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Covert distinction: how hipsters practice food-based resistance strategies in the production of identity

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Covert distinction: how hipsters practice food-based resistance strategies in the production of identity

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This paper reveals the processes by which food is used to express resistance to the mainstream and perform identity work within the hipster community of consumption. Based on the findings of a qualitative investigation, several resistance strategies involving food emerged: Vegetarian choices; Brand choices and avoidances; and Decommodification practices. We discuss how these strategies are framed by hipsters' discursive distaste for the commercial food marketing system but are, in practice, operationalised as subtle ways to achieve proper representation of their collective identity within the marketplace. Mundane consumption emerges as motor-force in allowing these consumers to surreptitiously maintain distinction and to protect their within-group identity from mainstream co-optation. We conclude by suggesting that the inconspicuous nature of mundane consumables such as food and alcohol products allows for idiosyncratic shared community performances that are covert and difficult for broader social currents to detect and co-opt.

Keywords: consumer resistance; community; food consumption; identity; hipster; consumer choice

Introduction

> Hipsters don't get punk-fed by the Man. (McMahon 2008)

In the past 20 years, the level of research attention devoted to group consumption has dramatically increased. One can attribute the growth of interest on this topic to an increasing acknowledgement that the consumption of cultural resources circulated through markets facilitates meaningful social relationships among people thereby giving rise to micro-cultural communities of consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Studies of these marketplace communities have generally demonstrated how communal consumption activities foster collective identifications grounded in shared beliefs, complex value systems, rituals and systems of meaning where consumers develop emotional linkages with one another (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar 2007). However, this stream of research has also shown that communities of consumption often reinforce their joint emotional attachment through a united and sometimes ritualised opposition to dominant lifestyle norms and mainstream consumer sensibilities (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Dalli 2008; Goulding and Saren 2009).

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The concept of communal resistance is a powerful signifier of collective identity whereby consumers have the cooperative ability to challenge given societal rules, counteract market-led norms and tastes and establish their own through their consumption choices, processes and practices. There is growing recognition that communities of consumption present an opportunity to foretaste deviant aspects of consumer behaviour: "they are sites of contestation where orthodoxy is challenged and identities are constructed and 'performed'" (Goulding and Saren 2009, 27).

This paper focuses on the resistant role that *food* plays within the domains of a particular communal context, the "hipster community." Originally considered a faction of contemporary American youth culture, hipsters are now a globally recognised consumption collective. This community is understood to emphasise a bohemian credo that rejects mainstream consumerism ethos as part of a collective stylistic statement. McCracken (2010, 52) suggests that hipsters are philosophically at odds with "the man" and it has been reported fairly anecdotally that food, alongside other commodities, plays a role in expressing an anti-establishment badge for this community (McMahon 2008). Indeed, anthropologists have for a long time considered food to be a particularly powerful semiotic device for cultural groups and, because of its overriding necessity and pervasiveness in everyday life; a form of communication through which expressions of domination and resistance can be made (Appadurai 1981; Bourdieu 1984; Lupton 1996; Fox 2003). When we choose what to eat, we are "communicating" meanings and projecting identities, expressing our values, beliefs and social affiliations and, in some circumstances, what we are against *or* what we deviate from (Martin 2005). Very few other consumer objects dominate our lives to a similar extent and exhibit such ingrained socialised rules and ritualised behaviours (Bourdieu 1984; Lupton 1996). Despite the magnitude of food in everyday life and community it is something often deemed trivial, unspectacular and inconspicuous and, in this sense, "food is extraordinary in its ordinariness" (Marshall 2005, 69). Consequently, anthropological interest in the semiotics of food has developed relatively independent to marketing-oriented studies of group consumption which often focus on the spectacular or the overtly extraordinary (Marshall 2005; Fonseca 2008).

As we seek to increase our understanding of the dynamics and complexities of marketplace communities we need to investigate all aspects of their consumption even the everyday and the ordinary, such as eating practices. We suggest that food-based expressions of resistance have a lot to offer in terms of understanding consumer identity projects and the social self within a community setting. It is through the exploration of the most trivial practices of consumption such as eating that a broader understanding of consumer culture and its mediators is made possible (Fonseca 2008). With this in mind, the purpose of this article is to explore the role of food in facilitating resistance for participants in the hipster community of consumption. By exploring mundane consumption in the context of community rituals, insights can be gained into how and why communities engage in inconspicuous behaviours to "resist an irresistible market (from which there is no escape)" (Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard, and Kristensen 2011, 219). Specifically, we will be able to understand how resistance based on the inconspicuous is expressed and negotiated by the group for the achievement of collective identity goals in ways that are more covert and idiosyncratic than the conspicuous and spectacular.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First the theories underpinning communities of consumption and their expression of resistance are discussed. Then the resistant properties of food will be explicated by drawing from relevant literature in consumer

research and the social sciences more broadly. This is followed by a brief overview of the hipster community before the authors provide methodological details regarding the informants, data gathering, and analysis procedures underlying the empirical study. Findings are then presented thematically and the paper closes out with discussion and commentary.

Communities of consumption and resistance

In exploring the resistant aspect of communities of consumption, one must consider the deep influence of the early work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Hebdige 1979; Hall and Jefferson 1993; Gelder and Thornton 1997). Through employing the concept of subculture, the CCCS attempted to account for collective forms of subversive behaviour among visually distinctive cohorts of the British working-class youth. These so-called subcultural groups consumed distinctive, yet uniform styles that broke away from traditional class-based identities. The CCCS studies established that once an individual consumer's resistance efforts became integrated in a community project, a genuine alternative is established to the mainstream norms and a certain style is formed around the oppositional consumption practices. As Hebdige (1979) reports, members of the punk subculture collectively relied on commercially produced items – studded leather jackets, metal spikes and safety pins, for instance to show off their resistance to class expectations.

Subsequent generations of scholarship are steeped in the examination of symbolism attached to conspicuous consumer products such as automobiles, clothing, cosmetics and other visible affectations by members of subcultures, and how through shared consumption these symbols are used in defining and expressing an individual's group membership, style and thereby social self. Goulding and Saren (2007, 227) in their investigation of the British goth subculture argue, "subcultures have often been conceptualised as the catalyst for counter-hegemonic strategies of resistance (Kellner 1995); however, they are also cultures of consumption" suggesting that these cohorts in their quest to resist domination must rely heavily on their creative use of marketplace materials.

