

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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In this thesis, I argue that the cooptation and commodification of young peoples' creative expressions of individuality through the practice of "coolhunting" causes alienation within said young people and is, therefore, unethical. I support this claim by using Marxist theory of the Frankfurt Institute, viz., Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's critique of enlightenment, to show how society has become sterilized by the "sameness" formula of "the culture industry." Thereafter, I explain how a small number of young people known as "trendsetters" penetrate the sameness boundary by originating genuinely creative expressions of individuality, and I show how coolhunters extract, co-opt, and commodify those expressions. I then discuss the ramifications of this process for both individuals and broader society, and I propose a course of action that counteracts these effects by reinvigorating the human creative imagination.

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Coolhunting: The Commodification of Creative Expression  
and the Alienation of Youth

by  
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Mark W. Fillmore, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of three transformative years as a graduate student at Oregon State University. As a student here, I have acquired new conceptual tools that have accorded me the opportunity to reflect upon aspects of my life that I previously neither understood nor could describe. Additionally, these tools have refocused the lenses through which I view the world, and for this I am indeed grateful. Consequently, over the last three years, I have discovered more about myself than I imagined possible.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Shannon and son Kyle. Shannon has been with me during my darkest hours of desperation and frustration and has never settled for capitulation. Kyle is my inspiration. His smile has given me the mental fortitude to complete this thesis.

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Coolhunting: The Commodification of Creative Expression  
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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The formative teenage years are often the most challenging, yet also the most creative, of an individual's life. For many, the teen-age is also a time when one begins to form her or his own ideas, beliefs, and opinions about the world around her or him. Along with forming ideas about the world, many teens begin to shape and construct the individual they will become for the remainder of their life. Often, many of these ideas are expressed outwardly, e.g., the type of clothes one wears, the hairstyle one adopts, or the type of music to which one listens. Teens develop new ways of outwardly expressing themselves, most often, either to differentiate themselves from broader society or to identify themselves with a particular peer group. However, when considering new or creative outward expressions, an interesting question arises: How long will teenagers, or any other age group for that matter, be able to produce new ways of expressing individuality in a society, such as our own, that is flooded by the ubiquitous, glaring clutter of marketing and advertising? In other words, if there is a marketing ploy for every imaginable niche, style, or option, how can anyone hope to come up with new ways of outwardly expressing self-identity or individuality? Furthermore, considering the circumstances, is it even reasonable to attempt to do so? As surprising as it may be, there are individuals embedded within this environment who manage to come up with new, creative ways of demonstrating individuality. However, as I shall explain, the young people in our society coming up with

genuinely new ways of expressing individuality outwardly are not able to do so for long.

Within this thesis, I will show how creative expressions of individuality have become commodified and thereby transformed into profit through a marketing-research practice identified as “trend scouting,” “trend spotting,” “cool chasing,” or, the most commonly used term, “coolhunting.” I have chosen to focus on coolhunting because of the type of “game” coolhunters are hunting: a specific group of young people they refer to as “trendsetters.” A coolhunter is an individual who attempts to locate the next cool or big thing that is supposed to hit the teenage landscape. The goal of the coolhunter is to spot the next cultural or social trend, before it is actually a trend, e.g., bands or types of music, styles of clothing or hair, etc., and take it back to a company that will then transform that expression into a commodity that can be sold. Ultimately, the intent is to produce the new commodity and have it sitting on retail shelves precisely at the same time the trend breaks into the mainstream; thereby, supplying the demand instantaneously.

I am going to argue that what coolhunters are actually doing is co-opting the creative expressions of a specific group of teenagers and selling them as a kind of treasure to interested companies and corporations, and I am going to show why this is an unethical practice. To be concise, first, I will explain the problems that will inevitably arise for the individual whose creative expressions are co-opted by demonstrating, mainly using Marxist theory of the Frankfurt School, how this

practice creates a harmful divide within said individual. I will argue that this separation leads to an inevitable alienation of the “hunted” teenager from her or his actual “self,” i.e., the teenager will begin to feel removed from her or his own self-identity. Second, I will describe the broader cultural and societal upheavals that will result from this practice. Third, I will conclude by suggesting a possible solution to this problem that will benefit both individuals and society in the long term.

Underlying my argument is the assumption that Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism is relevant in contemporary society. As materialism has become a major focus in Western life and as wealth and ownership in the industrialized world becomes increasingly concentrated, Marx’s description of the experience of workers in such an environment is as relevant as ever. Additionally, I assume the Frankfurt School critique of mass culture and society is relevant because of the ubiquitous nature of marketing and advertising in the contemporary industrialized world. Therefore, I will proceed from these points, but I will not offer justification for either of these theories within this thesis.

Thus far, within chapter one, I briefly introduced the topic of my thesis and described the assumptions for which I will not argue. I will dedicate the remainder of this first chapter to three subjects: 1) I will explain the goals and contents of chapters two, three, and four, 2) in order to establish definitional consensus, diffused throughout that explanation, I will clarify the meanings of several terms I

use throughout my thesis, and 3) I will describe related concepts I will not address in my thesis and explain why those concepts lie outside its scope.

In introducing the topic of my thesis, I used the first of these essential terms: individuality. Therefore, I will establish, here, a succinct definition of this term. The description articulated in Webster's New World College Dictionary is indicative of the meaning I intend to convey within my thesis and, therefore, will be a foundational component of that definition. According to Webster's, individuality is: "1) the sum of the characteristics or qualities that set one person or thing apart from others; individual character 2) the condition of being individual, or different from others" (728). This articulation is near my intention, yet it lacks an emphasis on distinctiveness. Thus, in order to include this emphasis, hereafter my accepted definition of "individuality" will be: *a set of characteristics or components establishing one person as not only different from others but also as a unique being in and of her or himself.*

Throughout my argument, I use three terms to conceptually enhance or fine-tune my description of the practice of coolhunting in order to illustrate the experience of the subject—in this instance, the young person being coolhunted. That is, I describe the practice of coolhunting as the *extraction*, *cooptation*, and *commodification* of genuinely creative expressions. Here, I use these terms metaphorically because expressions are not things—at least not things initially. However, I also use these terms in a literal sense to explain the processes of the culture industry, which are similar to that of natural resource extraction. Because

the culture industry perceives society as a resource, this language is helpful in describing how coolhunters operate within society. I use “extraction” to describe the method a coolhunter uses, initially, to draw out and capture a creative expression from a young person. Once a coolhunter extracts a creative expression, she or he employs the cooptation of said expression. I use the term “cooptation” or “co-opt” to explain how the coolhunter appropriates or designates the expression as her or his own. Thereafter, the coolhunter puts into motion the commodification of the expression. When I refer to the “commodification” of an expression, I am using this term to describe the utilization of the expression in order to create a commodity or product, i.e., the expression is used as a template to create a bona fide manufactured good, intended for consumption in broader society. These concepts are important for my thesis; therefore, hereafter, when I refer to these concepts, I will point to these definitions.

An important distinction to make, before moving further, is the difference between what I will describe as “giving expression” and commodification. Within this thesis, I am going to refer to a hypothetical example of an expression of individuality that is coolhunted in order to explain the process of coolhunting and the significant difference between giving an expression and the commodification of that expression. My hypothetical example involves a young woman named Bobbie. Bobbie loves to garden, and she feels that gardening, as an action, expresses a significant piece of who she essentially is. Because gardening is important to Bobbie, she decides that she is going to express her “gardenerness”

outwardly to society is some way that differentiates herself from others. Bobbie decides one way to express herself in this way is by wearing a straw flowerpot on her head as a hat. In expressing her gardenerness by wearing the straw flowerpot hat, Bobbie is giving an expression. The expression Bobbie gives is the outward display of her gardenerness to society, and she believes that this new expression sets her apart from others in broader society. Therefore, giving expression is the process of outwardly demonstrating an essential component of one's self in a differentiating way. Giving expression is not a new idea; it is done by many people daily, e.g., it can arise in writing poetry, composing music, creating a sculpture, or as I have explained—and will further explain—in wearing a straw flowerpot hat. Like the process of commodification, giving expression involves creating things or objects. The difference, however, is that the intention of giving expression is to demonstrate as essential component of one's individuality outwardly, whereas the process of commodification brings products into a marketplace to be sold.

Chapter two of my thesis is divided into two sections. In the first section, I will explain in detail, through an explication of existing literature, the practice of coolhunting, e.g., how it is performed, what makes an effective coolhunter, and what specific type of characteristics coolhunters look for in teenagers. Consequently, this explanation will reveal a deficiency within extent literature, which is the lack of a critical ethical analysis of coolhunting.

One perspective of coolhunting I will not address in my thesis is what Peter M. Gloor and Scott Cooper refer to as “swarms” (45). In their book, Coolhunting: Chasing Down the Next Big Thing, Gloor and Cooper describe a different sort of “collective” coolhunting (45). They compare groups of people to swarms of bees, i.e., just as a swarm of bees is better at accomplishing day-to-day bee activities, “A group of people is better at solving a complex task than an expert” (46). Gloor and Cooper argue that groups of people are better at predicting what will happen in markets than are individuals. In many instances, I agree with Gloor and Cooper; however, within this thesis, I am focusing on the particularities of individual experience. Therefore, I am not going to address their idea of “collective” coolhunting any further because it is a different sort of concept that deals with broader group notions and collaborative market analysis.

Along similar conceptual lines is diffusion theory. Diffusion theory is used as a sort of framework to explain the movement of ideas throughout broad social networks. In order to describe this concept, Everett M. Rogers, in his book Diffusion of Innovations, writes: “*Diffusion* is the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas” (5 original italics). Because diffusion theory is used to describe the *spread* of new ideas throughout society, and I am concentrating on the origination/creation of new expressions within individuals, its theoretical application resides just beyond my focus in this thesis. Therefore, diffusion theory

is another subject I will not address any further within my discussion of coolhunting.

In the second section of chapter two, I will explain the theoretical framework I use to engage in an ethical analysis of coolhunting. I will pull from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's discussion, concerning the regression of enlightenment toward ideology, the concept of the infection of "sameness" on every facet of modern society by "the culture industry" (94). Here, Horkheimer and Adorno describe the culture industry, first, as a "system," i.e., as a combination of media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc., that works to both restrain human curiosity and induce individual apathy (94). Second, they explain it in terms reminiscent of an industrial factory, i.e., they depict the culture industry as a factory churning out cultural artifacts, products, and ideas that fit into a framework that has proven profitable over time, which is how and where the idea of "sameness" originates.

Within this discussion, and throughout my thesis, I will use the term "ideology" as defined by Nick Crossley in his book, Key Concepts in Critical Social Theory. In explaining the history of this term, Crossley writes that "ideology" refers to "bodies of ideas which, in the view of those referring to them as ideological, are false or unrealistic and yet, because believed to be true, have...negative political consequences." Moreover, he continues, "it came to mean systems of belief, often tacit and taken-for-granted, which serve to legitimate unequal forms of social relations, usually class relations, to the disadvantage of the

poorer and less powerful party to those relationships” (147). In sum, for Crossley, *ideologies are sets or systems of beliefs held by individuals or groups of individuals about the world that are false or unrealistic and serve to legitimize unequal forms of social relations*. Consequently, hereafter in this thesis, the definition established by Crossley will be my accepted definition of “ideology.”

Following my explanation of Horkheimer and Adorno in the second section of chapter two, I will explain Karl Marx’s terms: life-activity, species life, and species being. By doing so, I will make clear the fundamental value of creativity to not only individuality but also humanness. Then, I will draw key concepts from Marx’s discussion of “estranged labor,” viz., his theory of alienation (71). Within his “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx explains:

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces...(and)...an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally (71, original italics).

Ultimately, Marx argues that this process of commodification creates a divide within the individual. The result of which is an alienated individual who suffers from confusion about how she or he should live not only an ethical life but also a fully autonomous human life. Explicating these components of Marx’s work in chapter two will form the basis of an important structure upon which I will build my argument in chapter three.

To begin my working definition of the term “alienation,” I will refer once again to Crossley’s work. On page three, he writes:

At the most general level it [alienation] refers to a separation or estrangement of human beings either from each other, from their own life or self, or from society. This separation can be either subjective, in the sense that agents feel alienated, objective, in the sense that they actually are separated from something whether they feel it or not, or both.

Here he explains that to be alienated from something is to be physically or psychologically separated or disconnected from some component of humanness, i.e., either from one’s self-identity, others, or broader society. Moreover, he clarifies that the Marxist “conception of alienation is philosophical,” which is to say: “It compares what human beings are with what they could be and does not focus on the psychological question of whether workers feel alienated” (6-7). In other words, according to Crossley, Marxist alienation is a conceptual method used to explain an actual separation of some kind between people, within individuals, or both; however, it is not a method for evaluating an individual’s psychological state.

In order to refine, even further, the alienated component of humanness with which I am concerned in this thesis, I will append the aforementioned definition presented by Crossley with the assistance of Tim Dant. In his work, Critical Social Theory, Dant writes: “The concept of alienation for Marx...expressed the separation of individuals from what gives a human life meaning: actions in a world that makes that world his” (9). Thus, this separation is from the very component that makes it possible for us to shape the world into the place we want it to be, i.e.,

our ingenuity, cleverness, or creativity. Therefore, to borrow from both Crossley and Dant, *alienation is a separation, within the individual, that limits one's ability to live a meaningful human life*. Accordingly, this will be my accepted definition of “alienation” throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Additionally, within my analysis, I will be using “self,” “sense of self,” and “self-identity” quite often. Therefore, in order to clarify exactly what I mean by self-identity or sense of self, I refer to George Herbert Mead’s seminal piece, The Self as Social Structure. Within his article, Mead writes: “The self...is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (31). Moreover, he argues that the “self” is the social development of both an object, i.e., a me, and a subject, i.e., an I. An individual experiences her or himself as an object in much the same way she or he experiences others as objects. According to Mead, the self must be understood as part of the larger social group, just as others are seen as parts of that group. This is achieved through normal social experience and interaction between an individual and members of the larger social group (31). It is only after one understands her or his self as an object, i.e., as a me, that she or he can understand her or his self as a subject, i.e., as an I. In short, according to Mead, *the “self” is a social construction that arises through life experiences and interactions with others and is first understood as an object and only later understood as a subject*. Thus, hereafter in this thesis when I refer to “the self,” the concept to which I will be pointing is this one developed by Mead.

The concepts of the self and individuality interconnect in an important way and both are crucial to my argument. Therefore, it is imperative that I explain clearly how these ideas fit together. Per my earlier established definitions: First, individuality is a set of characteristics or components establishing one person as not only different from others but also as a unique being in and of her or himself. Second, the self is socially constructed through a combination of life experiences and interactions with others. Consequently, because individuality is the set of characteristics that establishes a person as a unique being, the self must be one of the characteristics that make up the larger concept of individuality, albeit a very important characteristic. In other words, individuality is the umbrella concept under which the self resides. Henceforth, it will be important to remember how these concepts fit together because I use them frequently.

In chapter three, I will argue that coolhunting is an unethical practice because it leads to the alienation of some teenagers from their self-identities, senses of self, or, to use the words of Marx, species beings. I begin my discussion by tracing the history of the concept of the self within Western philosophy, culture, and society. In demonstrating the value Westerners place on this idea, I will have a solid foundation on which to build my thesis. At this point, the demonstration of cultural homogenization will be essential. In order to do this, I will draw further information from writers of the Frankfurt School. Referring to them once again, Horkheimer and Adorno, in their Dialectic of Enlightenment, write, “something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape” (97). Here they explain that all

consumers fit into one or more of the various categories concocted by the culture industry and that it is virtually impossible to create something for which there is not already a market. I will argue that it may be rare, yet it is possible to generate new and creative expressions in such a society. Thereafter, it will be possible to show the connections between creativity and expressing individuality, which will make clear the value of creativity in a society dominated by the clutter of the culture industry.

Once I establish creativity as a necessary component of the Western sense of self and individuality, I will draw from Marx's manuscripts and argue that the loss of creativity actually makes one less of a particular being and more a member of the faceless consumer crowd. As a member of the crowd, one begins to express less of one's own life and more of one's alienated life. In other words, as the value of one's particular life diminishes, the value of one's alienated life intensifies and eventually is perceived to be one's actual life. Thus, I will conclude that the commodification of genuinely creative expressions through the practice of coolhunting diminishes individuality and leads to a life of alienation from one's actual self-identity.

After explaining the ethical problems that arise for the individual, I will describe how these issues escalate to affect society as a whole. I will argue that society will experience at least two consequences as direct results of the commodification of genuinely creative expressions: 1) consumer options will decrease, which is antithetical to the expressed goal of coolhunters, and 2) creative

expression, as a whole, will diminish significantly. Thereafter, I will theorize as to how these consequences might affect broader Western society.

Exposing these ethical problems with the practice of coolhunting is only part of my goal within this thesis. My other objective is to reveal and underscore a comprehensible example of an identifiable practice within society that perpetuates the culture industry's formula of sameness. By showing in chapter two how the practice of coolhunting is implemented, I will demonstrate in chapter three that coolhunting, as a qualitative research practice, is merely one device among many used by the larger culture industry to pursue its own ends.

In the fourth chapter, I will summarize and restate the ethical problem with the practice of coolhunting. I will then propose a solution that will not only expose the culture industry's squashing of creativity but also instigate a broad societal recollection of the value of genuine creativity and individuality. In doing so, I will show how my solution, in the long term, will benefit both individual young people and society as a whole. I will conclude by considering potential difficulties and possible objections that may arise because of my thesis and, furthermore, propose solutions to those objections.

