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Mr. Randolph

What Is Hip?

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What Hip Will Be

The origins of hip can’t be traced back to one era, time, culture, or nation. Being hip is part of human nature. Being hip comes as naturally to some as leading comes to others. In this sense, hip will last as long as the human race. Hip culture and the celebration of all things hip, however, has not always been as popular as it is today. That being said, this is not a fad soon to fade. What was once a steady presence, sometimes accepted, sometimes ridiculed, has now become a trend fueled by social media, far beyond the control of those who would see it eliminated. Hip culture not only won’t be faltering in the near future, but likely cannot ever truly disappear, due to the expanding use of social media by the average person.

There is the stereotype of millennial hipsters going around, who have (note entirely unjustly) gotten a bad reputation among many communities. That being said, the so-called hipster community often fails to be considerable as hip, or really anything more than an early follower. Although they represent a necessary part of the “hip cycle,” the way they go about it is a mere mockery of what hip culture truly represents, both historically and now. The modern hipster wears the hip trends, uses the newest technology, and has for some reason been associated with an entirely ecologically safe diet and lifestyle. While these are not necessarily unhip in themselves, the motivation behind it is less hip than it would appear. In reality, they are merely copying, following the herd of other hipsters, in doing so making a massive crowd full of people who are all “unique” and yet completely interchangeable.

To be truly hip, one must act based on their own accord, not based off another’s actions. As we see in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Tom Sawyer and Huck both try to subvert authority, but only Huck does so in a truly hip fashion. When carrying out the rescue operation, Huck goes on his own instincts, but Tom is determined to act based on a book he once read. Huck, in this scenario, defines hip, as it is his nature, without thought or consideration , but action.

Being hip isn’t a choice, but the lack of one. Hip is natural, it is only society who has told us to conform. Acting by your own nature, as you would without society, however, is the epitome of hip. Always in our minds, the “hip path” is never fully forgotten. In this sense, the idea and culture behind being hip can never be eliminated, as it is part of our humanity. Further, however, lies the human desire to be with like minded people. With this, people expressing their hip tendencies are more likely to come together. This means that even if hip culture as we know it were to dissolve, there would be a hip revival overnight.

The struggle of the societal expectations vs subversion in hip culture, as shown in *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed, has been going on for ages and will go on much longer. It is the endless cycle of revivals and cullings of hip subcultures that we see play out on a daily basis. From the crusades to today, there has always been an oppressive figure, and likewise there have always been outliers.

Hip isn’t always on the losing side vs authority, however. Occasionally a trend will take over society, becoming mainstream. Even in this case, a new hip(er) culture appears, and so continues the battle versus the mainstream. As displayed in *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, a new figure of power does not always mean a new society. We see “‘So what's the score? How are things different? You running the world now? You God?’ ‘Things aren't different. Things are things.’” We see this interaction playing out day in and day out by the players in today’s world, giving us a whole new cycle of revivals.

In some cases, an authoritative figure comes to power with great control. In these cases, many see hip culture falter. It is situations like these which, though they seem counterproductive to the deviant cultures, actually strengthen it. As said in *Bartleby the Scrivener* by Herman Melville, “Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance.” It is this subversive yet unassertive means of protest which has for years been a tried and true method of sending a message. Peaceful protests all around the world have enabled mass societal reform and change, as well as allowed those without means to have a voice be heard. In some respect, this lack of action gives subversion and hip culture an immortality which cannot be taken away.

Passive resistance has become a facet of change in our country and the world. We see time and time again when making change is too dangerous, the passive resistance makes the difference. Marches, economic boycotting, internet solidarity, and many other means of peaceful protest have made massive change in the world. In some of the most oppressive areas of the world, the internet especially has become useful in change making.

We hear all about the subversive nature of hip culture, but this implies there is something fundamentally to be subverted. Although it is true, there are often laws of society which are broken, these are not of concern. The true right and wrong of the universe lies in one’s self, as demonstrated in *Divinity School Address* by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity. If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being.

