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Cultural Appropriation of the Plains Native American Headdress in the 21st Century by Middle-to-Upper Class American Non-Indians of the Hipster Subculture

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Abstract
My research addresses the cultural appropriation of the Plains’ Native American headdress by middle to upper class American non-Indians belonging to the hipster subculture. The hipster subculture appropriates minority cultures while also receiving the benefits of the majority culture to which they belong. The hipster subculture is influenced by a generally limited knowledge of Native American culture and the trends pressed by corporations. Native Americans also contribute to stereotype continuation in order to make money.

I reviewed six journal articles addressing culture appropriation in fashion, spirituality and stereotypes as well as six journal articles addressing the relationship between identity and appropriation, three journal articles addressing the hipster subculture and their reputation for appropriation, and three addressing the Native American’s place in the market. Because hipsters notably lack pride in their own culture, the subculture selectively appropriates pieces of Native American culture. With these conclusions, the hipster subculture will gain consciousness of their actions and take more caution in their appropriation habits.

Introduction
"Cultural appropriation" can be defined as the borrowing from someone else’s culture without their permission and without acknowledgement to the victim culture’s past. Recently there has been a conversation taking place between Native American communities and non-Indian communities over cases of cultural appropriation, specifically the misuse of the Plains’ Indian headdress, which Natives compare to the Medal of Honor. The “hipster subculture,” which can be defined as a generally pro-consumerist, anti-capitalist group of middle-to-upper class non-Indian Americans, has selectively appropriated aspects of many minority cultures; this action has heavily trended toward aspects of Native American culture. As a result, Native Americans have reacted with outrage as they perceive the offenses to be products of insensitivity, ignorance, and prejudice.

Although there are many justifications behind the actions of the hipster subculture, ultimately, studies suggest that the reasons for appropriation have been subconscious and unknown even to the subculture itself. Because they do not have a consistent body of rites and cultural traditions, middle-to-upper class non-Indian Americans who belong to the hipster subculture selectively appropriate aspects of minority culture such as the Plains’ Indian headdresses, not to offend its significance, but in order to subconsciously make it, and all they ultimately, studies suggest that the reasons for appropriation have been subconscious and unknown even to the subculture itself. Because they do not have a consistent body of rites and cultural traditions, middle-to-upper class non-Indian Americans who belong to the hipster subculture selectively appropriate aspects of minority culture such as the Plains’ Indian headdresses, not to offend its significance, but in order to subconsciously make it, and all they believe it stands for, a part of their own culture.

Cultural Appropriation and the Plains’ Indian Headdress
According to many accounts, non-Indian Americans belonging to the hipster subculture generally appropriate in an effort to appear worldly. Due to a sincere lack of education, these efforts appear offensive and insensitive. Many hipster subculture members wear the Plains’ Native American headdress in a highly sexualized manner, which perpetuates stereotypes of Native women and strips the headdress of its spiritual significance.

Harm of Cultural Appropriation
Native Americans have been forcibly assimilated to forget their culture, languages, and self, but as contemporary society today and Native American communities continue to rebuild after all this time, appropriation and stereotypes only further propel this culture into an invisible Otherness.

Maureen Schwarz, author of Fighting Colonialism with Hegemonic Culture: Native American Appropriation of Indian Stereotypes, claims that stereotypes include the Savage Revolutionary, the Drunken Indian, Mother Earth, the One-with-Nature or Ecological Indian, the Spiritual Guide and the Rich Indian (9). These images have convoluted the Native American’s own idea of himself or herself for years and further confused the non-Indian’s understanding of Native Americans. In support of this argument, Author of “Ok Kutch and Kachinas: A Critical Analysis of the ‘Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990’ (2010), Hapiuk claims that “as much as $160,000,000 has been unfairly stolen from the pockets of Indians” due to the sale of “fake goods passed off as genuine” Native American arts and crafts (1017). Hapiuk asserts that “Native Americans should be able to curtail the appropriation of their culture to maintain their own cultural survival” (1021). Although they’ve been trained in the past to assimilate, contemporary America no longer holds them to that American standard.

Discussion
Author of “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” Elizabeth Cook-Lynn asserts that nobody really cares what Indians think about any particular current national or global issue because they play such a small role in the national past, painted in cartoons like Pocahontas, John Wayne westerns, or the plethora of western and romance novels that generally appropriate in an effort to appear worldly. Due to a sincere lack of education, these efforts appear offensive and insensitive. Many hipster subculture members wear the Plains’ Native American headdress in a highly sexualized manner, which perpetuates stereotypes of Native American arts and crafts (1017). Hapiuk asserts that “Native Americans should be able to curtail the appropriation of their culture to maintain their own cultural survival” (1021). Although they’ve been trained in the past to assimilate, contemporary America no longer holds them to that American standard.

Fig. 1 presents a young woman donning a Plains’ Indian headdress and represents the misuse of the headdress as a cute accessory (Fig. 1). Fig. 2 This picture of Karlie Kloss demonstrates the relevancy and closeness of their culture (Moeller).

Fig. 5 Sioux Indians photograph demonstrates an example of images that promote the phantom image of Native Americans (Gardelnia). Fig. 6 Sius Indians photograph demonstrates an example of images that promote the phantom image of Native Americans (Gardelnia).

References


