

**Buying Rebellion: Fashion As a Marker of Class in America**

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## Introduction

Fashion is, perhaps, one of the most diverse forms of art. In the modern world, it is a fact of life that everyone wears clothes. Clothes provide warmth, modesty, and utility, and are now more producible than ever before. Visual arts, music, writing, etc. have much less direct affect to the public. These media are ways in which much of history has been passed down, but unlike clothes, they have little day-to-day utility. Clothes, on the other hand, have been developed and engineered as long as human civilization has existed. This is partially due to technological advancements, but also to a kind of Darwinian selection. Over time, clothes have become more versatile, durable, and producible. Certain articles, like the cotton shirt, jacket, and pants, are now pretty universal across all cultures. While clothes become more homogenous in terms of utility, the meaning clothes can convey has made them become extremely varied. What someone wears tells a story. Clothes can dictate someone's region, age, gender, interests, hobbies, affiliations, political ideologies, and more categories than one can list. Clothes can look “trashy,” and be made of the same materials as “classy” ones. An article of clothing can look “stylish” on one wearer, and “cheap” on another.

Having had a growing interest in fashion for a couple of years now, one place where I have noticed this difference is in thrift stores. Because thrift stores are generally sorted by clothing type, gender, and size, this means that clothes with many different functions are generally grouped together. Once I got in the habit of shopping in thrift stores, I also was exposed to the diversity in price point of each item. A store's price range could be from 1 to 10 dollars, or 7 to 20 dollars, and even higher. Thrift stores differ from normal stores in one major way—it costs virtually nothing to create the product itself. This means that

production cost is entirely eliminated from its selling price. Therefore, thrift-store items' value is based on their selling ability.

This is further proven by antique/specialised thrift stores. While some of these stores do buy their clothes, their prices are so different than those of normal thrift stores, it seems significant, as the act of buying clothes, and the selectiveness put into curating these secondhand items, indicates that these clothes have value over others. The last idea that fascinated me was the overall price range of clothes on the market. I frequently bought clothes for ten dollars or less, but I noticed my peers spending hundreds, if not thousands on single items. At first I thought that they were wasting money, and I was achieving the same styles at a lower cost. However, I noticed more and more luxury brands which seemed to mimic "average" clothes, as well as working-class ones. I wondered why that was, and what the difference was between a t-shirt and a t-shirt with the Louis Vuitton logo on it. I wondered whether or not the actual cost of each item contributed to its value—whether or not people were buying a t-shirt, or the idea that they could afford such an item. I also wondered how much a piece's cost contributed to its value—whether or not someone would wear an expensive item just for the sake of showing off affluence. In completing this project, I had the opportunity to learn about these dynamics. Not only do people wear clothes to convey their wealth, they also use them to convey membership into groups, and convey messages overall.

Based on my reading, experts agree that there is a trend of upper class people appropriating a more working-class fashion style. This is because they are romanticizing a working class lifestyle as rebellious.

## Definitions/Context

### **Defining Socioeconomic Status**

There are many factors contributing to socioeconomic status, and most papers quantifying this include education, annual income, and occupation as factors in determining this status. There are nuances that simple possession analysis doesn't cover, as ownership of different assets in different areas/cultures might signify different status levels. However, this system seems to hold up in American culture during the time period I will be analyzing.<sup>1</sup>

One thing that makes this status difficult to define is its obscurity. Besides occupation, this status is not often obvious to most, or even discussed. While sharing in numbers one's estate is an option, there are many shorthands one can take, and many recognizable characteristics of classes.<sup>1</sup>

### **Defining Fashion**

It is important to acknowledge that fashion is a broad word with many connotations. As we will recognize it here, it is defined mostly as trends within clothing. However, it is also difficult to isolate clothes as the only means by which trends are conveyed. It is also difficult to define where "clothes" start and stop; for example, Vivienne Westwood's chicken bone shirt, the designs of Rei Kawakubo, and much of "punk" exist on a kind of line between clothes and pure symbolism. These clothes demonstrate an argument the article makes, that clothes are not just for functionality anymore. As Andrew Bennett writes in the book *Culture and Everyday Life*, fashion is "something that cannot purely be

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan, Greg J, Mary C. Daly, Peggy McDonough, and David R. Williams. "Optimal Indicators of Socioeconomic Status for Health Research." *American Journal of Public Health. American Public Health Association*, 2002. Web. Mar 16 2021.

referred to as clothing but goes far beyond that - a cultural phenomenon concerned with meanings and symbols, a means of direct, visual communication.”

