan considers their sense of self, and uses pop to explain it, pop music becomes the mediator between the fan, and the transcendent idea of self. This process happens similarly for each member of a subculture. The repetition of this small pattern continues the subculture as a hole in the same way that developments in neighborhoods continues a city.

Subcultures draw in individuals, and create a place of belonging that is more enduring than any one individual. Even in traditional subcultures, that is those subcultures that predate modern mass media, display this phenomenon. Johnson writes that in Manchester "one of them lies just north of Victoria University, at a point where Oxford Road becomes Oxford Street. There are reports dating back to the mid-nineteenth century of men cruising other men on these blocks, looking for casual sex, more lasting relationships, or even just the camaraderie of shared identity at a time when that identity dared not speak its name. " (Johnson 195).

Manchester has been host to the historic Gay Village. This community has been there since at least the 1800's even as homosexuality was officially outlawed. When gay men gather on Oxford Road, they are participating in the tradition of Manchester's gay population. Meeting in the same

place is often a pragmatic decision, however when participating in this tradition, gay Mancunians are putting themselves into the tradition. By doing this, Mancunians become part of the Gay Village, and define themselves inwardly with the group's identity. They personally experience this as comradery and belonging. These personal experiences are signs of the social groups effect on their sense of self. Noë writes that all social roles, those like citizen, mother and philosopher, "are the roles we play, better or worse, successfully or unsuccessfully, in our social lives. We are persons insofar as we are subject, always and implicitly, to the standards of our community" (Noë 178). People, as agents in society, are preforming, rather acting out, the role they have been given from their community. Specifically, gay Mancunians act out by going to the same street corner, and secretly organizing their comradery. Punks act out in revelry and protest. These are scripts developed through stable and repeating patterns, and internalized through socialization, and now also mass media.

The defining characteristic of a individual's sense of self is often the subcultures they consider themselves a part of. Considering the individual as the unit of society, it can be seen in how a larger social groups work their group identity into the individual, thereby maintaining the large group. Punks define themselves with the subculture, using music to summarize its politics, style, and attitude. The Gay Village in Manchester perpetuates itself without, and even in spite of, any legal mandate, because each of its members identify themselves with the whole. Both of these models show how groups are sustained by the members who participate in them: they become the defining aspect of their member's conception of self.

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