## CHAPTER 2 – WHAT IS COOLHUNTING?

Understanding the practice of coolhunting and the contemporary discussion surrounding it is vital to my argument. Therefore, I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I will offer a detailed description of the practice of coolhunting. Here I will demonstrate 1) the existence and 2) history of coolhunting in relevant and existing literature. I will discuss at length not only the practice, but also all the sources from which I draw relevant information pertaining to coolhunting. Furthermore, by explicating various critiques of coolhunting from within this literature, I will demonstrate that an ethical analysis of coolhunting has not yet been performed.

In section two, I will explain the theoretical framework I will use to engage in an ethical analysis of coolhunting. Firstly, this will involve delineating components of Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, especially their critique of "the culture industry." This component will secure the basis of my argument by demonstrating how, within our modern society, the culture industry has made it very difficult for individuals not only to express themselves creatively but also simply to be creative beings. Secondly, I will explain Karl Marx's concepts of life-activity, species life, and species being. By doing so, I will make clear the fundamental value of creativity not only to individuality but also to humanness itself. These two explanations will draw out the current predicament we are facing within our society, which is, in short, that the culture industry is

deadening the vital creative component of humanness. Thirdly, I will conclude this section by describing Marx's theory of alienation. This will involve a brief introduction to his broader concept of "estranged labor" because it is within this structure that his theory of alienation arises. These descriptions will expose the framework I will use in chapter three to perform my ethical analysis of the practice of coolhunting.

Throughout my literature review, I found a common thread. Nearly every author who mentions coolhunting refers to an essay titled "The Coolhunt," by Malcolm Gladwell, which is consistently recognized as the original piece describing this practice. Gladwell's article has become a foundational piece for nearly anyone who writes about or explores the practice of coolhunting. Therefore, I will use Gladwell's article as a guide to negotiate a path through my description of the practice of coolhunting. Along the way, I will discuss how various authors have added to and enhanced this discussion.

Where did this concept of the coolhunt originate? This type of research has been ongoing since the late 1960s or early 1970s. However, the explosion that pushed this practice into the mainstream and, therefore, into being taken seriously, did not occur until the early 1990s. In his March 1997 article, "The Coolhunt," published in *The New Yorker*, Gladwell describes this practice and gives it its respective name. His explanation makes obvious the coolhunter's goal, which is chasing down or discovering what she or he hopes will be the next big or cool thing in youth culture.

Gladwell does not offer an explicit definition of “cool,” but he uses the term in much the same way it is used in mainstream society today, which would be something such as *currently fashionable and attractive*. This definition becomes clearer as he describes what coolhunters are looking for in their quest for the cool. Gladwell learns that cool is not a thing or an object but, instead, a human characteristic (86-87). Cool describes a type of person: an individual who has established her or himself as different from not only the majority of people in mainstream society but also from her or his own group of peers (Gladwell 87). Cool does not fit into a mold. Consequently, it arises in a variety of forms. Therefore, people who express these characteristics can be found in a variety of locations, and it is the job of the coolhunter to locate and identify these people (Gladwell 87).

In order to understand the practice of coolhunting, one must understand the goal of the coolhunt. As previously described, the goal of the coolhunt is to discover the next cool or big thing that is going to hit teen culture before it actually surfaces, which entails locating the right type of person, i.e., a cool person. Generally, coolhunters are looking for new expressions in fashion, music, sports, and other things important within the world of teenagers that can be later transformed into new and/or different products.

In his article, Gladwell describes his encounter with two of the original coolhunters: DeeDee Gordon and Baysie Wightman. At the beginning of his piece, Gladwell describes two analyses made by Wightman and Gordon that

established their methods as credible in the world of trend analysis and demonstrated their services as profitable to the fashion/culture industry. Wightman's first big hit was in 1992 when she worked for the Converse Shoe Company. That year, based on her recommendations, Converse brought back the One Star (which was a sneaker Converse produced in the 1970s) and it "quickly became the signature shoe of the retro era" (Gladwell 78). Later that year, Gordon went to work with Wightman at Converse and is credited with predicting the sandal craze that exploded in the latter part of 1992. Together, with a fashion designer, Gordon and Wightman "came up with the idea of making a retro sneaker-sandal, cutting the back off the One Star and putting a thick outsole on it" (Gladwell 78). Gordon made this prediction based on observations she made in Los Angeles of teenage women dressed as "cholos (Mexican gangsters)," who were wearing "tube socks and shower sandals" (Gladwell 78). Once Wightman and Gordon's services were recognized as a profitable route to the youth market, many big-brand manufactures that wanted an insight into youth culture began enlisting Wightman and Gordon's newly developed coolhunting services.

As more companies discovered that research into youth culture was available, many began searching for people who performed this type of work. Thus, as the desire for coolhunters increased, more people began these types of trend analysis ventures of their own. Consequently, coolhunting spread throughout the nation and, eventually, because of increased access to the Internet, to most of the industrialized world. For example, the coolhunting firm

Trendwatching.com claims that it scans “...the globe for the most promising consumer trends, insights and related hands-on business ideas,” and it continues, “we rely on our network of 8,000+ spotters in more than 70 countries worldwide” to do so (“About Us”).<sup>1</sup> Quite rapidly, the practice of coolhunting, which began with just a few individuals, soon became a global phenomenon.

The coolhunter’s desire is to bridge the gap between the cutting edge and the mainstream by spotting and collecting trends on the cutting edge, which are about to break into the mainstream, before the people in the mainstream pick up on those trends. Beginning on page 78, Gladwell defines three rules of “the cool,” which he uses to further describe the practice of coolhunting: 1) cool cannot be observed because it will take flight, 2) companies cannot manufacture cool; cool can only be observed, and 3) cool can only be observed by people who are cool themselves. These three rules clarify the specific goals of coolhunting and, therefore, will be explained in the following passages.

Gladwell’s first rule of the cool is, “the quicker the chase, the quicker the flight” (78). Here, the notion is the faster coolhunters are able to identify cool expressions, the quicker the originators of the cool expressions begin to come up with, and move onto, new ways of expressing their individuality. This becomes problematic for coolhunters because the better they become at identifying cool, the quicker cool moves on. That is to say, as soon as coolhunters identify something as cool, often, that thing is no longer cool because it has been identified as such.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on worldwide coolhunting see Kitty Shea’s informative article at: <http://www.swstir.com/use.do?method=exclusive&id=326>.

This predicament increases the turnover rate of cool significantly and makes the discovery of cool a difficult occupation for the individuals searching for it. Simply stated, Gladwell writes, “because we have coolhunters like DeeDee and Baysie, cool changes more quickly, and because cool changes more quickly, we need coolhunters like DeeDee and Baysie” (78). This is a conceivable problem and might make it seem impossible to identify cool without forcing whatever that thing may be into the dustbin of coolness. However, it is possible to identify cool—Gordon and Wightman’s success attest to this fact. What the first rule of the cool does is mainly emphasize the importance of the type of person who can be a successful coolhunter.

Earlier I discussed the certain type of information coolhunters are after: the next cool or big thing about to hit teen culture. Additionally, in describing what Gladwell seems to mean by “cool,” I briefly introduced the type of teenager for which coolhunters are searching. At this point, I will provide more depth to the description of the type of teenager the coolhunter is after, which is a very important piece of the coolhunting puzzle.

In his interview with Douglas Rushkoff on P.B.S.’s *Frontline*, Gladwell remarked, “‘Coolhunting’ is structured around, really, a search for a certain kind of personality and a certain kind of player in a given social network” (Rushkoff 5). Coolhunters are not looking for average mall shopping, fast food eating teens who look to others for ideas about coolness. They are looking for a specific type of individual. For example, DeeDee Gordon explains: “We look for kids who are

ahead of the pack because they're going to influence what all the other kids do. We look for the 20 percent, the trendsetters, that are going to influence the other 80 percent” (Rushkoff 6). Coolhunters have titled this specific type of teenager an “early adopter,” an “alpha kid,” or most commonly a “trendsetter.”<sup>2</sup> These kids come up with the new ways of expressing themselves that eventually trickle down to the other 80 percent of consumers, both young and old. Since they are cool, trendsetters have a lot of influence over their friends. Trendsetters are able to wear different clothes, listen to different music, and try new things because they have the trust and respect of their friends. For this reason, they are not afraid to stand out or to look different from others, including their own group of friends—which is uncommon among teenagers.

The stratification of teen culture tends to support these factors of trust and respect amongst peer groups regarding trendsetters. Social hierarchies are prevalent in most high schools, and trendsetters—who are the “hippest” and coolest teens—inhabit the upper most level of this hierarchy. In his book, How Hits Happen, Winslow Farrell describes the personality of a trendsetter as a “risk taker.” He writes, “certain circumstances prompt risk takers to reach out and try to spread the word [, e.g.,] about the attributes of certain rock and roll groups” (39). Trendsetters are able to reach out and take risks in this way because, Farrell continues, “the more active, ‘hip’ strata may have more say [, e.g.,] in what bands

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<sup>2</sup> “Trendsetters” is the most commonly used term by coolhunters and many authors to describe this group of influential teenagers. Therefore, throughout the remainder of this thesis I will use the term “trendsetters” to describe this sought after group.

are cool than those in the lower level, who might be shy to express their opinions for fear of being ‘wrong,’ or embarrassed, in front of their peers” (39). Because they are comfortable expressing their opinions about new things, which often involve taking risks, trendsetters are very influential when it comes to introducing new forms of self-expression into the mainstream. Because trendsetters are responsible for this introduction, the goal of the coolhunter is to locate the trendsetter, befriend her/him, and identify these new forms of self-expression before they trickle down to the other 80 percent of the population.

Here is where Gladwell’s second rule of the cool emerges: companies cannot manufacture cool; cool can only be observed (84). With regard to cool things or objects, specific individuals in society decide what to adopt as cool or how to alter a product to make it cool, and coolhunters describe this specific group of individuals as trendsetters. According to the second rule of the cool, companies cannot create cool. However, it is possible for companies to intervene in the process of bringing about cool if they possess informed intelligence about what or, as I have explained, who is cool. For example, “A company can...put its shoes on really cool celebrities and on fashion runways and on MTV” (Gladwell 84). However, unless a company knows what celebrity is cool at any given time and what type of shoe is cool at that same time, the company is bound to miss the teen market with their advertising. This is one area in which the services and value of coolhunters is easily recognizable to companies. Even though companies cannot

create cool, having an insight into what teens might think is cool (in the near future) gives companies an upper hand in the advertising business.

The basis of the second rule of cool is that cool is not a physical object or something that can be manufactured; it is a characteristic. Cool is something that exists within a person and not within an inanimate object. According to Gladwell:

The key to coolhunting, then, is to look for cool people first and cool things later, and not the other way around. Since cool things are always changing, you can't look for them, because the very fact they are cool means you have no idea what to look for. What you would be doing is thinking back on what was cool before and extrapolating, which is about as useful as presuming that because the Dow rose ten points yesterday it will rise another ten points today. Cool people, on the other hand, are a constant (86).

Here Gladwell clarifies that coolhunters are not looking for the cool expressions trendsetters originate, e.g., new fashions, hairstyles, or types of music, but they are actually searching for the cool individuals. The coolhunt is primarily about locating a specific kind of teenager, i.e., a trendsetter, and getting to know her or him. After which, the cooptation of her or his creative expressions is a much easier undertaking. The second rule of the cool holds true, cool cannot be manufactured; it can only be observed because human characteristics cannot be successfully manufactured as products.

Gladwell draws his third rule of the cool from his description of the second rule. Because cool only exists in individuals, a coolhunter must be able to recognize this type of individual. Therefore, a coolhunter must also be a specific type of person. Hence, the third rule of cool: cool can only be observed by people who are cool themselves (87). In order to be an efficacious coolhunter, which

means—in essence—a coolhunter at all, one must be cool her or himself. A coolhunter must have a certain kind of instinct that tells her or him when it is all right to bend or even break the rules in order to discover a trendsetter in an unlikely place, according to Gladwell (87). Without this instinctual sense, which comes from being a cool person oneself, one can never become a successful coolhunter.

In attempting to further clarify what types of individuals become coolhunters, I wondered whether race or gender played a role in the success of a coolhunter. Based on forenames and pronouns, it was possible to deduce the gender of many of the coolhunters about which I read in books, journals, and online. I found that most of the time coolhunters are women. However, attempting to discover a coolhunter's race was somewhat more complicated. The only visible evidence I found came from a PBS *Frontline* episode: Merchants of Cool. In this program, host Douglas Rushkoff briefly interviews two coolhunters (one of which was also observed by Gladwell): DeeDee Gordon and her business associate Sharon Lee. In viewing this program, I could see that these two individuals are women; moreover, my perception is that DeeDee Gordon is white and Sharon Lee is of Asian descent. Barring this particular example, however, it was impossible to deduce the race of any other coolhunters about whom I read. In performing my research, I did not find that race was a characteristic about which any of the authors, within their descriptions of coolhunting or coolhunters, wrote,

nor was it a characteristic addressed within any of the coolhunting websites I explored.

In her book, Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers, which deals with the commercialization of youth, Alissa Quart further describes the coolhunter. She writes, “The adults who market to adolescents and sign them up so they will share their intelligence are often called *cool hunters*” (41 original italics). These individuals must fit into teen culture themselves, which requires specific kinds of bodily characteristics and a certain type of personality. Quart contends that coolhunters are, generally, street savvy individuals who are outgoing, amiable, and are either late teens/early 20s or they appear to be of that age group (42-43). These individuals not only wear the attire of the teen generation, but they also speak their language. For example, Quart explains that coolhunters “put the adolescents at ease by cocking their heads drolly and layering their speech with ‘like’ and ‘whatever’ and ‘cool’” (43). In short, it is by talking the teenage talk and walking the teenage walk that coolhunters are able to acquire the information they desire from teens.

These quasi-teen actions emulated by coolhunters are not accidental. Coolhunters perform these actions in order to build rapport with teenagers and, ultimately, become their friends. In his book, Youth Media, Bill Osgerby maintains that coolhunters specialize in “keeping their finger on the pulse of the youth market, using a mixture of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews and clued-up intuition to link-up big business with young people’s attitudes and tastes”

(53). Often, coolhunters not only have an intuition that leads them to correct information, but they also have anthropological and/or sociological backgrounds that provide them with the proper qualitative and quantitative training to perform effective interviews, both focus group and individual, and to conduct surveys. This background helps coolhunters discover certain kinds of information from certain types of teenagers.

To reiterate, the first rule of the cool is that cool cannot be observed because it will take flight. Or in other words, the faster something is identified as cool the quicker cool will be forced to move on to the next thing. This causes a slight paradox for coolhunters: the better a coolhunter gets at her/his job, the harder it is to find cool. The second rule of the cool is that companies cannot manufacture cool; cool can only be observed. This rule is crucial to understand because it clarifies the specific aim of coolhunters. A coolhunter's goal is to discover a specific type of teenager and not simply some mysterious cool objects in the world. The third rule of the cool is that cool can only be observed by people who are already cool themselves. Here the claim is that coolhunters must be cool themselves in order to discover trendsetters and, thereafter, discover cool.

Gladwell describes the combination of his three rules of the cool as a “closed loop” (87). Coolhunting is about cool individuals from both sides of the story: cool coolhunters looking for cool teens. Gladwell continues, “It is not possible to be cool, in other words, unless you are—in some larger sense—already cool” (87). Remember, according to coolhunters, only twenty percent of individuals are

trendsetters. This being the case, the other eighty percent of the population does not have much of a chance at entering the world of cool.

This closed loop of the cool efficaciously prohibits the rest of us, the eighty percent, from both recognizing and being cool—at least in the sense about which coolhunters are concerned. We, the other eighty percent of the public, who are not trendsetters or coolhunters, think we know what is cool. However, what we think is cool would not be considered cool by trendsetters or coolhunters because we look to others to determine what this type of cool looks like. For example, the things we currently think are cool were probably cool to trendsetters many months ago. For these reasons, we cannot genuinely understand cool on the same level that trendsetters and coolhunters do. This lack of authentic knowledge—regarding cool—does not prohibit us, however, from understanding the cool that is marketed to us daily. However, this cool is far from the same “cool” coolhunters look for in trendsetters. Recall that the goal of the coolhunter is to find new cool forms of self-expression, apply those to the lowest common denominator—in order to make the expressions appealing to the largest number of people possible, commodify them as actual products, and then sell those modified cool expressions back to us: the eighty percent. We buy the products that we think are cool, but what we understand to be cool, ultimately, is simply what the fashion/culture industry—informed by coolhunters—tells us is cool. The cool we recognize is manufactured; it is a facade, a counterfeit. The closed loop of cool, Gladwell describes, is closed to us, the eighty percent, but does that matter? Should we be concerned that we

might not understand “cool” on the same level as coolhunters? I am not sure we should be too concerned with this issue because I do not think this is the genuine problem. The real problem arises in the cooptation of the creative expressions of the twenty percent, i.e., the trendsetters, and I will address this issue in chapter three.