Fashion, by this definition, can describe any set of symbols with a cultural meaning. Although it is crucial to recognize this other meaning, we will only be discussing clothing here.<sup>2</sup>

### Argument

#### **Fashion as a marker of socioeconomic status**

In the book *Culture and Everyday Life* by Andrew Bennett, the author discusses how this shift from functionality to symbolism has taken place over time. It starts by introducing sumptuary laws—laws dating back to ancient Greece that dictate how the members of each social class were allowed to dress. This is because, “the way in which a person dresses allows one to make conclusions regarding the person’s cultural background, economic status, and social power. In ancient history, clothing caused social distinctions due to laws regulating who was allowed to wear what, as well as the cost of materials.”<sup>2</sup> There are no longer laws prohibiting any class from wearing any materials, yet that doesn’t prevent clothes from having social significance along class lines. Instead of, say, velvet, or the color purple, more varied factors contribute to modern class identification through fashion. One factor is the price point, as for example, purchasing an expensive handbag can signal that you can afford it. As Bennet notes, “one’s class affiliation can be identified by a perfectly cut and fitted garment, [and] the use of expensive fabrics and display of brand-names...”. This passage addresses a new trend of brand ownership—the display of brand logos, especially those of luxury juggernauts such as Gucci or Louis Vuitton, as well as sportswear within the

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Andrew. “Culture and Everyday Life.” SAGE Publications. *SAGE Publications*, 2005. Print.

hip-hop subculture (with brands such as Adidas, Nike, FUBU, etc)<sup>3</sup>. The presentation of logos establishes the consumer's wealth by the brands they can afford.<sup>2</sup>

Recent marketing strategies for high-end fashion houses turns the traditional relationship between logo and status marker on its head. Here, obscurity, or lack of a logo can signal a wealthy "insider" status. An example of this is seen with Bottega Veneta. As Bennet explains, "Bottega Veneta's explicit no-logo-strategy makes the purse unrecognizable to the casual observer and identifiable only to those with certain knowledge." While an unmarked handbag might be unidentifiable to most, to the upper-class, it signals membership in an elite financial circle. Perhaps more importantly, it signals fluency in the cultural knowledge of that group, a fluency that cannot be obtained by knockoffs.<sup>2</sup>

People use fashion to show membership, either real or aspirational, in a variety of identity-based subcultures. Bennet explains that this connection is not a new one: "Consumers purchase brands in order to construct their personal identities. What people own has always been closely related to their personal identity. Berger (1972) describes how historic oil paintings never purely functioned as art but as a demonstration of private possessions, wealth and lifestyle." This explanation rings true for modern luxury purchases as well, which act as symbols of affluence. They also act as symbols of aspiration. As Bennet says, "the way a person chooses to dress, gives the world around them an idea of who they are, but also an idea of who they are trying to become".<sup>2</sup>

As society moved on from sumptuary laws, fashion trends became possible. The main motion these trends took was initially a "trickle-down" trajectory, where

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<sup>3</sup> Rizzo, Mary. "Class Acts: Young Men and the Rise of Lifestyle." University of Nevada Press. *University of Nevada Press*, 2015. Print.

working-class groups copied trends of the financially privileged. However, as time went on, more groups developed fashion styles unique to themselves, rather than drawing from the styles of the upper echelon. "Consequently, the direction of fashion change is no longer unilinear, members of lower classes, subcultures and cultural groups, influence fashion as much as those in the higher classes. Ever since, it has become more appropriate to refer to a "bubble-up" or "trickle-across" theory as trends move from being unilaterally "regal" or "destitute" to conveying more layered identities. As I will discuss later, one identity can be membership into a subculture. <sup>1</sup>