It has been suggested that communities of consumption can also collectively question and criticise material objects and may interact with the market in a critical way as an increased statement of resistance (Cova and Dalli 2008; Izberk-Bilgin 2010). Peñaloza and Price (1993) characterise these behaviours as "consumer resistance" which they define as "resistance against a culture of consumption and the marketing of mass-produced meanings" (p. 123). Consumer resistance is often expressed in the case of "brand hijack" (Wipperfurth 2005; Cova and Dalli 2008). Here one or several consumption communities re-appropriate or take control of variables that are conventionally pre-determined by marketers, such as brand meaning (Belk and Tumbat 2005; Muñiz and Schau 2005). Some communities even identify themselves as oppositional in nature to other brands (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). The stigma that is sometimes involved in their level of resistance forces individuals to seek the protection and comfort of like-minded others in a community, often resulting in the cohort assuming a defensive posture against the mainstream society (Muñiz and Schau 2005).

However, of all the complex interactions with consumer material objects, *food* is a commodity that has not been explored in great detail for its resistant symbolism within style-based communities of consumption though it is something that should not be ignored. Unlike more conspicuous items, food is a constant need driven by a

never-ending pressure to produce or acquire it and this makes it a more pronounced opportunity for communities to articulate their distinctiveness. To put in the words of Fox (2003): "Since everyone must eat, what we eat becomes a most powerful symbol of who we are" and as the following section will discuss, also what we wish to resist.

Consumer resistance through food

Recently, Fonseca (2008) having drawn on mainly anthropological literature has suggested: "there is an opportunity for deepening the studies on consumer culture through an analysis of food consumption and related practices" (p. 32). Fonseca posits that despite rarely being investigated for its symbolic capacity in marketing, food is more than just a unit of sustenance and represents an important cultural expression. Resistance, as one type of food-based expression, has been peppered throughout the literature within and without the marketing field. For example, a case of how food can be used to mark and assist resistance can be seen within correctional facilities where prisoners' experiences with food express ways to negotiate and contest the power inequalities resulting from their prison's highly regulated environment (Smith 2002; Godderis 2006). Food for this controlled and marginalised community becomes symbolic of the fact that life has become restricted and, being one of the few things that inmates still have control over, becomes woven into strategies by which they cope with and resist the "pains of imprisonment." Stealing food, verbal conflicts with kitchen staff and the deliberate spread of rumours about contamination of the guards' food are all strategies which help subvert the regular arrangement of power, resulting in a role reversal (Godderis 2006). Drawing on Godderis and Smith, we can define the term resistance strategy as any behaviour that opposes or conflicts with conventional or dominant structures or norms for the achievement of social or individual objectives. Looking at wider society, researchers have uncovered the use of food as a prop by consumers to refute other forms of authority. For young consumers the consumption of sweets which are classified as "rubbish" substances and prohibited by adults help establish their refusal to bow under parental authority (James 1982). James suggests that sweets targeting the child market with their outrageous names, strong flavours and bright colours represent disorderly and carnivalesque opposition to the sober world of adulthood. Chitakunye and Maclaran (2008) report that even the manner in which food is eaten – "speed eating" – by young consumers constitutes a pleasurable resistance strategy in response to adult rules of decorum around "civilised" eating habits.

Conversely, Moisio, Arnould, and Price (2004) investigate the role of preparing and consuming wholesome, homemade food in the construction of family identity and its resistant interface with markets' competing food product offerings. Comparably, Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard and Kristensen (2011) explore the character of "moralizing consumer resistance" among mainstream Scandinavian consumers who work within the market to choose only food brands which they perceive to be rich in craftsmanship. The Scandinavian consumer engages in moral considerations in separating "good" brand choices from "bad" brand choices so as not to be "polluted" by the products of "a capitalist marketplace." Products which carry minimal signs of branding are then properly prepared by the consumer and make for the ideal food consumption. Indeed, resisting the market through moralising food has been detected across various contemporary studies of consumer culture. Thompson and Arsel (2004) provide us with an example of how consumers through local coffee shop patronage

can unite to establish symbolic bulwarks against multinational coffee shop chains. Similarly, countervailing movements such as the "slow food" (Miele 2006), "natural health microculture" (Thompson and Troester 2002), and gourmet and organic food movements (James 1996; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) oppose McDonaldization (Ritzer 2004) and encourage alternative visions of contemporary foodways and appreciation of the local, the artisanal and the authentic.

Beyond the work on countervailing social movements, the food-based resistance strategies of consumption communities which are formed around wider and more complex arrangements of consumption objects or style have not been explored in much detail. The reason being that food is not the central tenet to many groups and yet it is still part of members' resistance processes and identity formation. Clark (2004) provides a rare example where food is investigated for its resistant properties among the Seattle punk subculture at "The Black Cat Café" where "food, like the place itself, was a declaration of autonomy and organic creation, a rejection of commodification" (pp. 21–22). Clarks' study suggests that food can be leveraged within and alongside a wider constellation of products and experiences of a consumption community to create resistant social identities. However, further research must be committed to explore the specific strategies of food-based consumer resistance by these types of cohorts. This brings us to the consideration of "hipsters."

Who are the hipsters?

"Hipster" is an etic term used to describe avant-garde, 20-something year olds who work hard to develop an idiosyncratic, alternative style and are considered to be a contemporary revival of bohemian culture (Frank 1997). The bohemians were a group that emerged in the 19th century as a reaction to mass culture and production: "bohemian identity was forged from a perceived mismatch between creative ability and the market" (Wilson 1999, 12). Participants in the Bohemian culture saw themselves as different from the masses, were associated with shocking and revolutionary art opposite to the convention and wilfully marginalised through an idealisation of poverty. This bohemian credo survives today in hipsters through the dimension which has been termed "indie" (short for independent). Indie refers to a rejection of mainstream consumerism in favour of authentic product constellations and experiences distributed through small-scale and often localised channels. In the early 1990s, the expression of this indie consumption ideology along with bohemian aesthetics became common enactments of a local subculture in Brooklyn, New York – the original faction of hipsters (Alfrey 2010). Over two decades later, the hipsters have become a globally recognised community of consumption.

McCracken (2010) in his popular exploration of the moral consciousness and belief structures of the hipster community reports that the cohort witnesses equal participation of males and females; is not homogeneous but still has an overarching frame of reference and is "the culmination of all the counter-cultural, individualistic, artistic, competitive, apathetetic, rage-filled rebellions" that pre-date it, such as those investigated by the CCCS (p. 52). Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel (2003) in a satirical popular guide, *The Hipster Handbook*, however report that hipsters tend to be largely a middle class phenomenon which intrinsically differentiates them from their working class predecessors of the CCCS era.