At the end of his essay, Gladwell offers a very short critique of coolhunting. In fact, it is not much of a critique, but seems more like an aside, because it is one short sentence. On the last page of his article he writes, “Coolhunting represents the ascendancy, in the marketplace, of high school” (88). Gladwell seems to be claiming that coolhunting is nothing more than a quasi-high school popularity contest. I tend to agree with Gladwell to a certain extent. The high school way of life is creeping into all corners of the market economy because children and especially teenagers are increasingly becoming a very lucrative source of revenue for companies.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the idea of “youth” itself has become a very effective tool for marketing products not only to young people but also to adults.<sup>4</sup> However, merely comparing coolhunting to a high school popularity contest does not properly illustrate the long-term damage that may be caused by this practice. One group, which is composed entirely of minors, is being

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Peter Zollo heads a marketing research firm that focuses on children, and he reports that “America’s 12- to 19-year-olds spent roughly \$94 billion of their own money in 1998” (Milner 158). Moreover, these numbers continue to rise. In 2002, Juliet B. Schor explains that this same age group, i.e., 12 to 19-year-olds, “accounted for \$170 billion of personal spending” (23).

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive analysis of the marketing of “youth” to adults, see Barber (2007).

mined for creative information in order to make another group of coolhunters, companies, and corporations wealthy.

In his book concerning teenagers and consumption, Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids, Murray Milner Jr. offers another critique of coolhunting. He argues that companies have created, “advertising, specialized products, services, and stores...to appeal to children and adolescents” (161). When businesses create these types of services for children and adolescents, it is very helpful to know what children like, dislike, and think is cool. Likes and dislikes are somewhat easy to predict. However, because uncertainty exists surrounding the topic of children and their idea of coolness, many businesses spend vast amounts of money in order to find out what children actually do think is cool. Therefore, because of the services coolhunters provide, many companies have been able to use informed intelligence to construct marketing and advertising campaigns that capture large portions of youth consumers. Milner argues that coolhunters are assisting in the creation of effective marketing campaigns that turn preteens and teenagers into consumers. However, he admits, “all advertising and marketing is not bad and evil—but neither is it an innocent source of information” (161). Milner leaves his discussion of coolhunting by asking: “should these activities [marketing and advertising] become an ever more central part of the experience and lives of our children and adolescents?” (161). Milner maintains that using coolhunting as a tool to enhance target marketing to children is questionable—at the very least. However, this is the extent of his coolhunting critique. Milner is mainly concerned with where

children learn consumer behaviors, which he concludes is from adults in a free market economy. In the end, Milner fails to take a firm ethical stance on the practice of coolhunting.

James P. Steyer makes a similar argument in his book, The Other Parent, which focuses on the commercialization of children. In doing so, he discusses the role coolhunters play in the process of youth commercialization. His argument is similar to Milner's except that he describes coolhunters in a slightly different manner. Steyer takes the argument a step further and claims that children are not only being strategically marketed to, but they are also quickly becoming commercialized. Coolhunters are not only locating trendsetters and, furthermore, taking cool expressions from them, but they are also "making youth culture a commercial entity that's packaged and sold to people" (113). Steyer contends that coolhunters are assisting in the commercialization and commodification of youth itself. However, like Milner, Steyer highlights coolhunting as an example to demonstrate one of the ways in which the commercialization of youth occurs. Steyer's main concern is the root of youth commercialization, and he points to the deregulation of governmental institutions such as the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) and the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) as the main culprit behind this problem.

Steyer's argument is approaching the ethical angle I am going to take against coolhunting in this thesis. However, here again, Steyer stops short of making an evaluative claim regarding coolhunting. Both Milner and Steyer

discuss coolhunting in similar contexts, i.e., they both use the example of coolhunting to show how marketers are more effectively understanding and catering to children's interests. Although they seem to assume that coolhunting is a detrimental practice, neither Milner nor Steyer directly addresses the underlying ethical question: Is coolhunting itself an ethical practice?

As I have demonstrated, critiques concerning children and media, marketing, and advertising have been performed. Underlying many of those critiques is the discussion of how coolhunting contributes precisely to youth marketing and advertising techniques. Many individuals have discussed the practice of coolhunting and have tacitly alluded to the value of its techniques. However, no one has directly addressed the ethical implications of the practice. This is precisely the area in which I am going to add to the discussion of coolhunting. Thus, in chapter three, by analyzing and applying specific Marxist theories of the Frankfurt Institute and drawing additional concepts from Karl Marx's early Manuscripts, I will perform an ethical analysis of coolhunting. However, before moving on to chapter three, I will briefly introduce the main concepts from which I will build my thesis.

Within their collection of philosophical works, Dialectic of Enlightenment, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno discuss the implications and repercussions of the enlightenment era. Within their discussion of what they describe as "the culture industry," Horkheimer and Adorno write: "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system.

Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together” (94). In other words, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that an unintended consequent of progressive enlightenment is the “infection of sameness” in/of everything in our modern, mediated society. The achievement of sameness, in this sense, comes when a society’s main aim is consumption.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s concept of the culture industry is important to my thesis. Therefore, within the following passages, I will explain the aforementioned idea of “the culture industry,” i.e., what it consists of, and what type of system it develops within society. I will begin this discussion by briefly describing Horkheimer and Adorno’s expressed goal in writing their book, which will expose the genesis of their idea of the culture industry.

In the early 1940s, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote the Dialectic of Enlightenment, in the United States, “when the end of the National Socialist terror was in sight” (Preface XI). Their intention, in writing this book, was to explain how and why the social order in major industrialized, capitalistic sectors of the world, which obviously included the United States, was changing. However, in the preface, they admit that this intention, which “was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism,” was a much greater enterprise than they initially had presumed (Preface XIV). A prominent feature of their examination of the social order is their confrontation with mass culture. In attempting to describe the social order, Horkheimer and Adorno recognize and analyze the role mass culture plays in the

dissemination of ideas within society. One of the concepts born out of their evaluation of the changing social order, and the influence of mass culture upon that change, is what they describe as “the culture industry.”

Horkheimer and Adorno use “the culture industry” as a term to describe the contrived methods employed by the mechanism of popular culture to produce an abundance of products, e.g., film, radio, magazines, television, fashion, music, etc., that appear—at least slightly—to be different from one another but, because of rigid formulation, demonstrably are not. In other words, they explain the culture industry as a quasi-factory churning out products and ideas that fit into a standardized, formulaic, framework: a framework that has proven profitable over time. Unsurprisingly, because of this framework, new products created by the culture industry share many characteristics with older, economically viable products.

In his book Critical Social Theory, Tim Dant analyzes Horkheimer and Adorno’s estimations of the effects of the culture industry’s cyclical fabrication of products and ideas. He elaborates, “...the culture industry produces material that deadens the masses, while the potential of art to provoke critical thought is drowned by the peddling of endlessly bland and repetitive cultural commodities” (110). The monotony generated by the culture industry, according to Dant, “deadens” the possibility of not only engaging in creative outlets, which traditionally are assumed to require imaginative or innovative impulses, but also in the simple appreciation of those outlets. This lack of appreciation, however, is not

surprising to Dant. He writes: “The careful packaging of mass cultural commodities leads to a ‘style’ that contradicts the individuality of art with a tried and tested way of presenting the content” (111). The “style” presented by the culture industry, which seeps through multiple artistic genres, is nothing more than a formulaic repetition of blandness. In being so, it is far from the conventional sense of style, which generally is characterized by originality, creativity, and/or often in taking social risks. According to Dant: “This rigidity of style helps backers [i.e., profiteers] to predict whether the audience will buy the [culture industry’s] product[s]...” (111). Therefore, as long as the goal of the culture industry is to sell products, Dant argues, the composition of those products will incorporate components of this rigidly defined concept of style.

Horkheimer and Adorno describe one corollary of the culture industry’s fabrication of this rigid sense of style as the “infection of sameness.” This sameness affects both the production of constants and what, traditionally, are thought to be variables within culture. For example, they write:

The brief interval sequence which has proved catchy in a hit song, the hero’s temporary disgrace which he accepts as a “good sport,” the wholesome slaps the heroine receives from the strong hand of the male star, his plain-speaking abruptness toward the pampered heiress, are, like all details, ready made clichés, to be used here and there as desired and always completely defined by the purpose they serve within the schema (98).

Because of their tried and true efficacy at selling products, these details, along with many others, “become interchangeable” within a variety of cultural media (98). For example, thanks to repetition and formula, even though one might not have

heard a particular pop song, "...the prepared ear can always guess the continuation after the first bars of a hit song and is gratified when it actually occurs" (99). The pop formula has become so familiar to the listener/viewer that she or he can easily predict what will happen next and is pleased with her or himself when she or he is able to do so. In accordance with this recipe, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the formulaic mechanism of the culture industry "rejects anything untried as a risk" (106). In other words, expressions of originality and/or creativity are presumed suspect by the culture industry. Consequently, it is the culture industry, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, which actively and intentionally perpetuates this ideological system of homogenized and standardized pop culture formulas.

This system described by Horkheimer and Adorno includes a variety of media, e.g., film, radio, television, magazines, etc. However, it is important to note that because Horkheimer and Adorno made these cultural observations in the mid to late 1940s, they were unfamiliar with the Internet as a broadcasting medium. Therefore, because of its ubiquitous nature in the modern world, I am going to extend their idea to include the Internet as an additional component of this system.

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this system, often quite literally, promulgates loudly and proficiently enough as to ensure that no ear remains unscathed by its reach. As an example, they explain the method used by the "Führer" (Adolph Hitler) to promote much of his propaganda:

The *Führer's* metaphysical charisma, invented by the sociology of religion, turned out finally to be merely the omnipresence of his

radio addresses, which demonically parodies that of the divine spirit. *The gigantic fact that the speech penetrates everywhere replaces its content...* To posit the human word as absolute, the false commandment, is the immanent tendency of radio. Recommendation becomes command (129 italics added).

Here they argue that, because of media such as radio, et al., it is no longer the content of a message that is crucial for its dissemination but simply the volume and breadth of that message. The more media through which a message is disseminated, the louder and more pervasive that message will be and, accordingly, the more ears will be exposed to it. All these media form a system, only one component of which is absorbed audibly, and Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this system, ultimately, demonstrates the regression of genuine enlightenment to mere ideology,<sup>5</sup> i.e., this system establishes and perpetuates a “false or unrealistic” sense about the world (Crossley 147). On page 136, they explain:

The most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of anything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction: personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. That is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false.

In other words, they claim that the culture industry has replaced the actual or genuine human desire to discover clarification about the world with an ephemeral want to be simply what the culture industry instructs humanity to be: consumers. Additionally, Horkheimer and Adorno observe that the actual mechanisms of the

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<sup>5</sup> For an extensive definition of this term, refer to my discussion of “ideology” on page eight.

culture industry are no longer hidden from perception—as that machinery might have been at one time in the past. They write: “Those in charge no longer take much trouble to conceal the structure, the power of which increases the more bluntly its existence is admitted” (95). Consequently, the structure of the system used to advance sameness is plainly evident for all to easily recognize.

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that people are aware of this fact but continue, nonetheless, to reproduce the ideologies of the culture industry, which—in the end—only serves to intensify the strength of the culture industry. Hence, this system of ideology ensures the perpetuation of sameness and the triumph of the culture industry.

From a broader perspective, Horkheimer and Adorno explain modern culture and society systemically. That is, because of this system of ideology developed and advanced by the culture industry, they claim that people no longer fight for individuality within families or tribes but do so on a much larger societal level. In other words, the development of individuality no longer occurs within the family or tribe. Instead, within modern society, the culture industry explains how one might become an individual with its pervasive, promulgated system of ideology, which is, in short, to do nothing more than consume products.

This concept, however, is problematic because, as I have explained, the culture industry does not inculcate individuality. In fact quite the opposite, it teaches conformity and sameness, i.e., a person is no longer a creative individual but merely a faceless consumer.

In her examination of Critical Theory, Critical Theory and Political Possibilities, Joan Alway describes the conformity the culture industry affects in us all. Citing words from Adorno, she claims that the culture industry's system of ideology that perpetuates conformity “has replaced consciousness” by teaching “us how and what to think” (40-41). She argues that the culture industry not only teaches us what to think, e.g., that pop music, film, literature, etc. are good examples of “art,” but also how to think, i.e., through its system of ideology, the culture industry actually manipulates human thought processes in order to achieve its goals. In doing so, Alway remarks, “The culture industry sets into motion a circle of manipulation and need which, feeding on itself, grows stronger and stronger. Within this circle of cultural progress, the individual, as an autonomous thinking agent, is destroyed” (41). Thus, she maintains that an individual, within a society dominated by the culture industry, is no longer an “individual” in the traditional sense but is a “pseudo-individual, an automaton, an object to be manipulated and administered” (41). In the end, this deconstruction of individuality ensures the domination of humanity by the culture industry and the repression of the ability to think critically according to Alway.

What is one to do? If one wishes to be unique, i.e., to be a distinct individual, in modern society—which, as I will explain in chapter three, is valued above many other characteristics—how does one project her or his individuality? If people in modern society fight for individuality on a societal scale, and if society is—as Horkheimer and Adorno claim—infected with sameness, and the culture

industry maintains and ensures that sameness with its system of ideology, how can the culture industry offer any useful insight when it comes to acquiring genuine autonomy? Ultimately, the culture industry cannot instruct people on how to be autonomous, nor can it instruct people on how to be creative individuals. What the culture industry can do, however, is perpetuate the very antithesis of individuality, i.e., by reinforcing the status quo, the culture industry simply demonstrates how to be identical to/with everyone else. If people want to be different from others, they must develop their own individuality—for their own selves. However, what if someone, e.g., a coolhunter, is vigilantly waiting by to draw out elements of that developing individuality? Thus, the interesting questions become: How important is individuality? What role, if any, does creativity play in that individuality? Are these characteristics ones that humanity deem worthy of emulation? Furthermore, when considering the condition and complexities of modern life, not to mention current society, does the loss or weakening of creativity and/or individuality necessitate genuine concern?

In chapter three, I will address these questions in depth. However, here I will explicate the material from which the answers to these questions will arise. I will do so by explaining why, according to Karl Marx, characteristics such as individuality and creativity are precisely what define us as human, i.e., these characteristics separate human animals from non-human animals, and therefore are important. Thereafter, I will introduce and explain Marx's theory of alienation.

In his early work “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx writes: “The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species character” (76). “Life-activity,” according to Marx, is the “active function” of the body, e.g., working, eating, sleeping, etc. (76). Yet, he makes it clear that the life-activity of humans is quite different from the life-activity of non-human animals. According to Marx: “The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It is *its life-activity*” (76, original italics). However, he continues, “Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity” (76). Thus, according to Marx, both human and non-human animals exhibit life-activity, i.e., all living creatures express active, bodily functions. However, a difference exists between the type of life-activity humans exhibit and the type of life-activity their non-human animal counterparts exhibit. Marx describes this difference in terms of consciousness—or the lack thereof. Because non-human animals lack consciousness, they are identical with their life-activity, i.e., the only purpose of non-human animal active functions is the perpetuation of the animal’s existence. Marx admits that non-human animals “produce,” e.g., they create shelters and/or homes; however, he writes, “an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young” (76). Likewise, humans are productive for many of the same reasons, although we have some additional motives that extend beyond our immediate needs. Marx claims that humans produce “universally,” i.e., humans remain productive even after they fulfill their basic

“physical needs” (76). Human consciousness allows life-activity, i.e., active, bodily functions, to affect more than physical needs alone. It additionally accords humans the opportunity to create an “objective world” that reflects their conscious choices (76). Marx describes this specific type of life-activity as “species life” (76). Ultimately, it is living a species life; it is this ability, i.e., the ability to create an objective world, that, according to Marx, “man first really proves himself to be a *species being*” (76, original italics). Marx uses the term “species being” to describe beings that are capable of consciously creating, through their labor, an actual objective world. Therefore, according to Marx, the evident difference between humans and non-human animals is the purpose behind each group’s life-activity. Non-human animals are identical with their life-activity, i.e., the purpose of their life-activity is simple species perpetuation. Alternatively, humans exhibit what Marx describes as “species life-activity,” i.e., the ultimate purpose of human life-activity is to be creative beings. Thus, the ability to be creative beings, to perform creative labor, and to build an objective world reflecting that creativity is precisely what makes humans species beings—and therefore different from non-human animals.

Thus, according to Marx, individuality, particularity, and creativity are extremely important for humans. He argues, “it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* social being” (86, original italics). Marx claims that living a life devoid of the possibility of becoming a particular individual being or the opportunity to perform creative labor, is not a human life at

all. In order to be a real or genuine social being, i.e., to be human or a species being, the opportunity to be a creative individual must exist.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the Marxist concepts of life-activity, species life, and species being, I will be drawing information from Marx's discussion of alienation<sup>6</sup> within chapter three. Therefore, now I will introduce Marx's theory of alienation and explain how, according to Marx, it leads to the loss of one's species being, i.e., the loss of the very component that makes us human and different from non-human animals.

Marx explains the concept of alienation within his broader discussion of "Estranged Labor" (70). According to Marx, capitalism generates within people the desire to acquire goods, commodities, or possessions, which is to say to acquire private property. As the desire to acquire private property increases, the perceived value of that property also increases. In other words, the value of private property, no matter what it may be, is dependant directly upon the human desire to own or possess that property. However, Marx argues: "With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men" (71, original italics). Thus, as the value of private property increases, the value of individual human life decreases. In fact, Marx writes, "The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces... (and)...becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates" (71). In other words, the worker's personal value diminishes in direct proportion

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<sup>6</sup> To revisit my working definition of "alienation," see pages nine and ten.

to the increase in value of the actual object produced by her or his labor.