### **Fashion as a "group uniform"**

There are other ways in which clothes can mark membership into other groups, not merely the uber-wealthy. Throughout history, many movements based on other ideas such as politics, music, or art have an associated style, which can differentiate devoted members from society at large. As Bennet writes, "One of the most discussed components of the style dimension has been clothing, since it is one of the most visible forms that members of subcultures use to prove themselves." Clothes can function as a sort of "uniform," to show membership into a group. "Fashion (is) a key resource through which individuals... construct their identities and position themselves in relation to others." There are clothes that are directly associated with certain identities/groups. For example, spiked black hair, extreme piercings, and black lipstick are all identifiers of the Goth subculture. These stylistic elements don't have their origin within the Goth subculture, but Goth style is a collection of them. <sup>1</sup>

It is through conscious stylization, that piece of clothing becomes a symbol. As Bennet writes: “[It] is necessary to consider that the act of wearing any garment is not, by itself, style synonymous. It is imperative that there is a process of stylization - a conscious organization of objects, a repositioning and recontextualization, which removes them from their original context and thus enables new readings and resistances (GUERRA, 2018). It is precisely through this process of stylization that subcultures communicate their messages and forbidden meanings, as well as their collective identity.” Messages can be conveyed through fashion, because these items have previous contexts. By using them in new ways, the message changes. In communicating these messages, groups can transmit an ideology.<sup>1</sup>

### Case Studies

#### **The interview**

During the course of my research, I had the opportunity to interview a luxury fashion designer. I talked with Charlotte Lagreula, the Leathergoods Senior Product Manager of Hermès. Hermès is an global powerhouse in the world of luxury fashion, a staple of the high-end world since its origin in 1837. Its handbags are its specialty, the Birkin and the Kelly designs being some of the most recognizable and desired in the world. Before the interview, I asked Lagreula about her thoughts on fashion and class as connected topics. Lagreula mentioned that she noticed cases of “micro-signals” or “micro-trends,” where brands take inspiration from various aesthetics, including those of the working-class. One example she discussed was in specific modern-day trends, many of which, surprisingly, are extremely practical.



Eli Swanson:

What are some specific examples of [these micro-signals]?

Charlotte Lagreula:

The fanny pack is one example that comes from the street, and now you have all the other brands... you have the wallet that is not in your bag. I really believe in it, but nobody believes in it right now. We'll talk about this in five years, the wallet you can have here [on the wrist] or a new handle. I don't know, you have all fabrics, [the] nylon, [the] waterproof.

Eli Swanson:

I'm wearing waterproof pants right now, just because I don't want to get cold...

Charlotte Lagreula:

...because you don't want to get wet. But then it's better, because you can dry back under the rain. And it's okay, because it's technical, I will use all the technical, like you have in streetwear. So, okay, I'm wearing sneakers, also at work, not only doing sports. This is at the beginning, now everyone wears sneakers. And all of this is going to be like in everyday fashion but you have to be technical, like the fabrics and nylon, and also the hood[ie]. Yeah, [the hoodie] was technical. But now like everyone in fashion uses the hood enough. So it can be technical, functional, and it can be some reusing that. Fashion loves to take things out of 'that' context and put it in 'this' context. It clinicalizes things that you make it not technical, because you added it to our society.

From what Lagreula told me, I gathered that a decent amount of current trends are highly practical and designed for light exertion. Bags are no longer carried as a statement, but serve as a tool for the modern employee. This move seems to be strikingly logical—gone are the days of restrictive formal wear, and stars are allowed more leisure—until it is remembered how much a luxury item can cost. Fanny packs, like the ones Lagreula mentioned, can cost hundreds of dollars, and other items can go into the thousands. Gucci “activewear” pieces go into the thousands. Louis Vuitton sneakers, almost identical to Vans, Converse and Fila, range in price from \$700 to \$1200.

This proves the difference between where these “practical” designs come from and where they end up. The original purpose of a messenger bag, for example, is delivery by bicycle. The bag had to be designed for getting dirty, for potential theft, to distribute the weight of the luggage, and for someone exerting themselves hours at a time. Messenger bags are also sold by Gucci, Hermès, and Prada, all priced around \$1000. Most physical exertion done by people who can afford these bags is by choice—going to the gym, playing sports with friends, while many of the origins of the designs are more due to necessity.