Arsel and Thompson (2011) further propose that through the marketing intelligence of cultural producers and widespread co-optation, "fashionable counterculture" has

become synonymous with the term "hipster." The authors argue that this has created a "marketplace myth" that threatens "the value of [legitimate indie consumers'] identity investments in a field of [indie] consumption" (p. 792). The myth cast around the hipster positions these consumers as being part of a trendy participatory lifestyle which is "largely denuded of any connotations of social protest or deviance" (p. 795). Indie culture is dejectedly mythologised (and marketed) as being stylish and tame which makes its aesthetics easy to co-opt by wider social currents. Arsel and Thompson suggest that progenitors of indie culture who work hard to build status in their community through their consumption and knowledge of how to consume will deny being a hipster. The hipster mythology ultimately devalues their tastes and interests and thus they try to socially distinguish themselves from this mythic perception and defend their tastes from devaluation through a process of "demythologisation."

The study of "real" hipsters is complicated by the popularity or "mythology" of their subcultural style, making group boundaries highly permeable and opportunities for participation and imitation ripe. A comparable scenario is explicated by Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander (2006) in their description of the evolution, diversification and appropriation of the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption. The community still exists, it has just proliferated which makes rigorous conceptualisation of the culture sharing group more difficult.

Regardless of "the stigmatizing encroachments of the hipster myth" (Arsel and Thompson 2011, 803), this study continues use of the term "hipster" as a simple, etic label to categorise, or *brand* (Arsel and Thompson 2011), the nebulous indie community of consumption. While Arsel and Thompson's (2011) work contests the perceived integrity of the etic term amongst authentic insiders, their study provides some useful orienting information on the very people who make up the cohort which helps us develop an operational construct definition to distinguish between insiders and outsiders. They suggest on a general level that legitimate participants of this cohort are deeply embedded in the indie music scene, i.e. fandom and involvement in music which is largely produced independent of major commercial record labels. On a deeper level, they suggest that these participants are interested in art and fashion linked to the indie ideology and hold both an irreverent attitude towards the mainstream and a predilection for non-commercial spaces, goods and activities which are central to their identity. In the pursuit of these interests, participants also forge both weak and strong social ties to other consumers "who not only share their aesthetic tastes but also continuously validate the status value" of their knowledge of how to consume which establishes a community framework within the cohort (p. 798). With this information guiding the current study, "hipster" will be used to label authentic indie music scene participants who are socially connected to like-minded others in their favouritism of alternative or non-commercial objects and experiences which they recognise as internal status symbols in their community. This is the unit of analysis for the current study.

Attention on hipsters has tended to focus on items of conspicuous consumption such as fashion- and music-related aesthetics. Few authors have investigated how their collective attitudes carry over to their choice and use of foods and reflexively how food is tied in with what they are trying to communicate with their larger consumption constellation or "style." Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel (2003) and McCracken (2010) in their popular descriptions of the hipster community both touch upon members' food related behaviours – suggesting high involvement members shop at

farmers markets, health stores and/or hemp shops, eat organic, locally grown, vegetarian and/or vegan food, drink blue-collar beer, frequent cafés and socialise at left-field bars. Furthermore, a popular web-blog "The Hipster Eating Code" parodies the pretension of such food choices and preferences while ostensibly introducing readers to the cultural and dietary rules for enjoying indie food culture (McMahon 2008).

By deepening exploration into the cohort's food related behaviours, it is hoped that we can acquire an understanding of how hipsters enact resistance, draw difference between themselves and their imitators and achieve their individual and collective identity goals within a community setting through low-profile, mundane consumption performances.

Methods

Data collection for this study consisted primarily of a quasi-ethnographic approach involving semi-structured interviews; participatory observation of food-related hipster events and activities, and shadowing and informal conversations with community members. Data collection was undertaken by the lead author between March 2010 and January 2011. The details of interviewing, observations and analysis procedures are outlined below.

Interviews and key informant selection

Depth interviews have for a long time been considered an effective way to elicit the symbolic meanings and experiences consumers experience with food (Levy 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Moisio, Arnould and Price 2004) and so were chosen as the primary data collection device in the study. Informants were sampled purposively (Miles and Huberman 1984) whereby selection was restricted to individuals who met reasonable classification as hipsters. Significant complications arise however when studying the hipster subgroup on the grounds that most members of this identity category shun the very label used to define them. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, 139) state that "selection of informants must be based on the best judgements one can make in the circumstances" and with this in mind, the lead author originally sought out to deliberately find consumers who best fit the hipster stereotype. This involved establishing contact with arts school and liberal arts students, local indie rock music promoters and artists – those which are specified by Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel (2003) and McCracken (2010). This inquiry follows a similar approach to Arsel and Thompson's (2011) sampling procedure which started with recruitment within the broad indie music scene. Identified informants who best expressed the hipster aesthetic – in their twenties, have sociable lifestyles, are drinkers of alcohol, interested in art and fashion and possessing a certain look were then selected. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that the rigour of judging suitable informants however should rest to some degree on self-identification, recommending that only those "whose testimony seems most likely to develop and test emerging analytic ideas" (1995, 138) should be representative of the purposive sample. Thereby a necessary selection criterion was informants' acknowledgement and testimony that they are a progenitor of indie culture via a signed statement of affiliation within an informed consent document describing "indie." All interview participants judged as suitable self-identified themselves as purveyors of indie style and recognised that they reluctantly could be classified as hipsters. Their reluctance corresponds closely with Arsel

and Thompson's (2011) argument that authentic members are sceptical of the term's mythic connotations. Despite this scepticism, permission was asked of informants to allow the use of the term "hipster" to classify them in this research and all agreed.

To ensure a level of reliability and consistency, all interviews conducted with informants were facilitated by semi-structured dialogue guides. These guides gave structure to the interviews but flexibility to probe emergent themes as they developed. All interviews were conducted by the lead author between two locations – a coffee shop on the grounds of University College Cork and in a bohemian type bar and grill in Dublin city. In total, 14 discourses were completed with each lasting over one hour. They were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim and stored with the informed consent of each informant for analysis. All names and other identifying information were changed. See Table 1 for a summary profile of research participants.

Participant observation

The second part of the fieldwork consisted of a study of the hipster community's food consumption at venues where members congregate. Participant observation or episodic "deep hanging out" (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003) is an approach in which "you are directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from their view of reality" (Agar 1996, 163).

