Lena Gotteswinter (Erlangen): “Reinventing and Restoring Masculinity: Hipsters’ and Blipsters’ Hybrid Lifestyles”

Abstract

In 21st century society, many trends in pop culture may be identified as symptoms of a “crisis in masculinity.” One of these is hipsterism and the wide dislike and allegations of effeminacy accompanying it.

However, in my essay, I explore the reinvention of masculinity by contemporary hipsters through a conservative nostalgia for conventional forms of masculinity (lived out for example in so-called “lumbersexuality” with symbols of ‘real’ manhood such as beards.1) Combining this with stereotypically feminine occupations – like grooming – and a liberal understanding of gender roles, hipsters are hybrid figures oscillating between femininity and masculinity in an attempted adaptation to current social anxieties. Parallel to this, I contend that (re-)emerging “blipsters” (= “black hipsters”) use hipness to restore their masculinity by revealing the original black roots of the concept, as it emerged among black slaves in the early US as a means of protecting African culture and then was imitated by whites.2 While slavery entailed various forms of emasculation, also this cultural theft constitutes a denial of black agency. Blipsters now defy this by engaging in hipness.

Drawing on this, I argue that, contrary to the common belief in hipsters’ ‘womanliness’3, hipness rather provides distinct mechanisms both for restoring conservative masculinity and balancing out historic power asymmetries in the intersection of gender and race. Moreover, it in fact fosters awareness of gender stereotypes and promotes the formation of a suitable hybrid gender identity for the current eclectic postmodern society.