As Emerson asserted earlier in his address, god lies within one’s self, so he is the only one who should be minded. The laws of society take back seat to the laws of one’s conscious, meaning to be hip is never wrong.

The moral ambiguous nature of hip comes to light in “The Wolf of Wall Street” directed by Martin Scorsese. The main character, Jordan Belfort, personifies all that is truly hip, living for himself at every turn. He is a greedy, self providing, drug using young guy making his way in the city. Although he may not abide by all rules, regulations, and laws, he abides by his own moral compass of sorts, and in doing so, does right by all things hip. Early in the movie, a defining line used in many of the trailers, Jordan confronted the legal side of his buisness life.

Look, I know you're not following what I'm saying anyway, right? That's... that's okay, that doesn't matter. The real question is this: was all this legal? Absolutely ~~fucking~~ not. But we were making more money than we knew what do with.” (1:06:40)

Throughout the movie, Jordan confronts the legal issues with his work on multiple occasions, but continues nonetheless. Social customs, norms, and more are thrown by the wayside as he engages in drugs, orgies, drinking, and generally anything else he and his friends saw fit at the time. In short, Jordan lived his life by his desires, and in doing so, became one of the most hip characters in recent cinematic history.

Being hip today is far more complex than it was in the time of the jazz kings. No longer is hip culture confined to any geographic location, gatherings at jazz clubs in New York have given way to online cliques. The entire concept of an active cool hunter has reached an obsolescence. In this day and age, all it takes for a trend to explode is one retweet, repost, etc. by some unremarkable person to drop the next trend into the lap of someone capable of sending it on its path to becoming hip. By the time a popular person (once a cool hunter) sees content, it may have been circulated through thousands of other people.

With the inauguration of our newest president elect, Donald Trump, we will be seeing a significant change in the emergence of culture. Despite the constitutional right, freedom of speech may be infringed upon. This, and this alone, is the major danger to hip culture as it stands. Censorship poses risks to all forms that hip expression takes. We have all seen the movies depicting dystopian, bleak worlds where forms of self expression are banned for the greater good. In all likelihood, we will never see a day like that, however under Donald Trump’s presidency, we could see some major changes that would shake the foundation of hip. For example, if he initiates an internet censorship bill, something he has talked about in the past, we could be seeing social media, a place where hip culture previously thrived, being policed.

Internet censorship is probably the greatest threat to modern hip culture and social freedom that we see today. Arguably, the internet will never be truly censored. When Facebook becomes censored, the hip will move to Twitter. When Twitter becomes censored, the hip will move to Tumblr. When Tumblr becomes censored, the hip will move elsewhere again. Even in the situation where there is full internet coverage, There are deeper layers the hip will go to. What is modernly known as the deep web presents a nearly unregulated domain for people to write, say, and do as they please. As is, you can find drugs, alternate worldviews, and order seven thousand copies of *Mein Kampf* and *Elmer Gantry*, all on the same site.

What we know as the internet, the things accessible by a simple Google search, a link from a site, or otherwise, are all a mere tiny fraction of what the internet truly represents. Even the most oppressive internet censorship laws under the most strict governments have trouble restricting the use of the “top layer” of internet. The task of censoring the “deep web” would be nearly insurmountable. With today’s technology, that is likely not a risk. That being said, the hip lifestyle should not be confined to the hidden backstreets of the internet.

Even in the worst case scenario, however, I believe hip will remain an ever present force, slowly working in the background of every situation. The heros of our dystopian novels and movies, the anarchists threatening the peace on our tv shows, they all represent ways in which hip culture can present itself. In this day and age we have not seen as much open anarchy, but none the less it exists worldwide. Even if online, things take a turn for the worst, and if we move towards a police state, we will always have the anarchists. We will always have the heros.

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Directed by Martin Scorsese ; screenplay by Terence Winter ; produced by Martin Scorsese ... [and others] ; Paramount Pictures and Red Granite Pictures present ; an Appian Way and Sikelia production ; an EMJAG production. The Wolf of Wall Street. Hollywood, Calif. :Paramount Pictures, 2014. Print.