The first author's participation in the food related aspects of the hipster community was facilitated by the guidance and assistance of what are known as subcultural "gatekeepers" (Arthur 2009; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The recruitment of gatekeepers occurred during the semi-structured interview stage of the ethnography. Three suitable informants agreed to take the first author into their social circle – "Tanner" (male), "Caoimhe" (female) and "Kiera" (female). Each of the three volunteers invited the first author to attend typical shared meals with them and friends at their student housing co-operatives near the Cork university campus in the late

Table 1. Informant characteristics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
Caoimhe	Female	21	Graduate	College IT staff member
Chris	Male	24	Undergraduate	Student, chef
Cormac	Male	24	Undergraduate	Student, disc jockey
Denise	Female	20	Undergraduate	Student, artist
Ellie	Female	21	Undergraduate	Student, barista
Grace	Female	21	Undergraduate	Student, music committee director
Jade	Female	21	Graduate	Retail worker, freelance musician
Julia	Female	22	Graduate	Photographer's assistant, model
Kiera	Female	21	Undergraduate	Student, retail worker
Lola	Female	22	Graduate	Retail manager, music festival organiser, stage performer
Rory	Male	22	Undergraduate	Student, radio intern
Sinead	Female	24	Undergraduate	Student, server
Steve	Male	27	Graduate	College tutor
Tanner	Male	20	Undergraduate	Student

evenings on a regular basis. The first author was introduced to all those present as a researcher interested in the social activities and behaviours surrounding food. These field visits typically involved cooking and consuming alongside the participants, engaging in discourse and joining them on nights out on the town or trips to music venues afterwards. Observations were written up in the form of memos, and photographs were taken to capture some of the visual richness (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Holbrook 1998). In order to explore the difference between how hipsters ate in their day-to-day life beyond their communal site-specific behaviours, each gatekeeper for as much of two full days as possible, including shopping trips, meal preparation and consuming meals either in the home or outside of home. With regard to ethical considerations, the purpose of the research was explained to all participants and written permission to use the observational data and photographs was obtained.

Analysis and interpretation

All ethnographic data were analysed and interpreted following the methodological procedures outlined by Spiggle (1994). Our analysis has been iterative: letting prior operations shape the following ones. As the data were collected, they were compared to the literature in a process of recursive triangulation before further data were collected and analysed. Hence, the reading of the literature was inductive and relevant and both shaped and reflected the interpretations presented. According to Spiggle (1994, 495) the advantage of iteration is that "it permits the development of provisional categories, constructs, and conceptual connections for subsequent exploration," and thus aids inductive processes by which we organised the data and extracted meanings which are drawn up in theme format.

Emergent themes: the resistance strategies

The most common food-related consumption occasion for hipsters was found to be "kitschy dinner parties" where hipsters invite their friends over to cook "from scratch" for them and engage in social alcohol consumption before going out clubbing in the town centre. The parties are termed kitsch (i.e. tacky or low-brow) because they are divorced from any association with the conventional, *Martha Stewart* middle class and middle-aged typecast dinner party in favour of an ironic expression of aesthetically deficient, bohemian stylistics. A low-budget feel is emphasised, ambient background music is replaced by low-fi rock, and much more alcohol is included with the food than the typical dinner party. These kitschy occasions tend to be quite informal affairs–mostly because nobody has quite enough chairs, let alone plates and cutlery at the student residence or inner city apartment. Regardless of these deficiencies, hipsters to a large extent revel in this environment, attributing value to the meagre surroundings. For example one of the male informants, Steven a college graduate, rents a small apartment in the city above a local rock pub and deliberately takes "a less is more" approach to interior design citing "the dirt poor look" as important to creating his bohemian style. Hipsters' take on the dinner party concept stands as a site of socially communicated resistance in itself where a blatantly inferior, tasteless imitation of a high brow social exercise is of recognised value for these consumers. Through an edgy re-appropriation of something traditionally seen as suburban and safe, there is an intentional and ironic blurring of high and low culture. For example, during a site observation at a dinner party, it was observed that the male hipsters present wore suit

blazers (though they were worn over skinny jeans and canvas sneakers). One informant, Rory, describes this behaviour as "going against the grain when it comes to the dos and don'ts of dinner party snobbery," that he and "his mates are deliberately making fun of" and subverting the usual arrangement of dress style and aesthetics at these events.

These kitschy dinner parties were noted to be high frequency events for the hipsters under study, with circles of friends congregating for the ritual at one another's' student homes at least once a week. When questioned about the uniqueness of the ritual, informants tended to disagree ardently that their kitschy dinner parties are in any way like the food-related performances of the wider collegiate population:

> No. There's nothing quite like what our own kind of social circle get up to. I suppose it's all down to us being on the same wavelength and yeah that has a lot to do with indie beliefs and the same interests. I've been to a few things with other people from college, like people that wouldn't be on the same wavelength and someone would just tear open a box with a barcode, heat up a frozen pizza in the oven and deep-fry a few chips. It just wouldn't be the same; you wouldn't have the same buzz [fun]. It'd be the usual s**t, same boring food and same boring convo [conversation]. (Rory)

> What we have created here is a way of life. It's brought into the dinner party fun then, the food, the drink and the music playing and the banter. That's what we do and I can't compare it to a few regular lads from college sitting around eating spaghetti at the [college house]. That's too normal. What we do involves real effort. (Steve)

The informants' comments suggest that the dinner party is a site of distinction where there is a deliberate and conscious attempt to distance the ritual from the eating behaviours of outsiders. Within the domain of their social ritual, hipsters resist normative behaviours of the mainstream by constructing their own alternative experiences. The resistance is idiosyncratic to the group – it is constructed by insiders and observable only by other insiders.

Beyond the social ritual of the dinner party however, hipsters discussed opposition in food shopping, preference, cooking and other shared meals with friends. Hipsters defined themselves throughout interviews in opposition to "*the bulls**t ads on the TV*" (Grace) and to "*what most people would eat because it looked nice on a supermarket shelf*" (Chris). This forms a rather large component of these hipsters' individual and collective selves and was found to be a negotiated process in which the "we" involved in their protest is defined by micro-socially constructed food consumption experiences that are distanced from the commercial mainstream and the market. To achieve this, shared distaste for food marketing through discourse was found to play a central role in sustaining hipsters' food related identity and this rhetoric was observed to inspire firstly, how the community constructs choices outside of market led norms and secondly how members reconcile their consumption of the mass-marketed offerings that they do use. These decisive actions then inform three collective strategies within hipsters' food consumption behaviours: (1) de-commodification practices; (2) brand choices and brand avoidances; and (3) vegetarian or vegan choices (Figure 1). These strategies work in tandem to ensure that hipsters idiosyncratically create their own distinction based on subtle opposition to the mainstream using the mundane or inconspicuous.