As she mentioned in the above paragraph, the wallet-on-shoes is a real Prada product. With prices varying around 1.5k, the Prada “Technical Combat Booties” are a series of leather shoes stylized like combat boots with a small fabric wallet around the ankle. Combat boots, like the name suggests, originated as military footwear, mass-produced in leather and wood for field combat.<sup>4</sup> Combat boots also have a connection to the Punk scene, a music subculture with heavy rebellious and working-class themes. Punk fashion incorporated items that were considered trash, and had motifs of gender

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, Daniel and Jeremy Bender. “The history of the US Army's uniforms since 1776, in images and depictions.” Business Insider. *Insider Inc.*, 2018. Web. Mar 16 2021.

nonconformity, violence and abrasiveness. Combat boots were just another extension of these ideas— by wearing cheap shoes associated with war and combat (especially when worn by women), they rebelled against peaceful and passive mainstream culture.<sup>3</sup>

Another connection I wanted to establish was that of sneakers. Sneakers are generally designed as athletic wear, and are (with notable exception) meant to be used on the ground, field, or court. Their purpose has shifted, arguably, since the mainstream integration of American hip-hop style. Sneakers are now another statement piece, proven by the prices of many of the most famous brands. Air Jordans, Yeezys, as well as collaborations with luxury brands can bring in thousands of dollars, not only to the companies, but to those who resell them on the secondhand market.<sup>5</sup> Hermès has a line of sneakers as well, which is something I asked her about.

Charlotte Lagreula:

Yeah. Now half of the collection is in sneakers, and you have kinds of sneakers, and you look at sports, or from the US because you are way in advance of this. But what is interesting is not that you just copy the sneakers from the US, but you reinterpret it with your own code and your own background.

One thing, out of all, was curious to me. Why buy a bag for thousands of dollars? Of course, the materials and production cost must be extremely high, but what drives someone to want to purchase one in the first place? Why is there a market for alligator-skin,

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<sup>5</sup> Matthews, Delisia. "I wear, therefore I am: investigating sneakerhead culture, social identity, and brand preference among men." *Fashion and Textiles. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2021. Web. Mar 16 2021.

diamond-encrusted bags at all? Why not just wear thrift-store clothes, like I wrote about in my introduction?

Charlotte Lagreula:

For instance, you can buy a Kelly, and save it in five years, and you have a benefit of 30%. Because you can have only one Kelly for the year, so you are super rich. And you want 10 Kellys this year, you can only have one new, so you buy it on the auction, so you can have your 10 Kellys a year, because you know there is scarcity. You are happy because you've got 10 Kellys, and a girl will buy them and sell them five years after she made the huge benefits, and so she's happy too. So it's like a second market. This is not, we cannot do anything about it, because it's secondhand. So it's not in our hands, but we look at it. I work on dream pieces and exceptional pieces. So it's [a] very limited edition. And when I see my product in auction, it can be 10 times, or 11 times the price that was in the store. Because people can have access to it. In the store they don't even see it. It was already sold. So to have access to put a bigger price on it. And some people were not interested in bags, they just bought to sell it after and do a benefit. It's like buying a flat or a house.

So, based on what Lagreula has told me, one appeal of expensive items is the interest they can accrue. While the designs can be appealing, the main market for these pieces is people wanting to resell. If you want to have 10 Kellys a year, you can resell your original at a higher price, then buy more bags. This makes sense, and it seems profitable to do with any expensive items. One of the last things I was curious about was knockoffs. I discussed previously my interest in thrift stores, and how thrift store clothes were generally priced by

the money that they could earn instead of by the cost of their materials. On a grander scale, this is similar. Clothes made of python skins, gemstones, etc. might cost a lot in terms of material price, but have little value besides what they symbolize.

Knockoffs, then, were the next idea that interested me. If a piece looked exactly like an original, and could be made of the same materials, why was one valuable and another one not?

Charlotte Lagreula:

I understand the copy because it's the mechanism that I told you, you have the first, the idea, and it's very creative. And then it's kind of copied, and you have [the idea] in all the society. So it's a reinterpretation. And you see the codes, because you developed it. So you see it. And it's inspired by that. But when it is a pure copy, it breaks my heart because it's my work to develop this.