Ultimately, the labor workers perform produces not only goods or commodities, i.e., the actual property or objects, but also “it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*,” according to Marx (71 original italics). Thus, through labor, two things that previously were not commodities become commodities, i.e., they become commodified. First, Marx argues that the labor required to create an object or good comes to be “congealed” within that object, i.e., labor actually becomes part of the finished product. Furthermore, he claims that the objects or goods generated through labor eventually become nothing more than “the *objectification of labour*,” i.e., through labor, labor itself becomes a commodity (71, original italics). Secondly, Marx argues that labor produces the worker—her or himself—as a commodity, i.e., the worker becomes nothing more than an item that can be bought and sold. According to Marx, when property or objects, which is to say capital, become as valuable as they are in capitalistic society, the value of animate workers—who through their labor create the objects—becomes second to the value of the inanimate objects of their labor. As a result, the worker becomes commodified, i.e., the value of the worker comes to be determined not by her or his character, work ethic, or integrity but by how efficacious she or he is at producing goods. Thus, according to Marx, it is through this process of commodification that both the worker and the worker’s labor become “*something alien*” to the actual being of the worker (71 original italics). In other words, it is

this misuse, this exploitation, which causes alienation of the worker from her or his species being.

For Marx, the alienation of the self is problematic because it removes the very component that makes us human: our species being. Minus our species being, the only functions we are capable of enacting are our animal functions, viz., eating, drinking, sleeping, and procreating, and we are no longer capable of being anything but non-human animals. If these animal functions are our only ends, the purpose of our individual lives becomes questionable at best. Therefore, for Marx, the alienation of the self is a genuine concern that must be taken seriously.

In conclusion, and to reiterate, it is my aim in this thesis to perform an ethical analysis of the practice of coolhunting. Therefore, in order to situate my analysis properly, I will begin chapter three by discussing the concept of individuality from a slightly different angle. I will focus on the concept of the self and trace its history within Western philosophy and society. Here, with the assistance of Charles Taylor's work, Sources of the Self, I will explain the genesis of this concept and demonstrate why the self is significant in contemporary society. Thereafter, I will explain how the wide-ranging reach of the culture industry has successfully penetrated nearly every corner of society today. I will argue that coolhunters recognize the ubiquitous nature of the culture industry, and, although they do not use or acknowledge this terminology, they understand that the infection of sameness is a consequent of the culture industry. Consequently, this will uncover the invaluable skill coolhunters demonstrate with their ability to

notice when new expressions penetrate the bounds of the culture industry's sameness. At this point, it will be important to note that in a society—such as our own—where anyone can purchase just about anything she or he can imagine, it is extremely difficult to formulate original or creative expressions of individuality. Thereafter, I will argue, nonetheless, that it is possible to formulate genuinely original expressions of individuality, and I will explain that one way to do so is through a process of self-objectification. As I discussed previously, coolhunters describe the type of individuals capable of originating new expressions of individuality as trendsetters. I will explain how it is that trendsetters not only possess but also express—unlike many in a society dominated by the culture industry—the creative component of humanness that Marx describes as one's "species being." Subsequent to making these connections clear, I will demonstrate that what coolhunters are actually doing is co-opting and ultimately commodifying the teens' creative expressions of individuality. I will claim that through this process coolhunters are instigating the alienation of teens from their species beings and, furthermore, their own selves, which subsequently deprives them of the ability to become fully autonomous individuals. Thereafter, I will describe how this process may complicate and further perpetuate the sameness with which the culture industry has already contaminated modern society. I will conclude by explaining the effects of this practice on society as a whole.

### CHAPTER 3 – THE SELF, COMMODIFICATION, AND ALIENATION

Do we as humans value individuality? Do we believe that creativity is a beneficial characteristic for humans to exhibit? Moreover, is creativity an intrinsically human characteristic? As I described in chapter two, Karl Marx argues that to be human is to be a species being, i.e., to be the type of being who, through creative labor, is capable of building a world that reflects her or his conscious choices about the world. Thus, according to Marx, to be human is to be a creative, particular being. However, do others share Marx’s view regarding individuality and creativity? Specifically, what does individuality mean in Western culture, and is it valuable on such a broad societal scale? These questions will be my immediate concern in the following passages.

Here I am going to argue that in modern Western society, individuality<sup>7</sup> is valued—quite often—higher than many other human qualities. Our culture creates and supports the idea that being different from others is important, and these notions are embedded within us—as Westerners—at a very young age. Conversely, it is also the case that we desire the opportunity to be part of larger primary groups, e.g., family or groups of friends. However, this desire does not thwart the stronger yearning for genuine individuality—and a barrage of daily reinforcements reminds us of the value of that individuality. From myriad overt

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<sup>7</sup> To revisit my full explanation and established definition of “individuality,” refer to page five of chapter one. In short, it is *a set of characteristics or components that establishes one person as not only different from others but also as a unique being in and of her or himself.*

media messages, e.g., shoe commercials starring sports stars who promote competition and individuality through convincing consumers that expressing individuality is nothing more than purchasing their sponsor's brand of shoes, to the various examples deeply embedded within Western tradition (which I will discuss momentarily), our society and culture play a key role in emphasizing the importance of expressing individuality.

As Westerners, in general, we believe that individuality is intertwined somehow with a self that is embedded somewhere within each one of us. So why do we value this inner-sense of self,<sup>8</sup> this component that cannot be touched or seen, and why do we believe it to be important? In subsequent passages, I am going to explain why it is that we value the inner self. I will do so by examining the origin of the concept of the self and exploring its cultural connections and significance in Western society.

In his philosophical analysis of the concept of the self throughout history, Sources of the Self, Charles Taylor describes the Western "modern identity" first, by uncovering its genesis and second, by tracing its roots through two later paradigm shifts, viz., the Enlightenment and the expressivist Romantic period. From the outset of his book, Taylor argues that in order to take seriously the search for the self, one must also understand how our notions of "the good" or "morality"

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<sup>8</sup> See pages ten and eleven of chapter one for my extensive explanation of the "sense of self," as defined by George Herbert Mead, which is *a social construction that arises through life experiences and interactions with others and is first understood as an object and only later understood as a subject*.

have developed over time. He writes: “Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (3).

Consequently, because these two ideas are “intertwined themes,” Taylor’s analysis of the self also traces the evolution of the Western notion of morality.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Augustine developed the notion of “turning inward,” i.e., looking within one’s soul, in order to find the path to God or spirituality. By doing so, Augustine initiated the Western notion of the self, according to Taylor. In fact, Taylor writes, “Augustine’s inward turn was tremendously influential in the West; at first in inaugurating a family of forms of Christian spirituality, which continued throughout the Middle Ages, and flourished again in the Renaissance” (177). Eventually, Augustine’s notion was secularized, and his concept of turning inward set in motion the idea of “self-exploration,” which had not previously existed.

Augustine’s development of the inward turn is a foundational component in the history of the self. However, Taylor explains that, for Augustine, turning inward is simply a “route” or pathway one might use to discover the source of human morality, which is God (139). By explaining the inward turn in this way, Augustine effectively locates the source of human morality outside the human body. That is, one might discover a pathway to spirituality by turning inward but—ultimately—the source of that path is God, who exists outside the body, according to Augustine. Thus, the next step in the development of the notion of the self comes as a modification to Augustine’s source of human morality.

This development occurs in the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE through the thought and writings of René Descartes. It is Descartes' "disengagement" of the immaterial mind from the material body that "defines a new understanding of human agency and its characteristic power," according to Taylor (177). By separating the mind from the body, by creating this disengagement, Descartes developed "new locations of moral sources" within individuals, i.e., it became possible to find a source of inspiration for morality within the individual (177). In other words, by separating the immaterial mind from the material body, Descartes modifies Augustine's notion of turning inward to find a path that leads outside the body to God into turning inward to find God, which is a subtle but important distinction. Descartes argues that there is an immaterial component within the material body that is a moral source in itself. It is important, however, to note that Descartes' chain of reasoning is dependent upon a "veracious God," i.e., Descartes advances Augustine's idea of turning inward another step by dividing the mind into an entirely new component; however, the extent to which the mind is capable of acquiring knowledge about the external world is utterly dependent upon an honest God. Therefore, Descartes' notion of separating the mind from the body is an advancement in the notion of self because, hereafter, the mind/self is believed to be an inner human component. Thus, according to Taylor, it is the coupling of Augustine's notion of turning inward with Descartes' concept of disengaging the mind from the body that puts in motion the modern sense of self embraced today.

According to Taylor, the next important figure in the progression of the concept of the self is Montaigne. His addition to the concept of the self is important because he expanded Augustine's idea of "self-exploration" into a new idea of "self-discovery," which is still important to our modern sense of self and individuality. Taylor explains that, according to Montaigne, "[i]ts (self-discovery's) aim is to identify the individual in his or her unrepeatable difference" (182). In other words, Montaigne articulates the notion that all individuals are original, particular beings. Where Descartes' self-exploration is a "quest" for "an order of science, of clear and distinct knowledge in universal terms," Taylor argues that "[t]he Montaignean aspiration is always to loosen the hold of such general categories of 'normal' operation and gradually prise our self-understanding free of the monumental weight of the universal interpretations, so that the shape of our originality can come to view" (182). Thus, for Montaigne, the quest of self-discovery not only leads to originality and particularity but also uncovers new and/or different "modes of expression," i.e., within the process of self-discovery one may locate new forms of expression that might otherwise not have been recognized (Taylor 182). Montaigne's concept of self-discovery is similar to our modern notion of self-discovery, and, in fact, Taylor observes: "The search for the self in order to come to terms with oneself, which Montaigne inaugurates, has become one of the fundamental themes of our modern culture" (183). Ultimately, Taylor claims that Montaigne is responsible for shifting the discussion from Augustine's inward turn—to discover God/spirituality—and Descartes' universal

mind body dualism to a more personal search for “what I essentially am,” which is not dependant upon anything outside the self. However, it is important to note that Montaigne’s development did not change the goal of turning inward, i.e., it was still about finding God or spirituality. The difference between Descartes and Montaigne, however, is that Descartes was interested in discovering universals that explain phenomena in the world, such as his principles of mathematics, whereas Montaigne was interested in particulars, viz., the individual, and discovering the original and distinctive qualities that compose individuals. For example, Taylor explains that, for Montaigne, Cartesian terms such as the “soul, reason, or will” cannot and do not adequately define “identity” or the individual (184). Therefore, Montaigne’s shift to focusing on the individual and identity was a vital step in the progression of the self.

Montaigne’s refinement of the concept of self-exploration to one of self-discovery makes possible the next evolutionary step in the sense of self. According to Taylor, this next step or change was not instigated by specific philosophers or theorists—as was the genesis of the concept—but rather by a significant change in the world-view accepted by society as a whole. The paradigm shift that brought about this change was the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment—or Age of Reason—came about through a complex connection of several factors in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and affected different classes, races, and genders of people in many different ways. Although the Enlightenment is a very interesting historical period, my desire here is not to

describe the various factors that led to its inception. Rather, my goal is to describe the effects the Enlightenment period, as a whole, had on society's perception of the self.

The most important social change brought about through the Enlightenment, regarding the perception of the self, was, according to Taylor, the rise in "unbelief" among unprecedented proportions of the masses. Here Taylor describes unbelief not as the denial of spirituality, but as the denial of God as the sole *source* of spirituality. He clarifies by stating the contrary: "An 'age of belief' is one in which all credible moral sources involve God" (311). Thus, within the Enlightenment era, individuals begin discovering and explaining new moral sources: sources within themselves that are nondependent upon God. It is during this period also that the concept of "modernity" arises, which in the West was coupled directly with unbelief. Taylor writes that as science and education became commonplace, so too did the notion "...that religious belief is irrational and unenlightened or unscientific" (310). He admits, however, that many of the social changes caused by the Enlightenment, e.g., "...industrialization, technological change, and mobility," also undermined other features of earlier life that were not connected to the idea of belief (310). In other words, it was not only the traditional idea of religious belief that came under attack during the period of Enlightenment. For example, many "traditional forms of allegiance, from tribal custom to group identity" faced inquiries by individuals examining the world from a new liberal perspective (310). Here the important change relating to the

perception of the self, however, is the aforementioned rise in unbelief. Like many of the taken-for-granted notions of earlier times, it is during the Enlightenment that the presumed connection between God and spirituality comes into question. This is exemplified, Taylor claims, by the fact that many people no longer think that denying the existence of God means simultaneously denying a spiritual component or dimension of their own self. Therefore, the shift in thinking brought about through the Enlightenment is responsible for pushing the earlier notion of the self another step forward by dislodging the assumed quasi-permanent connection between the inner, immaterial self and God and/or religion. By doing so, according to Taylor, the self becomes an alternative moral source in and of itself. Thus, from this point forward, turning inward in search of spirituality, morality, or what “I essentially am” becomes a quest independent from the existence of God.

The secularized shift brought about during the Enlightenment changed many people’s perspectives of the world. Taylor explains, “...once one admits that access to the significance of things is inward, that it is only properly understood inwardly, one can quietly slip one’s moorings in orthodox formulations” (371). That is, hereafter it is presumed possible for individuals to discover true meaning about the world and of goodness through the process of searching within one’s self, which is independent from God or religion. Additionally, as individuals acknowledge the existence of this potential within themselves, they begin to appreciate the independent, intrinsic value of their inner selves. It is here that the next evolutionary step in the progress of the self begins, which is, according to

Taylor, that the realization of this potential "...is also a form of expression" (374). As people began searching within themselves to find true meaning, they had to work out ways to express, outwardly, the discoveries they made within themselves. Consequently, the next step in the development of the self revolves around the concept of self-expression.

The mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Enlightenment era were transformed by the industrial revolution and the newly found fervor in Romanticism. The philosophy of nature was an important component to the emerging Romantic period. That is, before the Romantic shift, most people believed that humans and nature were positioned opposite one another in meaning and purpose. It was during the Romantic period, however, that people began perceiving nature as not an enemy or opposing force but as something beautiful in and of itself: as an important component of a fulfilling human life. In fact, Taylor claims it is during this period that human nature begins to be understood as the inner "intrinsic source" that gives life value (374). Thus, fulfilling this human nature means not only accepting and embracing the inner self but also formulating a voice for that self. "It [the self]," Taylor argues, "is no longer some impersonal 'Form' or 'nature' which comes to actuality, but a being capable of *self-articulation*" (375 italics added). Therefore, in order to understand human nature, i.e., the intrinsic source that gives life value, one must not only be able to turn inward and search for the self, but one must also be capable of expressing or articulating what one discovers within. It is this notion

of self-articulation, developed by the Romantics, that further advances the concept of self.

The newly found interest in expression, during this period, took on another form as well. According to Taylor, “[e]xpressivism was the basis for a new and fuller individuation” (375). Individuation is not a new idea; it is, in essence, the idea earlier described by Montaigne, which is that everyone is different and original. However, Taylor writes:

What is new is the idea that this really makes a difference to how we’re called on to live. The differences are not just unimportant [sic] variations within the same basic human nature...Rather they entail that each one of us has an original path which we ought to tread; they lay the obligation on each of us to live up to our originality (375).

This addition to the ante-notion presented by Montaigne is an important one to our modern understanding of the self and identity. The idea that there is an “original path” for each one of us to follow and that our differences oblige us to live up to our “originality” is an important piece of the modern sense of what it means to express one’s self and, moreover, what it means to be an individual.

Another important advance in the concept of self during the expressivist Romantic period is the newly found appreciation for creativity, or what Taylor describes as the “creative imagination” (378). He explains that before this time, art was mimicry, i.e., an exceptional artist was an individual who could recreate scenes from nature seemingly flawlessly. However, after the expressivist shift, art became less about the product and more about the aesthetic experience gained through creating or viewing the piece. Likewise, after this change, a good writer

was no longer someone who could simply reproduce old material in slightly different ways, but one who used her or his “creative imagination...to produce something new and unprecedented” (378-79). Moreover, Taylor argues, “once we see art as expression and no longer simply as mimesis,” the creative imagination used to generate these new forms of expression must be attributed to the “power” of the inner self (379). Here, this newly acquired sense of power, found in recognizing the source of the creative imagination, adds another layer of articulation to the expressivist concept of the self. Furthermore, according to Taylor, it is only through a combination of these expressivist advances that “we see the grounds for construing this inner domain as having depth, that is, a domain that reaches further than we can ever articulate, which still stretches beyond our furthest point of clear expression” (389). The fact that there is always more within the depths of the inner domain or the self—that we cannot articulate—is exemplary of “the power of expressive self-articulation” (390). Thus, the human creative imagination is important to the overall expressivist Romantic sense of self. That is, in recognizing the existence of the “inner depths” and articulating what is found there by generating “new and unprecedented” ideas, we verify the existence of the creative imagination and the expressive character of the self.

Taylor’s explication traces the evolution of philosophical thought and public perception of the self through, and as part of, two major paradigm shifts in Western history. In doing so, he shows how our contemporary ideas of individuality and the self are important notions to both the Western sense of

identity and broader Western notions of culture and society. He demonstrates that the modern notion of self has arisen from the very foundations of our culture and society. This account explains why, as Westerners, we feel that there is a connection between individuality and the inner self, i.e., because these notions are intertwined historically and philosophically.

In addition to Taylor's intellectual history of the self is Mead's explanation of the self as a social construction. Recall that Mead explains the self as something that arises through social interaction and experience and is understood firstly as an object and secondly as a subject (31). First, the self is understood as an object, e.g., I see my reflection in a mirror and come to understand that I am a physical being just as others in society. Second, through interaction with others in society, I begin to understand my self as a subject, i.e., as something more than an object. Here, I begin to see my self as an individual: as an I. Thus, according to Mead, the self is a relational concept. That is, if the only way to understand who I essentially am is through social interaction, the role that others play in this development is crucial.