Voicing distaste for mainstream food marketing and consumption

What emerges very clearly from the data is a discursive repertoire in relation to food that aids hipsters to frame their social world in a way that is critical of the mainstream
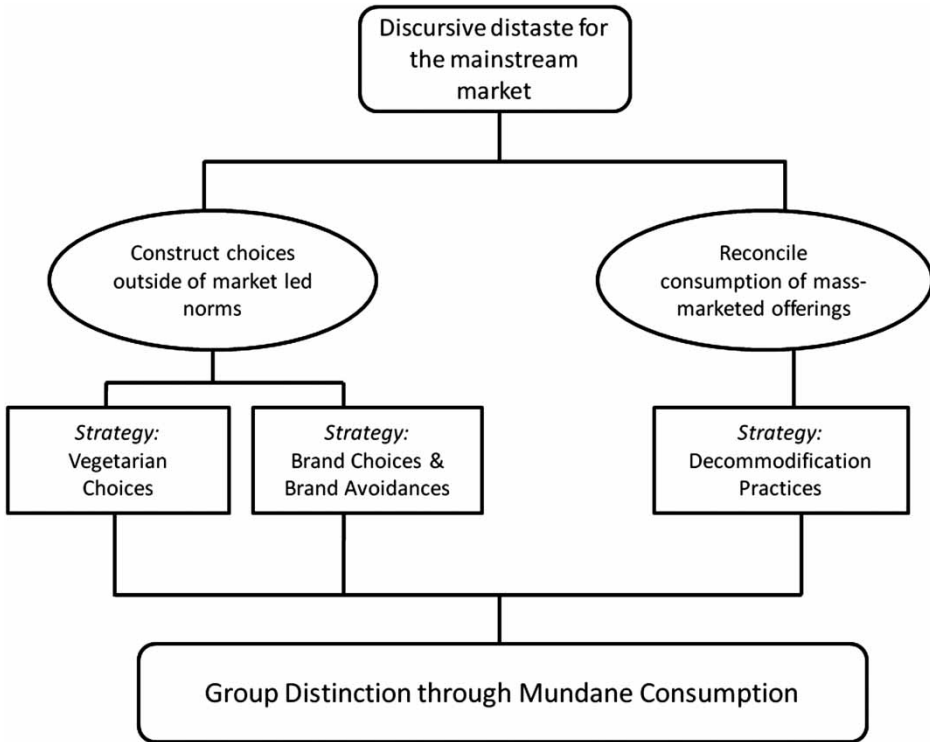
Figure 1.   Construction of distinction via food-based resistance strategies.

food marketing system. Particularly, voicing distaste for each and every representation of marketised food production, retailing and consumption is one of the most important tactics through which the hipsters in this study demonstrate a resistant collective identity. This discourse, rather than being primarily intended as ideological resistance to the market *per se*, was found to be operational in performing difference from conventional food consumers. Participants engaged in considerable discourse with each other about how such issues as animal cruelty within the food industry, the injustices of "supermarket bought meat," modern production and processing, marketing, corporate greed, and passive consumption all serve to protract an unjust and insipid mainstream culture. These resentful sentiments can be characterised as maintaining a critical distance from the industrial food market system while sharing knowledge which they believe goes above and beyond what the average consumer is aware of. In one particularly acerbic interview quote, Grace summarises some of the collective beliefs hipsters share about the food markets and the ignorance of the average consumer:

> It's all about money. Animals and people are exploited, but consumers don't seem to care "cause they're getting cheap food". It's disgusting. And it's not about food either – battery eggs are of a lower quality than free range ones, and the stuff McDonald's cooks could hardly be called food. (Grace)

In her introduction, Grace associates the food markets with money and insensible profit orientation and constructs the result as poor quality foods for the consumer. This construction is accomplished through use of adjectives such as "disgusting" and her

rejection of commercial chains like McDonalds as "food." This type of subversive discourse can be considered an important signifier of identity as Sneijder and te Molder (2006) demonstrate how identities as part of social actions can be performed through talk about food. We can consider hipsters' dissatisfaction with the food market through words as very much an identity salient mechanism for these consumers. Correspondingly, Kozinets (2002, 24–7) finds in his ethnographic exploration of the hyper-community of "Burning Man" that participants attempt to establish themselves as beyond the reach of the market through their words, expressions and chosen conversation topics, i.e. "discursive devices" (Sneijder and te Molder 2006). Discursive devices can be considered language-based tools that are employed to express some aspect of one's identity, worldview or belief structure or to construct a personal enduring viewpoint.

Informants drew on specific devices to equate industrially processed and mass marketed foods with money making and ruthlessness and to construct their consumption choices as outside of market led norms which they argue adversely influences individual consumers' identities, causing them to become passive and less expressive. Consider the following fieldnote taken from the kitchen table of a gatekeeper informant's college house during a kitschy dinner party:

> 8.00 pm, Thursday April 7th, Dinner Party (Caoimhe's House), 6 hipsters present: Conversation moves onto the "poor taste of packaged cheese compared to product bought by Caoimhe" at the farmers market to make homemade calzones. There is general talk about how most people do not see past what they can buy out of a supermarket. Participants vent their thoughts regarding modern food production systems and the way food is sold. A male, Danny, leads the debate, puts down his can of beer and gives a summary of the documentary film "Food Inc." while occasionally tooting Irish supermarket food as similar to the American foodways exposed in the film. Another male participant pipes in and asks Danny if he had heard of the "Coca Cola Killings" in South America. Everyone listens intently to what he has to say. A female, Samantha likens his story to alleged exploitation crimes of Tesco in India. (Researcher Fieldnotes, 7 April 2010)

During this field setting, the participants discursively construct their taste in farmers market bought produce as a resistant move against the general offerings of the mass food markets. They disassociate their collective taste with the low involvement that the majority of typical mainstream consumers devote to most food products. The righteousness of these hipsters' resistance to the mass-marketed is vindicated through swapping of stories pertaining to the immorality of various big food companies and/or the enjoyment of local food shopping experiences with independent outlets. These findings correspond with the dinner-table storytelling of Thanksgiving which was observed by Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) to be a way for American families to retrieve authentic values and avoid – at least in part – the standardisation induced by mass production and mass communication.

The collective discourse of swapping stories about the crimes of the food industry take place in a social arrangement around food with others in the community: a communicative setting. In this setting, hipsters share their stories to appear to be in the know, which corresponds to the presence of "expert forms of [sub]cultural capital" in the hipster community (Arsel and Thompson 2011, 799) Much like Arsel and Thomspson identified hipsters to display a cultivated taste and knowledge of specific consumption practices in their study, it was observed here that it seems to be cool or hip for a community member to be able to refute the corporate establishment surrounding food.