As Charlotte is saying, Hermès designs can be copied by others, simply because their ideas are used in other societal contexts as well. In a way, a copy can be a compliment, because it means your ideas are valuable enough to reuse. However, it can also be a cheap cash grab.

Charlotte Lagreula:

...You don't have all the work of creation and thinking it and developing it. So I understand. And I think if, when you create something you want to be the new "it", and people look at it, like "oh, my God." And I understand that people are inspiring these ideas, because it means,

it's become a trend and like your reference, but copy, pure copy, for all the people in the fashion industry, it's the worst thing.

Copy may be flattering, and an understandable practice. Ideas are difficult to conceive, and trends are a defining trait of fashion. But knockoffs are a different story, even “the worst thing,” as Lagreula calls them. This is probably for a couple reasons: firstly, knockoffs deprive an item of value. Arguably, one of the most recognizable Gucci designs is their loafer. It is easy to find many outlets online, selling originals at varying prices. Looking up “Gucci Loafer Knockoff” can yield as many look-alikes and copies as the originals, for a tenth of the price. Because of this, designers, like Lagreula, believe that counterfeit items lower the value of the originals. However, viewed through a class lens, knockoffs can provide accessibility to these trends for those who could otherwise not afford them.

This interview provided me with much context on the subject of luxury fashion. I learned the role of a designer, the competitive business model of high-end design, as well as gaining a better understanding of its uses by consumers. Trickle-down is an important tendency to notice, when studying fashion trends. However, as I have introduced before, there is a “trickle-up” tendency which is just as present, if not more. In the rest of this literature review, I will examine cases from history where this trend is present, and try to conclude their significance.

### **Rebel Without a Cause and The Wild One: Trickle-Up in the 1950s**

The 1950s were a huge turning point in 20th century America. The decade after WWII was one of America trying to establish its identity. This coincided with the creation of the American Teenager. After WWII, the teenager was an entirely new demographic, who

was able to get jobs independent from their parents. This made them a brand new market, without preconceived identity. One aspiration, as was portrayed by the “greaser culture” of the time, was found in the movie “Rebel Without a Cause,” specifically of James Dean’s character. This movie follows troubled youth rebelling against the society of the time. There are many reasons why a young person might aspire to embody the attitude and message of these characters. In “Rebel,” the characters are confident, respected, and sharp, which are all traits a young boy might aspire to be. However, they are also troubled and resentful of society, which makes them more fleshed out and relatable for the youth of the time. A fear present in the culture was the “corruption” of youth, which was something the main characters address head-on, and even embody.<sup>6</sup>

The main characters of RWaC all embody a similar angst; a dissatisfaction of society created by a familial rift. The idea of “the family” as a basis of societal structure was a popular one at the time. All of the main characters exemplify this, to some extent. James Dean’s character, Jim Stark, grows up in a household with an overbearing mother and a submissive father (this was made in 1955). Natalie Wood’s character, Judy, is ignored and shamed by her father for being promiscuous. Finally, Plato (played by Sal Mineo) is abandoned by his family completely, and left in the care of his housekeeper. This premise can appeal to a wide variety of teens in different familial situations, who might resent their parents, either for being disapproving or being “old fashioned.” The characters are simultaneously framed as being delinquents, down-trodden by society, as well as relatable middle-class youth of the 1950s. This created an appeal in young, especially white middle-class, men, to present themselves like James Dean. Through this presentation, they

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<sup>6</sup> Konzett, Delia. “Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterwork.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. Web. Mar 16 2021.

rejected the blandness of white middle-to-upper-class stability, and embraced rebellion against the family structure, the “system,” and American tradition.<sup>2</sup>

## **Punk**

Punk is a popular youth counterculture movement, based on themes of rebellion against major establishments. Punk originates in the 1970s, both in Britain, and the USA. Punk often has a radical political element, including both the Alt-Right (white power skinhead/ bonehead movements) or Anarcho-Communism/Leftism (Anarcho-punk/ Riot grrrl). Punk heavily relies on modes of self-expression, which can include music, art, and of course, fashion. Punk fashion, like other forms of punk art, includes a heavy element of “pushing the boundaries;” it often includes trash, combat wear, fetish wear, and overall “extreme looks,” such as body piercings, spiked/dyed hair, distressed materials, etc.