Taylor's explanation of the self is linked to specific historical perceptions. He explains how the concept of self was viewed at different periods and how it evolved throughout many periods. Moreover, as I previously explained, Taylor traces Western intellectual history from a Western perspective. Conversely, Mead's description of the self is different. In describing the self as a "construction" based on social interaction, Mead explains the concept of self as

one that has always been the case. If the self arises within social interaction and experience, it does not matter the historical period; the self has and will continue to be discovered and developed in this way, i.e., relationally. Therefore, Mead's description of the self highlights the importance of other people to our own perceptions of the self, and his explanation is not dependent upon historical time or a Western perspective. Mead's concept of the socially constructed self is a Western idea and helps explain the Western concept of self, but it does not apply to Western societies exclusively. Mead offers another perspective to explain why we feel a connection exists between individuality and the sense of self. For Mead, one's individuality develops as one's sense of self arises through interaction with other people. Although his concept of the self is different from Taylor's, Mead also offers details as to why we feel there is an important connection between individuality and the sense of self, i.e., because these notions develop within the individual through social interaction.

As I have demonstrated, for many reasons the concept of self is significant and valuable to Westerners. Contemporarily, however, concepts such as the self have begun to be used in different ways and for different purposes. Over the past few decades, advertisers and marketers have begun to appropriate concepts such as the self and individuality for the purpose of not only reinforcing the significance of these concepts within modern society but, more importantly, to sell us products. As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, the most apparent of these appropriations is the marketing of individuality. We are barraged daily with visual

and auditory marketing ploys that command us to express our individuality by purchasing specific brands of sneakers, jeans, or shampoo. Here the question becomes: is it possible to demonstrate individuality by simply purchasing and wearing/using these products? Moreover, is expressing individuality by consuming creatively the same thing as being a creative individual? According to Marx, Taylor, and Mead these are inane propositions, i.e., they would argue that individuality is not something that can be purchased nor is creativity something that can be found in the act of purchasing goods. However, this is the very commandment we, as Americans, are asked to obey by the ubiquitous advertisements we see and hear daily. Because we take seriously the notion of individuality, many of us want to outwardly demonstrate our commitment to this notion by setting ourselves apart in some way. Unfortunately, the sameness formula of the culture industry undermines the notion of outwardly demonstrating individuality.

In chapter two, I introduced and explained Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. Therein, I discussed their concern regarding the effects of the sterilization of many creative aspects of society. Horkheimer and Adorno's worry is that generic pop culture formulas concocted by the culture industry will eventually replace all social and cultural variation and distinction with homogenized, standardized sameness. They described this process as the "infection of sameness." Therefore, if we take seriously their proposition, does the contamination of sameness upon society ultimately void the prospect of outwardly

demonstrating genuine individuality? That is, in a society such as our own where nearly anything and everything has been commodified and marketed to the masses, is it possible to set ourselves apart outwardly in any meaningful way? In the following passages, I am going to argue that, indeed, it is possible. I will begin by discussing some of the ways people attempt to set themselves apart from others in our society. Thereafter, I will discuss the implications and consequences of extracting, co-opting, and commodifying these outward expressions, as happens in coolhunting, for the financial benefit of a few.

There are many ways people attempt to set themselves apart, i.e., ways they try to make themselves look, act, or feel different from others in broader society. Setting oneself apart from others is generally achieved by either creating new ways to use old ideas, e.g., Southern California surfers who decided to put wheels on boards to “street surf,” or by discovering ways to outwardly express one’s self in new or different ways, e.g., wearing a straw flowerpot on one’s head as a hat. Both of these possibilities come from somewhere within the self. According to Taylor, the human creative imagination is responsible for “new and unprecedented” ideas and, therefore, plays a significant role in the origination of these types of expressions (379). Therefore, the creative imagination, i.e., human creativity, is an important component of the self; it inspires individuals to try things in new ways for a variety of reasons.

Although it is true that ingenuity and creativity have spurred many advances in society, I will argue that because of the economic incentives created in

contemporary capitalistic marketplaces, the opportunity and desire to express creatively has begun to diminish. I am not suggesting there is no longer space for discovery or invention within our society. What I am suggesting, however, is that the ideology the culture industry uses to dupe us into thinking that being creative is nothing more than being consumers is undermining the human creativity that enables outward expressions of genuine individuality.

The type of creativity I intend to identify and discuss in this thesis is slightly different from the creativity used in invention. I am focusing specifically on the creative source people use when attempting to differentiate themselves from others. This type of creativity is different from inventive creativity in that it generally concerns one's own person and is intended for a single individual. An invention is the creation of something intended for the benefit of many people, e.g., the printing press, the electric motor, or the pizza pie. There may be several motivations driving the development of an invention, e.g., to make life easier or to create something someone needs, but today the possible end yield or monetary gain for the creator or creators involved is generally one of the most important motivations. In this instance, the number of people interested in the final product correlates directly to the possible monetary gain for the investors. In other words, the more people interested in the final product, the higher the chances of financial success for the product. The general intention behind an invention is to share the product with, or sell it to, as many people as possible. As I previously explained, creativity plays an important role in the development of new products and

inventions. However, ingenuity—this inventive type of creativity—is driven often by monetary motivations, which is different from the type of creativity upon which I am focusing: the creative force people use to differentiate themselves from others in broader society, which is to say, to express individuality. Here, the idea is that people do not want to blend in with the crowd, share their ideas with as many people as possible, or generate some kind of monetary gain. The motivation to express the particularity of the self is entirely different from the motivation an individual has for creating something to share and/or sell with/to as many people as possible. In other words, when an individual comes up with a new differentiating expression, most likely, she or he would not want that expression turned into a product intended to be bought and/or sold to others because it would no longer be differentiating.

This motivation or desire to express the particularity of the self by differentiating oneself from the larger crowd is prevalent among a specific group of teenagers within our society. In chapter two, I identified this group of teenagers as trendsetters. These teens are quite different from their peers in many ways. For example, it may be true that most teens want to discover identity, but most teens are more apt to want to fit in, be accepted by, or identify with others in their primary groups rather than be different, even from their close friends. Whether teens end up identifying with others in their primary groups or, in the case of trendsetters, differentiating themselves from others within their primary groups, the teenage years are a time of self-discovery and an age in which many initiate,

through social interaction, their senses of selves that will continue to develop throughout the remainder of their lives. As individuals grow older, the attempt to differentiate themselves in this way tends to recede. That is, at some point, people seem to discover or grasp their senses of self and no longer attempt to establish individuality in the same ways, or to the same extent, that some young people feel they need to. I do agree, though, with George Herbert Mead's assertion that the self is in a continual process of development throughout life; however, the difference I am pointing to is the initiation of that search for the self.<sup>9</sup> As teens search for identity, the majority of young people end up either identifying with the broader crowd or their close group of friends. However, as trendsetters search for identity, they often engage in precisely the creative act I described earlier: giving expression, i.e., they discover ways to differentiate themselves from the larger crowd by expressing the particularity of their selves in new and different ways.

Different people apply this strategy of differentiation in different ways, but the goal remains constant; it is the desire to express, to broader society, the particularity of the self. From blatant public displays of individuality, e.g., sporting a purple mohawk at school, to more passive, private acts, such as discovering a band on one's own that does not receive radio play because of its

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<sup>9</sup> Mead asserts that the construction of the self is a lifelong process that continues throughout one's entire life. I am simply arguing that the teenage years are a specifically important time in the development of the self because, during this time, many begin to wonder about the very concept of self, i.e., who am I? Moreover, at this time, many teens begin to question things that might have been found based on the conviction of others. In short, this developmental stage is very important for the growth of all individuals, and, therefore, here I aim to express it as such.

nonconformity, trendsetters perform actions that set themselves apart from their peers. I am not claiming, however, that trendsetters perform these actions with the intention of alienating themselves from their peers. On the contrary, trendsetters are most often instrumental components of their smaller primary groups.

Members of primary groups often find niches all members can fit into in order to identify as part of that group, i.e., the group adopts some sort of outward statement that identifies individual members as part of the group. For example, members of a primary group of close friends might alter their jeans by cutting them in a specific place or way, or they might give each other matching haircuts or modify some other outward component in order to unify their primary group's appearance as different from the broader crowd. It may be the case that most members within these groups are simply copying each other in order to identify themselves as part of that group. However, these individuals are attempting to set themselves apart from the larger crowd by doing something only their smaller primary group does. In this instance, are the members of this group really expressing individuality or particularity? They might be expressing something slightly different from the broader crowd, but they are not demonstrating their own particularities from one another. However, the fact that that small, primary group is doing something different from broader society is a demonstration of individuality coming from somewhere within that group. Within this thesis, I have described the instigator of this type of demonstration as a trendsetter.

The question now becomes: how in a society flooded by the clutter and sameness of the culture industry does an individual come up with an expression that is unique and not already commodified? The chances of breaking these bounds seem slim when considering the extensive reach of both the traditional and virtual marketplaces, which between the two offer a seemingly endless range of products. Here is where genuine human creativity enters the equation. One way to come up with an expression of individuality that might pierce the sameness bounds of the modern culture industry is to do as Taylor described our forbearers doing in searching for the self, i.e., by turning inward and searching deeply within one's self to locate something that has not yet been described, bringing it back to the surface, and—most importantly—articulating it. In essence, this process is what the Romantics described as creative expression. Furthermore, as we found in Taylor's analysis, the development of this process was the final step in the Western evolution of what currently is known as the self. Thus, one way to generate new expressions that break the sameness bounds of the culture industry is through accessing the creative component from within the self and utilizing it. Consequently, in a society dominated by the clutter of the culture industry, an individual may outwardly express her or his individuality by exposing and displaying an inner component of her or his self that was previously unrecognized and unarticulated. In doing so, she or he expresses genuine individuality, i.e., she or he is outwardly expressing that she or he is a unique being in and of her or himself.

So far in chapter three, I have shown, first, that the Western notion of the self is important not only to individual persons but is also important on a much broader societal scale, i.e., the concept of the self is embedded within our history and culture, and it arises relationally. Second, I explained how and why many people within our society attempt to outwardly express individuality—often with the goal of doing so in new ways. Here I highlighted my claim that one way to demonstrate genuine individuality in a society dominated by the clutter and sameness of the culture industry is through utilizing the creative imagination by turning inward and bringing to the surface new components of the self, which have not yet been articulated. Keeping this claim in mind, I now pose the question: If an individual delves within her or himself in order to outwardly express individuality in a unique and creative way, is it justifiable for someone other than the creator of the expression, for example a coolhunter, to exploit that development for her or his own financial benefit?

In chapter two, I described the practice and goal of coolhunting. In order to connect this concept with the current conversation regarding creativity and individuality, I will pose a further question: Where do new ideas concerning outward expression originate within trendsetters? The main group of young people that spur coolhunters' interests lives in the Western world. Therefore, because these young people live in a society dominated by the clutter of the culture industry, their new outward self expressions must originate somewhere within their creative imaginations. For example, as I have previously explained, one way

a trendsetter can outwardly express genuine individuality within our current society is by utilizing her or his creativity to discover an original, unarticulated notion within her or his self, which can then be, to borrow the old cliché, “worn on her or his shoulder” as an outward expression of individuality. Thus, trendsetters originate new expressions in much the same way as others, i.e., by using their creativity, albeit trendsetters are more closely in tune with their creative imaginations than the rest of us.

Now that I have established the proper foundation upon which to ask the primary question of my thesis, I confidently can ask: *Is coolhunting an ethical practice?* If, as I have explained, a trendsetter’s genuinely original expression is extracted, co-opted, and commodified through the practice of coolhunting, is the continuation of this practice ethically justifiable? What is at stake for the individual, i.e., does the extraction, cooptation, and commodification of an individual’s original expression of individuality negatively affect her or him? Moreover, what is at stake for society as a whole? These questions form the crux of my argument. Therefore, in the following passages, I will delineate my answers to these questions as clearly as possible.

As I described in chapter two, Marx argues that there is a demonstrable difference between humans and non-human animals. The basis of this difference is positioned in what Marx describes as life-activity. Recall that Marx describes “life-activity” as the “active function” of the body, e.g., working, eating, sleeping, etc. (76). He claims that all animals exhibit life-activity, i.e., all creatures perform

labor to fulfill basic physical needs. However, Marx argues that humans are different in that they are conscious and capable of creating an objective world, through their creative labor, that reflects their conscious choices. This ability defines humans as species beings. Thus, for Marx the defining component that makes us human is the ability to be creative and perform creative labor.

If this is the case, how important a role does this creative component play in the act of expressing individuality? That is, does genuine individual expression require the assistance of human creativity? In a society, such as our own, where, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, “something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape” (97), it often takes a very creative person, who is in touch with her or his inner self, to originate expressions that break the sameness bounds perpetuated by the culture industry. One way a creative individual is able to originate new ways of expressing individuality in our society is by examining her or his self in order to locate these new expressions. When an individual does this, she or he is giving expression, i.e., she or he is explaining previously unarticulated components of her or his self within that new form of outward expression, and she or he uses her or his creative ability to discover these expressions. Returning to my hypothetical example: because Bobbie recently discovered that being a gardener defines the type of person she is, she wants to express her “gardenerness” to society outwardly in a creatively new way. One way she might accomplish this is by looking within her self to discover a way to express this new notion of “gardenerness.” Bobbie decides to express her love for gardening by wearing a

straw flowerpot on her head as a hat. In doing so, she feels as though she is demonstrating her “gardenerness” to society and that this expression sets her apart from others in a new and different way. For Bobbie, this flowerpot hat is not just a silly hat; it is a way she demonstrates to society the type of person she essentially is, i.e., it expresses her gardenerness. In demonstrating her gardenerness in this way, Bobbie is giving an expression of who she essentially is in an outward manifestation of individuality. In other words, Bobbie transformed an inner expression of what she believes she essentially is, i.e., a gardener, into an outward expression that demonstrates the particularity of her self, i.e., the flowerpot hat. Bobbie’s goal in giving this expression is to project her individuality and nothing further. Moreover, at this point the original expression, i.e., her gardenerness, is still Bobbie’s; it is simply expressed outwardly as opposed to being concealed within as part of what “she essentially is.” However, the extension of Bobbie’s expression by someone else, specifically a coolhunter, into the marketplace for the financial benefit of others is problematic, and I will demonstrate why this is the case shortly.

At this point, however, it is imperative to revisit the notion of the culture industry in order to explain the position of genuinely original outward expressions within that system. That is, I am going to explain how these outward expressions penetrate the bounds of sameness the culture industry forms in our society. As Horkheimer and Adorno argue, the goal of the culture industry is to provide something for everyone, i.e., no matter how original one thinks her or his style is

or how obscure one's peer group's niche is, the culture industry tries to provide products that target that "original style" or "niche." Whether it is specific items, e.g., clothing or music, or broad social trends such as a certain type of lifestyle, the culture industry provides something for nearly every desire. In contemporary society, however, there is not much that is "one size fits all" when it comes to fashion or lifestyle. Therefore, the culture industry must provide an extensive range of products—hence, "something is provided for everyone." However, this range of products lacks genuine individual appeal because of the formulaic process the culture industry uses to generate these new products. That is, when profitability is the main aim, the way to sell the greatest number of products to the greatest number of people is to determine the lowest common selling point among the customer base and produce products to conform to that selling point. Thus, when providing something for everyone is coupled with profitability as the culture industry's main aim, this extensive range of products must conform, at base, to the lowest common denominator. This being the case, as consumers, how diverse a range of products might we expect to see in the marketplace? On the surface, it appears as though we have options as to how we might outwardly express ourselves, e.g., I think I express the particularity of my self by wearing a tee shirt with a clever slogan printed on the front that demonstrates "the type of person I am." Yet, how can something I purchase express my particularity when an unknown number of other people are wearing the same tee shirt? Most of us think we are expressing individuality when, in fact, all we are doing is expressing the

same thing as several others. Through the effective application of this method, the culture industry ensures that a majority of people will continue to be duped by the industry's ideological goal, which is to replace the genuine human desire to discover clarification about the world and themselves with an ephemeral want to be simply what the culture industry instructs humanity to be: consumers. In doing so, according to Taylor, the culture industry has distorted the image of success and "the good life" into nothing more than "the acquisition of more and more consumer goods" ("The Modern Identity" 66). Consequently, the more we consume and the less we create, the easier it is for the culture industry to perpetuate and sustain this ideology. Thus, expressing genuine individuality requires recognizing and being able to see through the ideology of the culture industry.

To either recognize or see through this ideology is uncommon in contemporary society. However, some are capable of doing so. At least two groups of people are able to recognize these patterns of sameness splattered throughout society. The first, trendsetters, are able to originate expressions that break through the sameness because, as I have argued, they are adept at accessing their creative imaginations. The creative expressions of individuality these young people give outwardly, such as Bobbie's straw flowerpot hat, are truly original and not mere reproductions of the culture industry.

The second group is coolhunters. However, coolhunters recognize the sameness from a different perspective and do so with a different intention.