Discourse is an opportunity for individuals to fulfil their emancipation process from mainstream tastes and justify their style. It is only through socialisation and exchange of personal experiences that the process of emancipation can be enacted and a collective identity is formed. From data gathered through shadowing informants away from the social setting, there were no recorded instances of hipsters expressing distaste for the market during encounters with outsiders on a day-to-day basis, i.e. college or work colleagues, family members, teachers or lecturers who do not fit the hipster framework. This rhetoric appears to be reserved for the communal resistance practices of the group. Hipsters' discursive distaste for the market is an internal mechanism of the community which establishes participants as high-minded, critical and informed consumers with the knowledge to back up why they see the mainstream as "lame" and their own consumption choices as "cool." These food-related discourses also have a very real impact upon informants' enacted food consumption behaviours. For example, Chris suggests that a vital part of being a hipster is to ensure one does not contradict the market-distancing discourse that takes place socially:

> it's certainly a big part of who I am and I define myself by what I eat to a large extent yeah. Especially socially with friends, that's how our own circle would work. We'd eat fresh local stuff or organic produce and not crap rolled out off a conveyor belt for profit. I'm not a hypocrite, when Saturdays over I'd always go away and continue eating that stuff throughout the week. (Chris)

There were also attempts to impose symbolic boundaries and to police the territory of food relatively un-harmed by the market, a theme that resonated through the interviews. Ellie suggests that "*some things aren't food. If it's over-processed and things like that, it stops being food after a while*." Indeed, the alternative appeared to be a choice of organic or artisanal foods. Organic food products, once considered a "totem of the 1960s anti-establishment, anti-corporate, anti-conformist, hippie counterculture" (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007, 135) were found to be the preferred options for contemporary hipsters. During observations of the communal consumption of these preferred foods, hipsters would utter profanity and denounce mass consumption of the "*same old sh*t*" (Lola). Expletives like sh*t demonstrate a clear distaste in mass market foods while adjectives such as "same" and "old" indicate they are the mainstream norm which the community wishes to resist through their anti-consumption. Discursive strategies in favour of organic products helps hipsters differentiate themselves from more mainstream youth culture.

It was found however that voicing distaste for the mass market for hipsters does not always preclude consumption of processed foods, that the two phenomena reluctantly co-exist, and this brings us to the decommodification practices involved in hipsters' food-based resistance strategies.

Strategy 1: decommodification practices

Despite their ideological stance against corporate activities, many informants suggested that being price sensitive often dictated that they purchase cheap, mass-produced product options from the retail multiples such as supermarket own brand's value range (Cormac, Kiera, Ellie, Jade, Julia, Tanner, Caoimhe):

> I'd try and buy from em, local producers if possible. And preferably organic but since I started back in college this year that'd changed a little bit because my income doesn't match up to the organic prices basically. (Cormac)

In order to quell this apparent hypocrisy, it was observed that there are often practices enacted to ensure the use of mass-produced, commercially processed and packaged food products that are acceptable for consumption in micro-social rituals. This was usually achieved through acts of "decommodification" (Kopytoff 1986, 64; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991, 27–8) such as the removal of labels, packaging etc, the cooking/baking of foods and/or any form of customisation or presentation of food products in a way that differentiates them from common consumer objects. Such acts of decommodification are behaviours that singularise products or move an item from the amoral market to a moral communal sphere (Kopytoff 1986, 64). Wallendorf and Arnould (1991, 27–8) describe this type of consumer behaviour as a form of sacralisation – a way in which consumers can make mass-produced and delivered food products into sacred, singularised artefacts fit to serve ritual purposes. Ellie, for instance, described the acts of discarding packaging materials and the presentation of foods alongside alcohol for her friends at a dinner party:

> Yeah, like we'd try to personalise the foods by like ripping off the packaging or like yeah … just like … Like our summer fruits were served at the house party in a smushed up sauce in a Tupperware tub and not in the Tesco Valuebag it came in! (laughs). Like it didn't come the way it was presented, it kind of looked like something we made from scratch ourselves. We just prepared it and put it in a bowl and it became, I suppose, ours then. (Ellie)

By stripping corporate food of its labels and packaging, hipster food is decommodified, freed of its alienating qualities, and restored to an original state: "*things look better then; you can't see that it was bought for 3.99 off a shelf somewhere*" (Jade). In terms of *sacred consumption* theory, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) argue that in order for something to be special or hold a "sacred" position in a ritual, it must be kept apart from the profane sphere of commercialism. Data from the shadowing component of participant observation found that individual hipsters generally did not go through the same efforts of decommodifying food products when away from the communal setting. Observations gathered from shadowing Tanner, Caoimhe and Kiera found there was very little latent meaning in the preparation and presentation of foods when only for the purposes of individual consumption. Specifically, Tanner was observed to eat branded breakfast cereal in the morning (sometimes straight from the box with his hands) while the two girls prepared much less creative and sometimes quick and easy meals when eating alone or with a family member. For example, both girls were noted at separate points to prepare basic sandwiches for their own private consumption and no attempt was made to conceal evidence of the market: branded condiments and ingredients were left in full view on the table. Decommodification was thereby observed to be a strategy specific to the social sites or rituals of the hipster community. Rituals are highly communicative acts for the participants involved and so for hipsters, stripped food is seen as cool to eat with members of the community and no longer a product of the greedy corporations (something that would be seen as un-cool to eat in a community setting). The overt influence of the market would threaten the integrity of sacred places and occasions for hipsters.

Cooking or baking, which are creative and transformational processes in themselves, then were described by a number of informants (Rory, Kiera, Ellie, Tanner) as a further step in demarcating the realms between hipsters' food and the "*same old sh*t*" of the marketplace:

> I guess if I buy something like, y'know, couscous from Tesco, well it's still Tesco cous-cous, but I mean I guess it depends what you cook with it. If I'm cooking with it, I'll use Chinese fresh ingredients or quality ingredients, and if I do have to use something from say the Tesco value range then I guess you wouldn't really know at the end of it. (Cormac)

Ready to cook meals were avoided in social rituals in favour of blending a combination of food products together in cooking something original or authentic. Analysed within the frame of decommodification, meals cooked from scratch are symbolic of rejecting the market for the achievement of social objectives. Wallendorf and Arnould (1991, 27) suggest that "The transformation involved in cooking and serving branded products purchased in supermarkets is key to the creation of a ritual with unique meaning for participants." For hipsters, consuming over-processed food products is counter to the cohort's collective identity or style. The response is to value products that are not stan-dardised or processed which they reject as corporate-capitalist "junk food" (Rory, Chris, Grace). These consumers' preparation of meals "from scratch" for friends can be seen as a way in which they are able to transform market-bought products into home-made dishes suitable for use in communal rituals.

Homemade food has traditionally been viewed as an "authentic" creation of the family (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991; Groves 2001) but perhaps the data in this eth-nography suggest that homemade food can be a construction of authenticity for the con-sumption community also. Homemade food "operates as a symbolic bulwark against intrusion of the market into the domestic domain" (Moisio, Arnould and Price 2004, 380) and this barricade against corporate activity is detected in Tanner's words:

> the odd time we can have a big get together and being interested in art and creating some-thing, em, original like most of our friends in our circle, we'd try to cook or make some really nice, like creative food before going out drinking or whatever. Something you can't just buy out of a chiller cabinet. (. . .) Like make something new, homemade stuff, sh*t you can't buy.