A heavy inclination of punk was to reject middle-class comfort and choose homelessness. This move was seen as rebellious against institutions such as the government at the time. It also gave a sense of authenticity to the movement. One anonymous punk youth explains the difference: “Everyone got called a poseur, but you could tell the difference: Did you live in a rat-hole and dye your hair pink and wreck every towel you owned and live hand-to-mouth on Olde English 800 and potato chips? Or did you live at home and do everything your mom told you and then sneak out?”<sup>7</sup>

This rebellious youth sentiment can be traced back to the Teddy-Boy style, which appeared as a movement directly after WWII, and in which groups of teens copied Edwardian styles. Most of these teens were seen as violent or rebellious, despite their

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<sup>7</sup> Traber, Daniel S. “L.A.’s “White Minority”: Punk and the Contradictions of Self-Marginalization.” *Cultural Critique*. *University of Minnesota Press*, 2001. Web. March 16 2021.



“proper” appearance. These clothes became increasingly marketed towards teenagers, as this age range became a new marketable demographic. One designer who got her roots in designing these Teddy-style clothes was none other than Vivienne Westwood. Westwood, who is still a prominent designer today, can be cited as one of the original inspirations for the punk “look.”

What I found surprising about Westwood, which seemed to contradict my preconceived notions of Punk, was her background. Her beginnings as a designer were in experimental luxury clothing. Her clothes referenced fetish gear, radical politics and blatant sexuality (all of these much more taboo then than now), and her clients included Siouxsie Sioux, the Sex Pistols, and underground icons such as Toyah Willcox, Margi Clarke, and Gerlinde Costiff. This new style combined retro elements as well as experimental symbols. While this shop influenced much of Punk, these were luxury clothes. They were bought mostly by rock stars, and those who could afford them.

Vivienne Westwood is, to this day, an incredibly established designer. Many of her pieces go for thousands of dollars. Her clothes have grown more tame over time, as one newer client of hers is Theresa May, who wore a plaid pantsuit to deliver a pro-Brexit speech.<sup>8</sup>

## **Hip hop**

One of the best examples I can think of of the phenomenon of “trickle-up” is with hip hop. Hip hop is a movement coming out of the Black and Latino communities of 1970s

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<sup>8</sup> Guerra, Paula. “Today Your Style, Tomorrow The World: punk, fashion and visual imaginary.” *Moda Palavra. Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina*, 2019. Web. Mar 16 2021.

America, particularly in New York City. It is a subculture encompassing music, dance, art, and of course, fashion. Much of hip hop utilises sportswear, jewelry, and luxury brands, and is an origin point for much of the mainstreaming of sportswear (especially that of sneakers). Hip hop has become incredibly mainstream these past decades—music genres like rap dominating the charts since the 90s, and most modern-day brands are undeniably influenced by this style. Brands like FUBU, Adidas, Ralph Lauren and NIKE partially helped originate this style, and nowadays Supreme and Off-White are recognizable staples.

One extremely recognizable topic of hip hop is race- and class-based oppression. The subculture originated from people facing administrations which actively worked to imprison, impoverish, and overall marginalize them. The music and messages they sent were rebellious, because they had to be. This movement focused on creating a sense of Black self-identity and pride, as well as promoting individual expression.

This was seen as more desirable than white middle class life, more defined, vibrant, and rebellious. Comparatively, white, middle class identity had no desirable defining features. Copying and stealing these ideas was an easy way to seem “rebellious,” or “counterculture.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Brother Sharp**