Coolhunters recognize the culture industry's boundary of sameness from a macro perspective, i.e., they are able to see the broader picture. They understand contemporary fashion and are able to distinguish which new expressions have a chance of becoming trends and which do not. Thus, recognizing the existence of the culture industry's boundary of sameness is a crucial component of being an efficacious coolhunter. This macro perspective is critical because in recognizing that the bounds of sameness exist, a coolhunter properly situates her or himself for witnessing expressions that penetrate those bounds. For example, a coolhunter might recognize Bobbie's expression of gardenerness, i.e., her flowerpot hat, as an expression that is different from the culture industry's notion of what it means to be a gardener. In recognizing Bobbie's expression as one that is genuinely new and possibly viable in the marketplace, the coolhunter appropriates that expression and puts into motion its commodification. This is done by either selling it to an interested company or by turning it over to the company for which she or he works. In either case, the ensuing procedure is the same. The expression is applied, initially, to the lowest common denominator in order to reach the largest market possible. For example, the coolhunter decides that Bobbie's straw flowerpot hat would reach a broader market if it were made of a fabric that looks like straw but also comes in a variety of colors as opposed to really being straw and only coming in "straw yellow." Thereafter, the new, slightly more insipid, version of the expression becomes a physical product that can be sold in either the actual or virtual marketplace. Here, I have drawn a somewhat bleak picture of

coolhunters' work, but I dare say that they are thrilled when they recognize expressions piercing the boundary of sameness—and not only for financial reasons. Because coolhunters are “cool” themselves, they delight in seeing new products break into the marketplace. How else could the rest of us common, non-cool people express our quasi-individuality? Coolhunters have us—the non-cool folks—in mind as they extract, co-opt, and commodify the genuinely original expressions of the few remaining individuals who express genuine creativity in a society dominated by the clutter of the culture industry. However, as good as these intentions may be, even if coolhunters believe they are assisting in opening doors to more expressive options for the public, they, too, are being undermined by the culture industry.

As genuinely new expressions penetrate the boundary of sameness and coolhunters seize them, these expressions continue to exist outside the sphere of sameness. These expressions are usually too raw to be infused directly into the marketplace. It is at this point that the ethical problem with the practice of coolhunting emerges, i.e., this is the stage at which the individual's outward expression of genuine individuality becomes commodified. Returning to my example, the makeup of Bobbie's expression of gardenerness, i.e., her straw flowerpot hat, is too rigid for the mainstream gardener. Thus, as I previously described, these expressions first must be processed and homogenized in order to become products that will suit the greatest possible number of people. In Bobbie's case, her flowerpot hat will be made of a fabric that resembles straw and comes in

a variety of colors. Here is where the genuinely creative expression—that once penetrated the boundary of sameness—is commodified, repackaged, and injected back into the culture industry’s sphere of sameness. Thus, in terms of the culture industry’s goal of perpetuating sameness, the practice of coolhunting—as a whole process—is simply helping the culture industry perpetuate that sameness by reorganizing its boundaries. When a coolhunter recognizes a genuinely creative expression of individuality and seizes that gesture with the intention of bringing that expression to others, little does she or he know that she or he, ultimately, is assisting in the reformation of a slightly different boundary of sameness. The longer this process continues the more new products in fashion and culture will begin to look similar to old products in fashion and culture, e.g., the retro fashion movement. Instead of helping to expand the sphere regulated by the culture industry, in the end, coolhunters are actually assisting in its contraction. Thus, coolhunting, as a practice, is nothing more than a tool used by the culture industry to perpetuate its sameness formula.

In the preceding passages, I have argued that the process of giving expression is a way people outwardly express to society who they essentially are. I did this by explaining how Bobbie gives expression of her gardenerness within the genuinely original expression of her flowerpot hat, and I claimed that this is not problematic. However, I also claimed that when someone else co-opts that expression, i.e., her gardenerness, with the intention of commodifying it for the benefit of others, it is problematic, even unethical. I have explained how this

extraction and cooptation is performed, but I have not yet explained why it is problematic. Therefore, the next step in my thesis is to address this ethical problem: Why is the extraction, cooptation, and commodification of an individual's creative expression unethical?

Through an application of another component of Marx's theory, I will properly formulate the basis upon which to answer this question. In chapter two, I described Marx's theory of alienation in detail; however, here I will briefly recapitulate for clarity. Marx argues that the economic incentives generated within a capitalistic system create two new commodities: the worker's labor and the worker her or himself. First, Marx argues that a worker's labor comes to be "congealed" within the object of her or his labor, e.g., if I construct automobiles, according to Marx, the labor I exert in assembling that automobile comes to be embedded within the final product. In other words, the worker's labor becomes part of the finished product, i.e., it becomes a commodity. Second, the worker her or himself becomes a commodity because of the supposed value embedded within the objects of her or his labor. According to Marx, in a society in which the value of inanimate objects trumps the value of the animate workers who produce those objects, the workers become nothing more than gears in the larger mechanism of production: parts that can be replaced, i.e., commodities. Therefore, Marx argues, it is through this commodification process that both the worker and the worker's labor become separated from the actual being or inner self of the worker. It is Marx's conclusion that this process of separation, ultimately, is responsible for the

alienation of the worker from her or his creative ability, which is a characteristic that gives life meaning and defines her or him as a species being.

Marx's theory of alienation addresses the first ethical dilemma caused by the practice of coolhunting. Within the proceeding passages, I will use an argument by analogy to show that the practice of coolhunting is responsible for the alienation of young people from their creative abilities or inner selves. That is, in much the same way that the capitalistic marketplace is responsible for the commodification of the worker's labor and the worker her or himself, the practice of coolhunting—operating within a capitalistic marketplace dominated by the clutter of the culture industry—is responsible for the commodification of the genuinely creative expressions of a specific group of young people.

What is the effect of coolhunting upon the individual being coolhunted? In other words, is the commodification of an individual's outwardly creative expression, for the financial benefit of others, ethically permissible? As I previously argued, giving expression in an outward fashion to demonstrate "who one essentially is" is not problematic when the sole proprietor of that expression is the individual who discovered that component of their self. That is, regarding Bobbie's example, when Bobbie expresses who she essentially is, her gardenerness, by wearing a straw flowerpot on her head, she is giving expression to that piece of her self within that outward display. I argued that this is not problematic because Bobbie still has complete control over both the flowerpot hat and the expression. Because she has control over these, the outward expression

that demonstrates “who Bobbie essentially is” is still a part of her. However, it becomes problematic when a coolhunter, or anyone other than the originator of the expression, declares ownership of the outward expression, here the flowerpot hat, and extends it as a commodity into the public realm. If part of Bobbie’s inner self is a piece of that outward expression, it is congealed or embedded within that expression. Furthermore, if someone else appropriates that expression for broader market purposes, Bobbie’s inner component, which is embedded within that expression, is lost within that appropriation. That is, the originator of the expression no longer has control over the expression that demonstrates to society who she essentially is. If Bobbie’s straw flowerpot hat expression is extracted and co-opted by a coolhunter and later commodified and sold to broader society, Bobbie will no longer have control over either the flowerpot hat or, more importantly, her gardenerness that is embedded within that outward expression, which is one of the characteristics that demonstrates to society who Bobbie essentially is. In a similar way, Marx argues that performing creative labor is essential to living a genuine human life. However, once someone other than the person performing the creative labor has control over the objects of that creative labor, the worker loses control of her or his creative labor.

It is important to understand, however, that the coolhunter, who is responsible for this appropriation, is entirely different from someone who simply imitates a trendsetter. If someone other than the originator of an expression copies that expression, generally, the goal of copying it is to also use it as an outward

expression, i.e., the copycat's aim is to borrow the outward expression for her or his own expressive purposes. In fact, the copycat might even claim ownership of the expression. Nevertheless, the difference I want to make clear is that the copycat does not appropriate or co-opt the other person's expression with the intention of commodifying it as a product to sell. The copycat uses someone else's creative expression in much the same way the originator of the expression does: as an outward expression. The main distinction is that the copycat does not express genuine individuality in the same way that the originator of the expression does.

The copycat is different from the coolhunter because they have different goals. Remember that a coolhunter's goal, once she or he locates a trendsetter, is to entice that young person into revealing her or his ideas pertaining to outward expressions of individuality. Once a coolhunter has in her or his possession an idea for an expression that she or he believes has the possibility of becoming a trend, the coolhunter puts into motion the process of commodifying that expression. Therefore, in essence, the coolhunter extracts and co-opts a young person's genuinely original expression with the expressed purpose of commodifying, mass-producing, and marketing that new commodity to broader society. Consequentially, this distinction significantly differentiates the coolhunter from the copycat.

Once the coolhunter successfully co-opts a creative expression and subsequently re-injects that expression as a commodity into the culture industry's consumer society, the same trendsetter who once delivered the original outward

expression to the coolhunter has the opportunity to purchase the “new” item. Returning to the example of Bobbie: when she is confronted with this situation, Bobbie has the opportunity to purchase the very item derived from her expression, i.e., the new version of the straw flowerpot hat. However, as I argued, congealed within the item is a piece of her inner self, i.e., that expression of who she essentially is: her gardenerness. In essence, Bobbie witnesses a part of her self for sale in the item. Once that piece of her self has become part of that commodity, it cannot be extracted. In other words, the process cannot be reversed. Therefore, once the process of extraction, cooptation, and commodification is complete, Bobbie can only purchase the item that contains her gardenerness. She cannot reclaim that component, and more importantly she has absolutely no control over what happens to it. In short, Bobbie no longer has control over something originally derived from her own creativity that was intended to be used as an outward expression of individuality.

Additionally, if the sense of self is constructed and therefore defined socially, as Mead argues, the way the commodified version of “who Bobbie essentially is” is used in society matters to Bobbie. In confronting her expression as a commodity in the marketplace, Bobbie recognizes that her expression sells for a price, e.g., \$15.95, and she might begin to wonder if her act of giving expression is worth that same dollar amount. Here, Bobbie not only loses control of her creative expression that represents an important piece of her self, i.e., her gardenerness, but she also realizes that her act of giving creative expression has

been reduced to nothing more than a market process of exchange. Just as Marx explains in “Capital, Volume One” that a capitalistic system eventually degrades creative labor into nothing more than an “exchange value” or price (338), Bobbie receives the message that her creative expression that demonstrates “who she essentially is” is only worth \$15.95, which leaves Bobbie wondering if this price also reflects her individual value.

Experiencing effects from this process of extraction, cooptation, and commodification creates a divide within the individual. Bobbie begins understanding her creativity as something alien to her actual self and, for that reason, begins feeling separated from her actual self. Marx describes the commodification of the worker’s labor and the worker her or himself as creating an internal divide within the worker because her or his creative labor is no longer under her or his control. Moreover, he argues that this divide causes alienation of the self from the species being. The internal separation I am describing within the trendsetter is very similar to the one Marx argues takes place within the worker. That is, as Bobbie recognizes the expression she originated enter the marketplace as a commodity, she sees part of herself in that commodity and becomes detached from the expression and that part of herself. Bobbie confronts the new flowerpot hat, which is made of fabric that looks like straw and comes in a variety of colors, and she becomes detached from her gardenerness, which is the characteristic that demonstrates who she essentially is. The fact that her gardenerness is no longer under her control demonstrably separates it from her being. Consequently, Bobbie

becomes disconnected or isolated, indeed alienated, from her own creativity because of this experience. Recall that, for Marx, it is the creative ability to imagine and, furthermore, create an objective world around oneself that exemplifies what it means to be human, or a species being. Moreover, regarding the experience of the worker, Marx writes: “In tearing away from man the object of his production...estranged labour tears from him his species life, his real species objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him” (76-77). Thus, in much the same way, as Bobbie recognizes the creative expression of her “gardenerness” embedded within the commodity, this piece of her self is torn away, metaphorically, from her being. Consequently, the alienation Bobbie experiences from her creativity will eventually lead to a life that is less than entirely human and more animalistic. That is to say, reverting to Marx, that the active function of an alienated human life de-evolves to the active function of a non-human animal—which is a life concerned with only working, eating, sleeping, and procreating. I previously argued that creativity enables individuals with the ability to differentiate themselves amongst broader society, i.e., to express genuine individuality. If Bobbie becomes alienated from her creativity, she will begin to lose the ability to express individuality. Moreover, in expressing less of her individual life, she begins expressing more of her alienated life, i.e., she becomes less of an individual and more the member of a faceless consumer crowd. In other words, as the value of Bobbie’s individual life diminishes, the value of her

alienated life intensifies and is perceived, eventually, to be her actual life. Consequently, Bobbie begins to relate more closely with her products and less with her actual self because her products now reflect who she essentially is. As a result, I am forced to conclude that the extraction, cooptation, and commodification of a trendsetter's original expressions through the practice of coolhunting leads to a significant loss of individuality for that person and, ultimately, to a life of alienation from her or his actual self-identity. Thus, on an individual level, the trendsetter might end up living a life lacking depth, genuine quality, or actual meaning because of the processes applied by the coolhunter. For these reasons, I must conclude that on an individual level the practice of coolhunting is detrimental and, therefore, unethical.

Now that I have explained the problematic effects of coolhunting upon individual trendsetters, I am going to broaden the discussion to society as a whole, which will introduce the second ethical dilemma caused by coolhunting. Thus, the question becomes: What might be the effect upon broader society if the culture industry, supported by practices such as coolhunting, continues to homogenize genuinely creative expressions? Taken as a whole, everyone within our society will experience at least two consequences. First, as I previously described, by helping to ensure the culture industry's sameness, over time, coolhunting will decrease the options we have in the marketplace for products that are different from others—which is the antithesis of coolhunters' supposed goals. Coolhunters are not attempting to homogenize the fashion industry. However, in embracing

and applying the culture industry's formula, coolhunters are reorganizing the boundaries of sameness and ultimately helping the culture industry sterilize society.

Horkheimer and Adorno worried about the homogenization of society and the cultural landscape in a similar way. As I discussed in chapter two, they argue that the more a mantra is repeated and the louder and more widespread it resounds through media, the more likely people are to not only accept the mantra but also believe and repeat it. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno write: "If the German fascists launch a word like 'intolerable' [*Untragbar*] over the loudspeakers one day, the whole nation is saying 'intolerable' the next" (134 original italics). They argue that the dissemination of one particular message or idea throughout society can be dangerous to foundational concepts such as freedom or liberty because in a free market society these concepts often become associated not with their original meanings but with brands, trademarks, or products. In other words, as concepts such as "individuality" become associated with products, people begin to equate the meaning of individuality with the product the concept is used to sell. Horkheimer and Adorno conclude that this sort of conceptual confusion "...is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry" (136). Ultimately, if the culture industry is able to establish its ideology within individuals, it will have overcome the final barrier to its goal of perpetuating sameness.

This societal consequence drawn out by Horkheimer and Adorno regarding the homogenization of concepts supports my earlier claim (pages 46 and 47) regarding the use of these concepts in the contemporary marketplace by both consumers and advertisers. Moreover, it is the same sort of consequence I delineated regarding the contracting nature of variety within the marketplace. The difference is that coolhunting contracts material variety whereas the confusion about which Horkheimer and Adorno are concerned contracts conceptual variety. In both situations, mechanisms of the culture industry are working to homogenize broader society and the social structure, which, in the end, is detrimental to everyone within that structure.

The second effect coolhunting will have upon broader society is an overall reduction of creative expression within society. As the few remaining individuals capable of genuine creativity are exploited for capital gain, the various forms of expression that make our world interesting may diminish. For example, the young people who might have grown up to become artists, poets, or musicians might never develop their creative abilities and, thus, never have the opportunity to cultivate those inner components. If the culture industry continues to dupe us into believing that being creative is nothing more than being creative consumers, it may be the case that new forms of art, music, poetry, or other types of creative expression might not have the opportunity to materialize in the public realm. Moreover, genuinely creative individuals, i.e., the people who break many boundaries, try new things, and do great things, may become a species being of the

past. Consequently, when considering long-term effects, the practice of coolhunting does nothing more than advance the goals of the culture industry. It is simply another method used by the culture industry to ensure society is, and remains to be, made of consumers and not genuinely creative individuals.

As I have explained, there are important reasons for questioning the value of the practice of coolhunting within our society. Coolhunters believe they are bringing more options to consumers with their qualitative research methods. However, in reality, as I have argued, this practice actually assists in the contraction of consumer options and ultimately does nothing more than advance the goals of the culture industry. Consequently, serious ethical dilemmas have emerged, or will soon emerge, as a direct result of this practice. In this thesis, I delineated two categories of such problems. Firstly, and most importantly, the individuals being coolhunted are losing creative, original expressions, which are intended to be used as personal expressions of individuality but, instead, are extracted and co-opted by coolhunters and later commodified as products to be sold in the broader marketplace. In this chapter, I argued that this process of extraction, cooptation, and commodification is responsible for the alienation of young people from their actual self-identities. I demonstrated how this is unethical because it leads to a life of estrangement for the coolhunted individual, i.e., the alienated young person no longer lives an individual life dedicated to her or his actual self but a life as a mere member of the faceless consumer crowd, which is, ultimately, a loss of autonomy, genuine meaning, and quality in an individual's

life. Secondly, I argue that these effects will eventually spill over into broader society and, therefore, affect everyone in two important ways. First, consumer options will continue to diminish and contract as coolhunting perpetuates the formula of the culture industry. This first problem leads to the second issue for broader society. As the culture industry tightens its grasp, using practices such as coolhunting, the creative expression individuals traditionally use to offer variety and zest to our world will increasingly look, sound, and feel the same.

Specifically, the presence of genuinely creative expressions such as art, music, and poetry will diminish from our collective cultural landscape. Therefore, it is because of these harmful results for both the individual and broader society that I am compelled to claim that the practice of coolhunting, as an observable mechanism of the culture industry's narrowing formula, is unethical.

In conclusion, the aim of chapter three was to expose a much larger societal issue than the practice of coolhunting. My intention was to uncover a recognizable example of an actual practice that advances the goals of the culture industry and applies its formula in a comprehensible way. In doing so, I accomplished two things: I showed that coolhunting is detrimental to both individuals and broader society, and I demonstrated how the culture industry is tightening its grasp over society, with practices such as coolhunting, by replacing the genuine human desire to be creative with a pseudo-craving to be only a creative consumer.