Tanner suggests here that there is a discernable association between food and art within his social group. This is a profound connection to make on the grounds that creative ability in opposition to the market is a construct that the bohemian origins of indie ideology are firmly rooted in (Frank 1997; Wilson 1999). Cooking processes through their inventiveness and invested labour are identified by Tanner as an activity that represents the wider creative predilections of the community. Specifically the homemade meal is positioned as a creative form on display for the social setting. This suggests that home cooked food is embedded in the indie idealism of hipsters and their motivations to distance themselves from the mainstream market through col-lectively performed distinctive and unique behaviours. The quote also reflects the fact that, in the hipster logic, a meal can be considered homemade as long as it is not a readymade convenience product sold under such commodifying logic. Discourse about "homemade" or "from scratch" masks the presence of the market and expresses an alliance with the intimate and the social. In this way their "homemade" products are at least partially manufactured and distributed through the market, rather than crafted wholly from scratch. Nevertheless, their homemade products lack the commercial profit-making aspect of the mass-produced "readymade." Hipsters see readymade food products not as a desired convenience, but as a symbol of monoculture or the mainstream. Informants generally agreed that the most alienating aspect of the ready-made food products is that they originate from an impersonal production system,

something that lacks this "original" or "creative" aspect of the homemade. Hipsters value the labour embedded in their creations and so what they qualify as homemade may be both a retaliatory consumption practice in response to the commodifying moves of the marketplace but also as a potent signifier of their artistic identity. Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard and Kristensen (2011) suggest that moralising about consumption has predominantly been discussed in terms of consumer resistance but argue that such acts of resisting an irresistible market can be operationalised as creative self-expression (p. 219). Within the context of this study, creativity can certainly be witnessed in hipsters' communal processes of decommodification in combination with their discursive attempts to refute the market through storytelling. These resistant processes facilitate the maintenance of alternative and artistic aesthetics around indie culture thus enabling an expression of group identity.

During field observations, Kiera and her friends were found to decommodify supermarket bought products through the baking of confections for a friend's kitsch themed birthday party. These hipsters blended various everyday store bought ingredients (branded chocolate, flour, eggs, food colourings, icing mix)or what could be considered the profane, to bake an elaborate, kitschy cake shaped in the likeness of the "Cookie Monster" and vegetarian friendly chocolate cupcakes, i.e. sacred artefacts for the social ritual (Figure 2). For hipsters, the act of baking ensures reverence for and the sacred status of secular consumption objects such as cheap branded products. In other words there is an objectification of the food (the sacred is represented in an object and thus "concretised").

Decommodification practices are directly linked to creative processes which complete the transformational cycle of mundane (profane) to the sacred. The rituals also

Figure 2.   "Making the sacred from the profane": decommodification through baking.

give credence to an ideological stance against the market that hipsters work so hard to create through their consumption, but were largely observable only during in-group activities and not inherently apparent away from hipster social sites.

Strategy 2: brand choices and brand avoidances

In order to bolster their discursive distaste for mainstream food marketing, a large number of informants described actively avoiding brands that they feel have no place in their community and would serve only to add undesired meanings to their cohort (Rory, Caoimhe, Tanner, Rory, Chris, Grace, Kiera, Ellie, Tara). Brands most collectively avoided by informants included popular global brands, specifically the market leaders of ready-to-eat ranges and convenience products. Informants associated these brands with a lack of creativity and perceived them to be consumed only by those who are "part of the rat race" (Rory). To be part of the rat race is to not have time to value the social nature and creative agency involved in cooking from scratch or even the autonomy to choose something unusual. Julia suggests that she has on occasion been guilty of picking up a well known vegetarian-friendly brand of quick-to-cook meat substitute products from the supermarket for personal consumption but that she "*wouldn't dream of purchasing a convenience brand like that for an indie house party* [*kitschy dinner party*]. *That's the type of thing our scene wants to avoid being associated with.*" She suggests even decommodification practices are not enough to mask the homogeneity of such brands: "*You can't even do anything to hide the cheapness and uniformity of branded things that grill or even microwave in two to five minutes.*" Popular convenience brands lack self-expression and carry with them a signal of standardisation and are thereby avoided during times of social togetherness.

Paradoxically while hipsters described avoidance of what can be considered popular mass-market food brands, they were found to gravitate towards the cheapest take-out alcohol brands on store offer, marking an irony in their consumption. Some observations found participants did drink premium-line spirits such as *Jack Daniels* whiskey on occasion, though much of the beer consumed by hipsters during social rituals tends to be value brands such as *Karpackie* lager or *Druids* cider which retail for discount prices on the off-trade. In line with popular writings on the hipster community, McCracken (2010, 63) suggests the beer brands of choice for community members in the USA include *Pabst Blue Ribbon* and *Old Style*, which are considered proletarian flagships.

When questioned about their alcohol brand choices and preferences in interviews, informants typically claimed that these brands are favoured apathetically on the grounds for their economic value: "*I suppose I drink Karpackie or like a whiskey on the odd chance, but mainly for alcohol its cost.*" (Tanner). Within the setting of the on-trade, price consciousness continued to play a big part in brand choice with many Hipsters interviewed in Cork city opting for *Beamish*, a relatively cheap locally brewed Irish dark beer: "*We all drink (Beamish) because it's the cheapest . . . well I think it's the cheapest pint you can get inside in a place*" (Denise). Such disimpassioned statements throughout the discourses indicate that hipsters do not perceive any symbolic value in cheap alcohol brands, only their economic value. This concern for economic value may be structurally imposed by the typical socio-economic status of a hipster's life-stage and earning potential. Hipsters in this study described the enjoyment of "getting drunk" with their friends and looked to the most economically feasible way for them to achieve this.