Brother Sharp is a rather interesting case study of a man living in mainland China who became an internet sensation. The man was severely mentally ill, as well as homeless and drug addicted. His “style” incorporated large winter-wear, as well as women's clothing and other pieces found in the trash. A photo of him circulated the chinese internet in the 2010s, nicknaming him “Brother Sharp,” and calling him “the world’s handsomest homeless

man.” His likeness was used in advertisements and TV, and only years later was he compensated at all for his fame. This aspiration to homelessness is not only seen in internet culture or even just the mainstream, but by luxury fashion as well. Brother Sharp strikes me as an interesting case due to the fact that he was barely compensated. This is one case of heroin chic—a movement partially embodied by the assimilation of grunge and similar styles, which romanticizes/trivializes poverty, mental illness, and drug addiction.<sup>9</sup> This might be the most direct case of my analysis of trickle-up: fashion houses taking ideas from people struggling to survive in an attempt to seem “counter-culture.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Most, if not all, modern styles reference those of times past. Many originate from working-class utilitarian backgrounds, others from higher-class luxury ideas. Fashion used to follow a more linear “trickle-up” pattern, as the working classes aspired to present more like the “elites.” However, as time moved on, working-class subcultures began to form independently of the main trends, many of which embraced a rebellious sentiment against the upper-class. These trends were embraced due to the nature of them seeming inherently rebellious, fresh, or more desirable than the wearers’ current situation. Styles send signals (whether or not intentional) to the world about appearances—how much care you can/do put into your appearance, what groups you align with, what interests you have, your gender, and much more.

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<sup>9</sup> Moir, Aiden Marie. “TRANSIENT VOGUE: THE COMMODIFICATION AND SPECTACLE OF THE VAGRANT OTHER.” *York University*, 2013. Web. March 16 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Cole, James Daniel “Dumpster Chic and Haute Homeless: Placing Brother Sharp in a fashion industry continuum.” *Critical Studies in Men’s Fashion. Intellect Books*, 2018. Web. March 16, 2021.

Another important piece of context I learned during the course of this lit review was the role luxury fashion has. Besides being another form of class distinction, it has a role as a financial investment.

However, I still feel like much of this is still conceptual. In this literature review, I haven't proposed a solution, and I have barely presented a problem. So what if fashion borrows from varying sources? So do most forms of art—what makes this one different?

This trend, I have found, can be compared to cultural appropriation. By trivializing a look for its “rebellious” or “counterculture” value, it reduces the original message. Many creators or inspirations for looks can also go uncompensated and unrecognized for their actions. For example, as mentioned before, Brother Sharp, went unpaid, while his image was referenced and used in Chinese pop culture.

I also frame luxury fashion, as a whole, in a negative light during this literature review. Based off of the interview with Lagreula, it is overly simplistic to conclude that the entire practice is negative. It creates jobs, cultural symbols, and if anything, its use of trickle-up brings marginalized subcultures into the mainstream. This can give them exposure and representation. This doesn't eliminate its ironic qualities—as stated before, Vivienne Westwood was a huge counter-cultural icon, who is now worn by Theresa May. Combat boots, an item more-or-less regarded as trash, and tied to another counter-cultural movement, can sell for upwards of a thousand dollars.

I used a wide scope of resources in the creation of this project. Therefore, it is important to address possible methodological flaws. I used essays from various time periods, and have cherry picked sections from books, without finishing them. Lagreula spoke in French during the interview, and some of the quotes were translated later into

English. I also pulled from non-academic articles to cover topics like Brother Sharp. I would suggest, if someone were to do more research on this topic, more insider interviews with designers, and a better analysis of current trends. Hip-hop, punk, and similar trends are, in a way “coming back,” at the time of writing, but I analyze them in the context of their creation and later assimilation. If someone were to analyze trends in this way, I would propose they examine more contemporary ones, as that might be more understandable and more powerful. The reader might relate more, as they themselves might partake in them.

Completing this literature review has definitely changed my perspective. I know that class and fashion are undeniably related, however their relationship has much more nuance than I had expected. I learned about the cyclical nature of trends—as one symbol becomes mainstream, its rebellious nature diminishes, and is gradually replaced by a newer, flashier, and more significant idea. Rebellion has looked like wearing literal garbage, Edwardian fashion, sportswear, office wear, or the color purple. As part of my JRPS, I will need to complete a separate artistic project explaining another aspect of this topic. I think that I should analyze more of the individual contexts for these trends, and how the symbolism was significant during these specific times/places. I think that this will help by further explaining the importance of these trends, and the social reactions they had.

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