In the next chapter, I will summarize and restate the problem with the practice of coolhunting. I will then propose a solution that will both expose the culture industry's squashing of creativity and instigate a broad societal recollection of the value of creativity and individuality. By doing so, I will show how my solution will benefit both individuals and society as a whole. Thereafter, I will consider potential objections that may arise because of my thesis and suggest solutions to these difficulties.

#### CHAPTER 4 – A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEDIA LITERACY

I began chapter two of my thesis by explaining the practice of coolhunting in order to establish two things. First, that coolhunting is a genuine marketing-research practice and is carried out extensively in our society (and to a lesser extent, within the broader industrial global society). I demonstrated how coolhunting, if performed properly, is monetarily beneficial for a few, viz., coolhunters themselves and the corporations or companies that acquire the genuinely original forms of self-expression from coolhunters. Furthermore, from a contemporary, pragmatic capitalistic Western point of view, if a marketing-research practice such as coolhunting is capable of producing financial gain, the utilization and exploitation of that practice is requisite. In other words, my first goal in chapter two was to show the viability and efficacy of coolhunting within contemporary society. Second, by explicating relevant existent literature, I proved that a critical ethical analysis of coolhunting has not yet been performed. In doing so, I pointed to the area in which my analysis adds to the broader discussion regarding coolhunting. These two points both introduced and explained coolhunting as well as the contemporary discussion surrounding it.

Understanding the practice of coolhunting is crucial to my analysis because much of my inquiry centers on the actual performance of this research. Many of the ethical questions I have exposed, regarding coolhunting, can be traced to the methods used by coolhunters. For example, when a coolhunter discovers a

trendsetter and befriends her or him, the coolhunter's goal is to get to know the trendsetter on a personal level; a level that allows the coolhunter to ask questions about genuine thoughts, opinions, and concerns about the world. To many, this piece of a coolhunter's work might appear as an effective qualitative research method or an ingenious data collecting technique. However, as I argued in chapter three, when a coolhunter enters the private sanction of a young person's space, whether it be her or his room at home or a place where she or he associates with friends, and begins asking questions about the very characteristics that make that young person an individual, the coolhunter is not simply collecting data. In actuality, the coolhunter is drawing out the creative expressions that that young person uses to outwardly express her or his individuality. Thus, understanding this practice is important to my analysis because this piece of the coolhunter's work that might appear, *prima facie*, as an effective research method, turns out to be the launching pad for some serious ethical concerns.

I began chapter three with a discussion of Charles Taylor's sketch of the sense of self in Western philosophy and history. In doing so, I demonstrated the crucial cultural and social connections embedded within contemporary Western society to the notion of the self. I elucidated this connection in order to prove that the sense of self or self-identity is a very important piece of, what might be considered, our Western heritage. That is, as a society, we value this notion of the self above many other personal traits for specific cultural and historical reasons. I also explained Mead's concept of the relational social self in order to demonstrate

further the importance of broader society to the development of the individual sense of self. By showing the demonstrable value of the self within Western culture and society, I highlighted the applicability and importance of my thesis question to broader society.

In deeply planting the sense of self within Western culture, Taylor pinpoints one of the underlying motivations that drive people in contemporary society to express individuality. However, in chapter three, I explained how the culture industry has appropriated and misused the concept of individuality in order to sell commodities to broader society. The culture industry has created, through a daily barrage of marketing and advertising campaigns, the pseudo notion that being an individual is nothing more than being a consumer. This ideology presented by the culture industry is compelling, and often people accept it as a genuine depiction of reality (the monetary success of a variety of pop-cultural artifacts attests to this fact). Furthermore, because the culture industry's main concern is profitability, selling as many products to as many people as possible is its foremost goal. In order to do so, new forms of self-expression used to create new products must be applied to the lowest common selling point before actually becoming commodities. A difficulty arises in this lowest common denominator formula; it leads to a marketplace full of products that share basic, common characteristics that have proven profitable over time. Horkheimer and Adorno described this effect on the marketplace as the infection of sameness.

It is difficult to see through the ideology presented by the culture industry as reality. However, in this thesis I explained how both trendsetters and coolhunters do so. Trendsetters originate expressions of individuality that penetrate the boundary of sameness, and coolhunters recognize the expressions that penetrate that boundary. These two groups see through the culture industry's ideology but both have different motivations for doing so. Trendsetters come up with new expressions in order to set themselves apart from others in society, e.g., Bobbie's straw flowerpot hat, and their primary motivation is the demonstration of genuine individuality. Alternatively, coolhunters look for expressions that penetrate the sameness boundary for different reasons. Once a coolhunter recognizes an expression as one that both penetrates the boundary of sameness and has the potential of becoming a trend, she or he co-opts that expression with the intention of selling and/or ultimately commodifying it. This process of commodifying a genuinely creative expression is where the first ethical problem arises.

In chapter three, I applied Marx's theory of alienation to the practice of coolhunting. Here I argued that the process a coolhunter uses to extract, co-opt, and commodify a young person's genuinely creative expression of individuality is very similar to the process the capitalistic marketplace utilizes to commodify both the worker and the worker's labor. I asserted that when an expression is co-opted and later commodified, that expression comes to be congealed as a part of the new commodity. Once the expression is embedded within the commodity, it is no

longer possible for the originator of the expression of individuality to have any control over the new commodity or, more importantly, the expression she used to demonstrate to the world “who she essentially is.” That is, once this process of commodification is complete, the one time genuinely creative expression is no longer a piece of the originator but is an actual commodity. In other words, the extraction, cooptation, and commodification of a creative expression intended to demonstrate individuality is the cooptation and commodification of a small part of an individual. Therefore, I concluded, in much the same way that the capitalistic marketplace creates a separation within the worker from her or his actual self-identity, the commodification of an individual’s creative expression causes a separation within that individual from her or his actual self. This separation causes the individual to become alienated from her or his self-identity or species being, which leads to a life less than entirely human. That is, she or he begins to relate more closely with her or his products and less with her or his creativity and, ultimately, becomes less of an individual and more a member of the faceless consumer crowd. Furthermore, in the long term, by relating more with her or his alienated life, the young person might never have the opportunity to develop into a fully autonomous individual. Thus, by demonstrating how coolhunting is responsible for the alienation of young people from their species beings and/or senses of self, I exposed the first ethical problem with this practice.

Next, I described the effects of this practice upon society as a whole. By arguing that society can expect to experience at least two consequences as a direct

result of the commodification of genuinely creative expressions, I introduced the second sort of ethical problems that will continue to arise because of this practice. First, the options we have for products in the marketplace will contract over time, as opposed to increasing, because of coolhunters and the “research” they perform. As coolhunters collect new expressions of individuality that penetrate the boundary of sameness, homogenize those expressions, and re-inject them as commodities back into the sameness boundary or marketplace, the variety that may have existed in the marketplace will diminish significantly. This first consequence mainly addresses the surface of the problem; however, it is important because this result is perceivable within society. That is, the more coolhunters successfully introduce commodified expressions of individuality applied to the lowest common denominator into the marketplace, the more everything within the marketplace will begin to resemble everything else, which means less variety for consumers. As I wrote earlier, this first consequence is nearest the surface of the problem and, consequently, is most recognizable in society. Therefore, it clarifies how coolhunters, albeit most likely unknowingly, help shrink the sphere of sameness and embrace the culture industry’s formula and ideology.

I described an additional component of this first consequence by explaining and relating it to one of the results Horkheimer and Adorno predict the culture industry will affect in society. They argue that because of the culture industry’s advertising and marketing campaigns that appropriate concepts, such as freedom and individuality, a sort of confusion about the meanings of those concepts will

follow. This is a loss of conceptual meaning and variation and, therefore, is a little different from the one for which coolhunters are responsible. However, both losses, conceptual and material, correspond in that they prove to be accountable for a contraction in social and cultural variation.

The second societal consequence is more broadly detrimental to expressive life as a whole. As creative forms of outward self-expression are co-opted and commodified by coolhunters and the aforementioned alienation from the actual self follows, creative expression—in general—will diminish within society. The young people who might have become the artists, poets, or musicians of tomorrow, might never have the opportunity to develop these creative and expressive outlets because of the separation caused at an early stage of development within their lives from their actual selves. As I explained, the more one relates to her or his alienated life, the less one has the opportunity to experience components of her or his actual life. In short, the fewer creative young folks develop into creative adults the fewer public creative expressions will exist in society. In the end, these two consequences, no doubt, would negatively affect us all.

In chapter three, I explained two types of ethical problems that arise as a direct result of the practice of coolhunting, viz. problems for individuals and for broader society. Exposing these consequences, however, was only a part of my goal. I also desired to uncover a comprehensible example of an identifiable practice within society that perpetuates the culture industry's formula of sameness and ideology of consumerism. By showing how the practice of coolhunting is

implemented and explaining the motives, desires, and goals of individual coolhunters, I demonstrated how coolhunting, as a qualitative research practice, is a device used by the larger culture industry to perpetuate its formula of sameness within contemporary society. In other words, my second desire herein was to show, in an observable way, how the culture industry is tightening its grasp around many, if not all, of the creative outlets remaining in contemporary society. It is important to remember that coolhunting is only one of many devices the culture industry uses to manipulate the sphere of sameness, which intensifies the ethical quandaries I described for both individuals and society as a whole. For example, because creative expression has become a viable commodity in the marketplace, the culture industry, most likely, uses many mechanisms to commodify individual expressions of creativity. Additionally, problems for society as a whole become more serious when considering that it is not only the practice of coolhunting that reduces consumer options and diminishes creative expression but also a variety of other mechanisms along with said practice. In short, the culture industry uses coolhunting along with other tools to pursue its goals of perpetuating sameness and disseminating ideologies of consumerism. It is for these reasons that my solution to this problem is not merely the abandonment of the practice of coolhunting. Admittedly, I would take pleasure in witnessing the cessation of this practice because it would benefit individuals. However, when considering the long term, laying waste to only one practice of the culture industry would not make much societal difference. Instead, I am going to propose an educational

change that both instigates a broad societal recollection of the value of creativity and individuality and undermines the ideology of the culture industry.

The problem underlying the practice of coolhunting is the culture industry. If we imagine the culture industry as a tree, the plethora of practices it uses to perpetuate its sameness and ideology would be the branches of that tree. Clearly, branches of a tree are more vulnerable than its trunk. Thus, if it were possible to locate every branch, we could simply trim those troublesome branches. However, because it is, most likely, impossible to recognize and/or identify every branch that needs trimming, i.e., every instrument and/or method the culture industry uses, I am going to argue for the employment of an entirely different strategy. My strategy will attack the tree at its roots by altering the composition of the soil in which the tree finds stability. In other words, by modifying the foundation the culture industry uses for stability and growth, it may be possible to affect genuine change in our society.

My solution to this problem originated within my practicum analysis. Therefore, before I go into detail about my solution, I will briefly describe the main features and goals of my practicum. The practicum I developed consisted of designing and teaching two sections of a five-week media literacy course at the Boys and Girls club of Corvallis, which I titled: "Media Literacy in Contemporary Society." In order to present this material in an understandable fashion to young people, I taught the course by asking and exploring five questions aimed at specific, somewhat smaller, objectives. These questions were: 1) Who created this

message? 2) What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? 3) How might different people understand this message differently from me? 4) What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? 5) Why is this message being sent? These questions helped the young people relate to the material because the questions connected them, as individuals, to the information, i.e., how and why do advertisers and marketers try to get *me* to purchase products. Because the goal of my media literacy course was to help young people develop internal mechanisms of their own for evaluating the variety of media messages to which they are exposed on a daily basis, designing the course with these five questions at base made this goal attainable.

My thesis is an analysis of the practice of coolhunting but, admittedly, teaching the media literacy course did not put me in contact with a professional coolhunter. However, it did present me the opportunity to witness how susceptible young people may be to the manipulative techniques used by media makers. I learned that young people are quite perceptive when it comes to understanding the underlying goal of media messages. Without fail, each time I asked questions about media makers' motives someone in class would quickly identify profit as the foremost goal of said media makers. This was beneficial because, ultimately, I thought that if I could understand how well the kids interpreted what was going on in media messages, I would better comprehend how a particular group of young people might understand the underlying goal of a coolhunter, i.e., that a coolhunter is not interested in friendship but in identifying specific types of creative

expressions to commodify. Additionally, and more importantly, teaching this course gave me the opportunity to learn how media messages actually affect the identities of young people—whether for better or worse—which was the underlying question in which I was mainly interested. Throughout the ten weeks of teaching, I received a handful of comments that led me to believe, at least in the case of the young people in my classes, that an individual's sense of self can be affected by media messages. This manipulation of the self raised genuine concerns for me regarding the strength of the culture industry's influence over not only young people but also society in general.

These experiences helped me realize that one way to introduce the concept of the culture industry to young people, in a comprehensible way, is through teaching media literacy. Thus, my solution to the larger problem of the culture industry is rooted in teaching media literacy. However, my proposition is to teach media literacy in a new and different way. I am suggesting that we take media literacy education a step further than it has been taught traditionally by not only teaching kids about how the culture industry attempts to make them consumers but also by bringing the concept of commodification and specifically the notion of commodifying forms of self-expression into the curriculum. Admittedly, the addition of this component will complicate teaching media literacy for the individuals who teach it. This is because teaching media literacy, in the traditional sense, involves avoiding evaluative claims and/or statements regarding the ethical value of the content of the actual message being seen, heard, or read by the

consumer. Traditionally, it is not the job of the instructor to say whether the content of a media message is ethically justifiable. It is her or his job, however, to help students understand how and why media makers create and disseminate messages. I am not suggesting that media literacy teachers should make statements regarding the ethical value or lack thereof of the content of media messages they dissect in their classrooms. In fact, I do not believe this is an effective way to teach students. What I am going to suggest is that media literacy must be taken a step further.

A large part of teaching media literacy is helping students to understand the embedded how's and why's of media messages, i.e., how was this message created, and why was it created? Finding answers to these questions requires digging into and analyzing media messages as a group. For myself, the best way to help young folks understand the how's and why's of media messages is to get them involved personally, i.e., by analyzing and dissecting messages specifically directed at their age and social groups. Generally, young folks are very perceptive. As they begin discovering some of the how's and why's of media messages, they begin to understand said messages in an entirely new way. For example, from the outset of my experience teaching media literacy, I found that kids are fully aware that media makers and advertisers are trying to get them to purchase products. Moreover, at least initially, both groups of kids said the same thing regarding this point: media makers want to know what young folks' current interests are in order to tailor products to fit those tastes, i.e., to provide the products kids "really want."

In both classes, however, this perception changed as we dissected and analyzed the underlying meanings of the messages. The more we dug into the embedded how's and why's of the messages, the more the students began to realize that media makers' drive is not young peoples' interests, but rather their own. In other words, often the most surprising embedded message students discovered was that media makers most often reuse the most efficient formula they have for selling as many products to as many people as possible. This was a somewhat shocking revelation to many of the young people in my courses. They began to realize that it was not their interests media makers were trying to suit, but often it was their interests that were being shaped by media makers' manipulative techniques. Here, many of the young people in my courses began to see media messages in new ways because, as a group, they were able to evaluate some of the embedded how's and why's of messages being directed at them.

Teaching media literacy requires thinking and speaking objectively with regard to the ethical value of the actual content of the media messages one analyzes. My solution, which takes media literacy education and analysis a step further, will involve making evaluative claims or statements. However, my solution is different and significantly more complicated than simply offering ethical evaluations of specific messages for students.

As I alluded to earlier in this chapter, my proposal is to bring an additional component of depth to media literacy education: the commodification of creative expression. This component is two-fold, and I will explain the second factor

shortly. The first half of this addition to the curriculum would be to unambiguously explain what it means to commodify a self-expression and give a practical example of how this process might occur. One avenue through which this element could be presented to students would be an introduction to the practice of coolhunting. If explained properly, I am confident that the methods and goals of this practice are transparent enough that most young people could understand them. Just as I have done in this thesis, it would be imperative to explain the practice of coolhunting, show how and why coolhunters co-opt specific information from a specific type of young person, and end by clarifying how those creative expressions become commodities. This explanation would add depth to media message analysis because it would demonstrate where some of the ideas for products originate. Here, however, is where the second element of this addition to the curriculum would be introduced.

Through discussing and understanding how genuinely creative expressions are appropriated and commodified by coolhunters, the opportunity to discuss the value of creativity and individuality arises. Once the discussion moves from media messages to creativity and individuality, it would be possible, acceptable, and necessary to bring evaluative language into the dialogue. For example, at this point it would be appropriate to discuss the historical and philosophical value of the concept of self and individuality in Western society.

Teaching broad philosophical concepts to young children might prove to be difficult. However, within the first section of his online article, "Teaching

Philosophy to Children,” Michael Pritchard discusses methods for helping young children think in broader philosophical terms. For example, he writes: “Stories about those roughly their own age can provide opportunities for children to discuss ideas that are most important to them.” By providing young folks with examples of situations in which people their age make ethical decisions and by asking questions about those examples, even young children will begin to investigate and pursue the moral questions posed. Therefore, by using methods designed to help kids think philosophically, it would be possible to talk with young people about the value of the concept of self and individuality in an understandable fashion.

Thereafter, discussing the role creativity plays in the construction of individuality would be essential for both explaining the value of creativity and keeping students thinking about media messages. Here, one could ask a variety of thought provoking questions regarding the value of creativity that would engage students personally, e.g., What does creativity mean to you? Do you think being creative is important? Is creativity something you can purchase? Asking questions such as these would create the opportunity to pull the discussion back toward media messages and more specifically commodities. If being a creative individual means being original and unique, telling your own stories, and living your own life (which would inevitably arise when asking what creativity means to students), would it make any sense to claim one could express creatively through simply purchasing certain kinds of products? Conceivably, the discussion would move toward reasons why being a creative consumer is not the same as being a

genuinely creative individual. Thus, as a group it would be possible to conclude that there are some things, e.g., creative expressions of individuality, which need not and should not become commodities.

The addition of this two-fold component to media literacy education would help counteract the culture industry's homogenization of society by helping children, at a young age, realize that genuine creativity is a vital component of a complete human existence. Teaching media literacy is beneficial to young people because it challenges them not to ignore media messages, which is impossible, but to pay close attention to said messages, i.e., media literacy is designed to help children develop internal mechanisms of their own for evaluating the various messages they see, hear, or read daily. The addendum to media literacy I am presenting will be beneficial to young people because part of learning to evaluate messages is learning to recognize what the media maker wants the individual to know and what they do not want the individual to know. As I explained in chapter three, because contemporary advertising and marketing use individuality and creativity as selling points, these misappropriations would be recognized by young people and characterized as such in their evaluations of the messages. That is, if genuine creativity is recognized as something that should not be commodified, a young person will easily identify this representation as such and therefore reject it. Admittedly, not all students apply the lessons they learn in classes to their lives. However, if only a few take them to heart, the consequence would be a renewed vitality in the meaning and value of individual creativity within these young

people. Furthermore, as the recognition of the value of genuine creativity increases, the ubiquity of the culture industry will begin to diminish.

The percolation of these ideas will eventually benefit society as a whole. The revitalization of creativity within young people will eventually reach adults and consequently broader society. Creative expression is not only beneficial for the individual creatively expressing her or himself but also for anyone who experiences the expression in some way, i.e., the more creative expression exists in society, the more society as a whole benefits. Clearly, this is not a short-term solution. However, when considering the systemic infection of sameness the culture industry has inculcated within society, the only practical solution is one that percolates from the bottom up within and as part of broader society.

Solving the current problem facing society, regarding the culture industry's squashing of creativity, is an extensive undertaking and will require the cooperation of many people in various positions of society. The solution I am presenting will require, firstly, that media literacy be taught to young people throughout society. This can be accomplished through teaching in schools or, as I did, in places outside the traditional classroom, e.g., after-school programs such as the Boys and Girls club. It is possible to teach media literacy in a variety of settings because its goal is to help young people develop personal skills of evaluation and critical thinking, which will be useful in their daily lives. In the case of many schools, this may mean the addition of a course to already underfunded school systems and/or overcrowded curricula. However, one benefit in this

situation would be that if media literacy is not being taught presently in a school, my recommended additional component could be included as part of the curriculum from the outset of the new media literacy course. Additionally, as I discovered in developing and teaching my media literacy course, the monetary cost of implementing such a course is rather inexpensive. The most significant cost for the group providing the course would be wages for the teacher. Additionally, as far as providing classroom materials, some tools are helpful in teaching media literacy, e.g., television, vcr/dvd player, digital camera, but many of these are common in contemporary classrooms. However, it is not imperative that these tools be available. It is possible to teach media literacy with nothing more than paper, pencils, and a chalkboard. Alternatively, in places where media literacy is taught currently, my recommendation would be to add the additional components of depth and analysis to the curriculum. Undoubtedly, my solution requires more than a few teachers agreeing to teach it; it would require parents, teachers, administrators, organizations, the young people, et al., agreeing that media literacy is a worth-while undertaking and therefore an important subject to teach. This undertaking would be a lot of work, but it is an important issue and an important subject for young people to study. In fact, all the adults and many of the young people I worked with at the Boys and Girls Club, along with many parents with which I spoke about my media literacy course, were very enthusiastic about the course material. Just as Pritchard writes that “philosophy can enhance the entire educational experience of students” (2. Philosophy in a Crowded

Curriculum), I believe that teaching media literacy with my proposed philosophical additions would benefit not only the students but, in the long-term, society as a whole. Consequently, I consider this undertaking reasonable, realistic, worthwhile, and possible.

The culture industry is very expansive, and it has infiltrated nearly every corner and aspect of contemporary life and society. Therefore, undermining and weakening its influence will require a societal effort. In other words, the success of this project will depend upon how many believe it to be worthwhile and important, which may seem difficult. However, because individuality is historically and culturally significant within Western society and because creativity plays a crucial role in said individuality, it is my view that demonstrating how creativity will be revitalized through and as part of media literacy is the best way to build consensus about the value of such a program and, therefore, amplify societal support.

In a society, such as our own, overrun with the sameness of the culture industry, discussing different ways to live fulfilling human lives with young people is important. Accordingly, my proposed addition to media literacy education provides one location to start this type dialogue. However, as much as I would like to see my recommendation applied broadly, it is more probable that my proposal will begin as a grassroots type of campaign. If a few individuals discuss the commodification of creative forms of self-expression and the importance of creativity within the context of media literacy, most likely these ideas will begin to

take root within a few young people and continue to grow therein. Consequently, this change might begin only on a small, individual level. However, this may be the most effective method for uncovering the culture industry's facade of expressing creativity through consumerism because, ultimately, realizing the invalidity of expressing creativity through purchasing products is a conclusion individuals must reach on their own. Thus, by showing, as an example, how coolhunters (at least to an extent, unwittingly) perpetuate the sameness formula of the culture industry by commodifying genuinely creative expressions, this new perspective on media literacy could expose and undermine the ubiquitous influence of the culture industry and instigate a revitalization of the value of genuine creativity within young people.

In the proceeding passages, I will articulate a few possible difficulties with the claims I have made in this thesis and some objections to the arguments I have formulated to substantiate these claims. Thereafter, I will offer clarifications to these objections that will resolve the misunderstandings.

I began chapter three by explicating Taylor's sketch of the evolution of the Western concept of the self in order to demonstrate the value of the self in contemporary society. According to Taylor, the last major step in this evolution comes during the romantic expressivist period. This being the case, the argument might be made that the self is only important (at least to the extent I have claimed it is) if viewed from the romantic expressivist perspective. If the concept of self is analyzed from another perspective, does this change the base of my argument? In

other words, if the importance and value of the Western concept of self is downgraded, i.e., the concept of the self turns out to be not as important as I have claimed, is the foundation upon which my argument built weakened? To respond to such an inquiry, I would admit that I rely heavily upon Taylor's historical sketch of the self. However, I would point out that his is not the *only* narrative about the self, and I would agree that many other perspectives exist, e.g., Mead's description of the socially constructed self. However, I would clarify that I rely on Taylor's perspective because it comes from within the Western tradition, and it exemplifies one perspective of the self that is very important within our culture. Thus, because it is my goal in this thesis to explain the value of the self from within Western society, it makes sense to rely upon Taylor's recapitulation of intellectual history. In the end, my argument is not threatened by this acknowledgment of specificity. In fact, it more properly places my discussion within a Western framework.

The concept of self is important to my argument and, as I have shown in this thesis, it is important to what it means to be an individual in the Western world. This being the case, one might ask: how and why does fashion and style relate to the self and expressing genuine individuality? Moreover, one might claim that my entire argument is based on nothing more than physical appearances and therefore is entirely superficial. In order to respond to such a question, I will refer to the problem I previously identified of which the practice of coolhunting is merely an example: the culture industry. I argued in this thesis that it is possible to genuinely express individuality through one's physical appearance. However, I

argued that this act is uncommon and only a small number of people are able to truly do so via this medium. Admittedly, an individual's physical appearance is somewhat superficial because it is concerned mainly with an individual's external, surface characteristics. Yet, completely focusing on this aspect of my argument is to address only the surface of my claim. My concern is not appearance, fashion, or style. My concern is the cooptation and commodification of creative expressions of individuality and the effects that commodification has on the individuals originating those expressions along with broader society. I chose to focus on coolhunters and the practice of coolhunting because this is a contemporary practice and therefore is observable in society. Moreover, coolhunting demonstrates the formula the culture industry uses to perpetuate sameness throughout society. Ultimately, the focus of my argument is to underline the importance of genuine human creativity and expression in a society dominated by the sameness of the culture industry. Therefore, physical appearance may be superficial but, in this thesis, I have shown why neither creativity nor expression is. Would it make any sense to ask if creating a certain piece or type of music, creating a certain work of art, or writing a play, novel, or poem has anything to do with the self, creativity, or expressing genuine individuality? This question is inane because contemporarily these expressions are deemed genuinely creative. In this thesis, I have argued that some forms of physical appearance can be genuinely creative expressions because these outward manifestations originate as components of individual, human

creativity. Therefore, not all outward physical expressions of individuality are superficial.

In answering the preceding question regarding the superficiality of concerning myself with outward expressions of individuality, I mentioned the cooptation and commodification of genuinely creative expressions and the individual and societal effects caused by this process. I argued in chapter three that this practice is detrimental to both individuals and society. However, I anticipate some possible objections to my claims regarding these results. For example: One might argue that because of practices such as coolhunting, the level of creativity in the marketplace has expanded dramatically. All one must do is search either the actual or virtual marketplace, and one will find a nearly unlimited variety of products to suite one's desires. Thus, coolhunting is responsible for not only expanding the marketplace but also assisting in a much wider distribution of creative ideas throughout the marketplace. How can sharing new ways of expressing individuality with broader society be detrimental to society? Moreover, these practices are necessary in order to bring creative ideas into the marketplace to better serve the variety of individual likes and dislikes that exist in contemporary society. When new, creative expressions are transmitted as products into the marketplace, everyone benefits from that creativity. People want to purchase new and exciting products, why deny them the opportunity to do so?

A similar argument might be made in an attempt to justify the individual benefits of commodifying creative expressions. Here, one might argue that this is

an opportunity for young people to positively contribute to society by offering new ideas that benefit others. Instead of keeping her or his creativity to her or himself, where it is only individually valuable, the trendsetter would have the opportunity to share her or his creativity with broader society. Additionally, the commodifying of a creative expression would make it possible for the originator to witness her or his expression out in the world. That is, the individual responsible for the expression would have the opportunity to see her or his creative expression materialized, as a product, in society. More importantly, because young people's opinions and voices are often lost, or even ignored, in the daily barrage of media and politics, the commodification of their most creative expressions is a way to amplify those opinions and voices to a level that can be heard by all. Young people want their voices heard, and their opinions to matter. Therefore, what better way to do so than by intensifying those voices and opinions by transforming them into commodities that everyone will recognize. Furthermore, maybe young people want to share their expressions of individuality with broader society. If a young person has a new way of expressing something exciting, would not she or he be happy to see it popularized in broader society?

I will address these objections in the same order in which I presented them. I will address, firstly, the questions regarding "societal benefits" of commodifying expressions of individuality. After which, I will address the so-called benefits for the young people whose expressions are commodified and popularized in broader

society. However, before I address each of these objections individually, I will explain the underlying problem common to both claims.

Both of these claims are problems of perspective. In both cases, the arguments attempting to justify some benefits of commodifying expressions of individuality are ad hominem arguments of the culture industry. In fact, these claims help substantiate my argument because they are exactly the type of claims that have been used to perpetuate the formula of the culture industry over the past few decades. By framing these objections in terms of the “benefits” both broader society and individuals will experience, the culture industry masks the processes it uses to bring these “new forms of self-expression” into the marketplace. It has been my effort in this thesis to show how the culture industry’s sameness formula squashes creativity, and these two pro-commodification arguments are examples of how the culture industry is able to do so without raising much suspicion within broader society.

In order to address the first objection, which is directed at the societal benefits of commodifying creative expressions of individuality, I return to my earlier discussion of the type of expressions coolhunters co-opt from young people. Recall that coolhunters are not after merely any creative expression. They are looking for expressions on the cutting edge that have the possibility of becoming the next trend or big thing. However, just as I explained in chapter two, the culture industry rejects untested notions because they are risky. Therefore, the creative expressions that are co-opted must be able to be shaped slightly to fit into

a formula that has already proven successful. For example, returning to Bobbie's outward expression of "gardenerness" given through her straw flowerpot hat, the culture industry has developed a method/formula for effectively marketing hats to the public. Therefore, when the coolhunter co-opts Bobbie's outward expression, the coolhunter already knows, for example, that hats can be marketed to the public. Bobbie's expression of gardenerness will have to be altered slightly in order to fit into a formula devised by the culture industry. It is after the extraction and cooptation of the creative expression that the coolhunter puts into motion the process of commodifying said expression of individuality. At this point, Bobbie's creative expression is applied to the lowest common denominator in order to reach the largest possible audience. As I previously explained, the new flowerpot hat will be made of a fabric that looks similar to straw and comes in a variety of colors. It is through the application of this formula for success that the creative expression becomes an acceptable product to be sold in the marketplace. Thus, the "new and creative" faux-straw flowerpot hat that comes in a variety of colors is slightly different from Bobbie's original expression of individuality. The new commodity resembles the original expression, but the "creativity" the coolhunter assists in bringing to society is no longer the type of creativity Bobbie used to express her gardenerness. Expressing individuality or creativity by purchasing and/or wearing a commodity is not the same as originating an outward expression to demonstrate one's individuality to society. To claim that coolhunters are increasing the opportunity to express genuine creativity or increasing creativity

overall in the marketplace is to misunderstand the formulaic processes of the culture industry and, more broadly, the evidence I have used to build my argument.

I have shown how the aforementioned objections to my argument regarding the societal effects of commodifying expressions of individuality are invalid. Next, I will address the arguments regarding the alleged benefits of commodifying expressions for individuals. In chapter three, I explained the specific type of creativity with which I am interested in this thesis: the creative source people use when attempting to differentiate themselves from others. I elucidated this specific type of creativity in order to distinguish it from other types of creativity, e.g., ingenuity, which is the creative source people use when their goal is creating something that helps or benefits *others* in some way. Admittedly, other types of creativity are necessary for the prosperity of any society. However, the creative source I identified in this thesis is one used for differentiating *oneself* from others. The intention behind utilizing this creative source is not to help or benefit others but to set oneself apart from others. Therefore, in response to the claim that commodifying an expression of individuality is beneficial for the person because she or he would have the opportunity to observe her or his expression materialized in broader society, I would argue that this is precisely the antithesis of the desired result. The aim of generating a way to differentiate oneself from broader society is to be the only person who employs that expression. Therefore, observing an expression in broader society that one intended for her or his use

alone, ultimately, is detrimental for that individual because it is opposite her or his desired outcome. Moreover, as I have shown in my thesis, once an individual's creative expression has been commodified in this way, it is no longer under her or his control. Consequently, the individual becomes alienated from that creative component of her or his being, which is the defining human characteristic according to Marx.

Furthermore, it is simply not the case that the only way young people can contribute to society is through the commodification of their genuinely creative expressions of individuality. In fact, young people can and do contribute to society in many ways. For example, while teaching my media literacy course at the Boys and Girls Club, I met several young people who volunteered to take on older sister or brother type roles at the Club. The Boys and Girls club is open to anyone between about six and eighteen years of age;<sup>10</sup> therefore, there were several attendees in their early to mid teen years. Admittedly, many young people at this age do not want anything to do with younger children, but this was not the case for them all. Some of the older kids actively contributed to the experiences of the younger kids by doing things such as playing games, helping with homework, or just being friends with the younger kids. Becoming a mentor to a younger child is very beneficial for both the mentor and the student. Therefore, this is one possible route for contributing one's ideas to broader society in a genuine and

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<sup>10</sup> The Boys and Girls Club offers responsible supervision for any young person enrolled in first through twelfth grade. For more information about Club policy, practices, etc., see the Boys and Girls Club of Corvallis webpage: <http://bgccorvallis.org/>.

sincere way, unlike simply observing one's expressions materialized as commodities.

Lastly, the creative expressions an individual uses for expressing individuality might be different from her or his opinions about or views of the world, and they are certainly different from other people's opinions about or views of the world. If this is the case, how could an individual's commodified expression intended at one time to express individuality communicate the "voice" or "opinion" of "the young people?" For example, can Bobbie's expression of gardenerness represent all young people's opinions about or views of the world? Obviously, neither Bobbie's expression of gardenerness nor any other individual's creative expression can represent *all* young people's opinions about the world. Therefore, the commodification of expressions is beneficial to neither individuals nor society, and in this thesis I have shown how and why this is the case.

I chose to focus my thesis on the ethical value, or lack thereof, of the practice of coolhunting because it is a concrete example from within society that advances the ideology of the culture industry. Clearly, the problem that concerns me is the culture industry itself. However, because it is a conceptual term used to describe an expansive system of media and mechanisms, which together restrain curiosity and induce apathy within the populous, I needed to uncover an observable, practical example that would make obvious the mechanisms employed by the culture industry within society. Therefore, in this thesis, not only do I show how coolhunting is responsible for the alienation of a specific group of young

people from their emerging self-identities, but I also explain why the mere abandonment of this practice will not instigate any broad social change.

Coolhunting is only one practice among a plethora of others that together enable the culture industry with the ability to convince us that being creative is nothing more than being creative consumers. Consequently, it is the culture industry as a whole that we must confront. In this thesis, I have proposed a new perspective on media literacy education that will both expose the mechanisms of the culture industry and revitalize the value of genuine creativity within young people.

Through utilizing this strategy, it will be possible to confront the broader culture industry head-on. In the end, if we are able to modify the foundation upon which the culture industry finds stability, it will be possible to affect genuine, positive social change.

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