Although price orientation attracts hipsters to their choice of beer brands, observations at kitschy dinner parties and various sites of ritualistic play indicated that there *is* certainly an identity salience embedded in these products for hipsters. In the following fieldnote, participants tease out their perception of the *Druids* cider brand:

> 9.30 pm, Thursday April 7th, "Dinner Party (Caoimhe's House), 6 hipsters present:" Amidst conversation, one of Danny's male friends, Andrew, quietens everyone, checks a text his phone and announces that his girlfriend will be here soon with a crate of Druids cider. A few of the room cheer and one of the other males slaps his hands on his knees and shouts in faux rural Irish accent: "Drinking like bums and looking like bums again tonight, it'll be a messy one!" A few of the participants then go on to light heartedly tease the Druids brand, its association with those on the margins of society and how "it'd nearly be cheaper to drink Druids than bottled water!" (Tanner). (Researcher Fieldnotes, 7 April 2010)

There is a degree of brand hijack taking place here where hipsters appropriate their own meanings for *Druids*, associating the brand with "bums," and their consumption of it somehow being indecorous or obscene. In the following interview extract, Lola describes specifically how the associations of discount alcohol with the most disadvantaged members of society are re-appropriated by hipsters to manufacture their own symbols:

> all the homeless people drink Druids too but at the same time (…) the cheaper, the more it becomes associated with student life. If you were in college drinking it with the indie kids they wouldn't say anything because it's the staple cider. It's developed a kind of brand personality around it like it's cool to drink, it's associated with being edgy and dirt poor. (Lola)

Hipsters' communal consumption of discount alcohol brands which they associate with poverty is made *safe* through the status of being a university student. The cheapness around the brands helps give an *edge* or coolness to their status. By drinking discount brands of alcohol this cohort appropriates what they perceive to be the authenticity of disadvantaged consumers in spirit, if not in any specific, concrete way – many of the hipster cohort sampled are still by their status university students. The cheap, no frills image of these brands is constructed to fit "*a poor student type lifestyle*" (Tanner) image which is understood in popular texts to be an association that hipsters find attractive (Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel 2003; McCracken 2010).

A lack of marketing also helps bolster the rebellious symbolism hipsters appropriate to discount beer brands. Value options such as Druids, Beamish or Karpackie with little above-the-line promotional support are essentially each re-appropriated as a "protest brand," a non-hyped underdog beer that hipsters choose to drink for the achievement of identity objectives. There are no attempts by the community to decommodify their discount alcohol products like they would do to mass marketed food products – instead there is a celebration of their beer brands' cheapness and lack of promotion. These brands concretise the properties of cool because they symbolise the non-mainstream and are not constantly pushed at them through corporate efforts:

> You don't see ads on TV with happy jingles for Karpack'. We drink it regardless and yeah, we do get a bit of a kick out of drinking it socially like in our group because it means we're not sheep and we're not afraid to try something that's not sold in some businessman bar. (Cormac)

 This affinity for discount alcohol brands ties in with what has already been found in the literature with regards to the mainly-middle class hipsters' use of working class clothing like plaid shirts to escape their structural background (Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel 2003). By buying into the product choices of the lower classes (beer, clothing, etc.), the hipster community is able to construct an outré combination of styles or a kitsch consumption constellation that opposes the safety of middle class lifestyles and their associated consumption.

Strategy 3: vegetarian choices

Vegetarianism or veganism emerged as an exhibition of hipsters' resistant stance against what they perceive to be market led norms and as a critique of mainstream tastes. Eight of the interview informants disclosed that they were vegetarian (Sinead, Caoimhe, Tanner, Grace, Denise, Ellie, Steve, Julia) and one more identified as vegan (Tara), while the complete data pool demonstrated some knowledge of ties between vegetarian attitudes and indie culture which substantiates what is commonly reported on the community's eating habits in popular texts (Lanham, Nicely, and Bechtel 2003). For example, Cormac emphasises the prevalence of vegetarianism in his social circle and his interface with it:

> Em, with my classmates and friends, a lot of them are vegetarian you know (. . .) I would focus on bringing vegetarian food along seeing as how a large percentage of the people Id hang around with would be vegetarian so I'm limiting myself if I bring meat along. (Cormac)

This discourse pertaining to a felt need to minimise meat products during social rituals was confirmed through participant observation at hipster dinner parties where for the most part everything consumed would be vegetarian or even vegan friendly (Figure 3):

> 7.15 pm, Friday 6th May Dinner Party (Caoimhe's Friend 'Stephanie's House), 7 hipsters present: Dinner is a large dish of vegetable and tofu Thai red curry. Everyone has brought along some kind of accompaniment for the meal – a female has brought a dessert of homemade vegan lemon cupcakes and non-vegan white frosting in a bowl (so participants can choose to frost or not frost their cupcakes). Two other females have brought two shoulders of discount brand vodka (350 ml each). One male has also brought a bottle of white wine, six cans of beer and a dish of fried rice while the other has brought a zip-lock bag of home cooked refried beans and a type of wheat noodles in a soy-based broth. The refried beans are served out of a large glass ashtray (which has been washed) because of lack of crockery. A rectangular table and a smaller round table are pushed together to make a larger dining area around which the vegetable based meal options and alcohol are all shared around. (Researcher Fieldnotes, 8 June 2010)

 The vegetarian dishes typically consumed at the kitschy dinner parties violate the highly structured form of conventional meals and are presented in a mixed, undifferentiated form. This abandonment of the structure of conventional eating can be seen as symbolic of refutation of broader patterns of taste. Informants characterise their general rejection of meat products as being tied in with the culturally constructed indie or independent credo, i.e. a favouring of goods and services from independent producers:

> I think it's a big part of indie culture now, like indie is about not really I suppose buying or supporting the big corporations like the record companies and clothing labels. And

Figure 3. "Hip food": tofu Thai red curry.

vegetarianism obviously enough doesn't support the meat industry which is pretty big business. (Julia)

Vegetarianism has historically been (Spencer 1995) and continues to be (Beardsworth and Keil 1992, 1997; Maurer 1997; Boyle 2007) regarded as a marginal, or deviant, food option. Boyle (2007) argues that vegetarianism is viewed as a marginal dietary preference because the entrenched social norm of meat eating has kept vegetarianism on the periphery. It is this mainstream normative preference to eat meat that the hipster cohort resists:

The only reason why everyone eats it is because it's made popular through fast food restaurants on every street corner. It's the regular thing to do to eat that stuff even if there's far tastier, more adventurous and cooler things to eat than a big dirty burger. Most people don't go for it, but I consider myself adventurous anyway so I do. (Steve)

The choice to avoid the meat products can be theorised as tied in with hipsters' underlying philosophy to stay ahead of the mainstream or as Beardsworth and Keil (1997) suggest, a stance which accentuates and dramatises the consumers' distinctiveness or "superiority in a moral or intellectual sense, in relation to the rest of humankind" (p. 223). This superior stance is quite apparent in Steve's comments.

The suggested fight against the market-led norm to eat meat was also found to be partly a feminist practice for the male hipsters in the interview sample. To elucidate, various researchers and social theorists have drawn attention to the role of meat, with its prestige, protein content, and proximity to physical violence, in the perpetuation of patriarchy and as a symbol of male dominance (Adams 1990). Not eating meat symbolises a weak or subordinated masculine identity and so meat rejection becomes an important identity enactment of metro-sexuality or androgyny within the

hipster community. Vegetarianism alone is not enough to achieve a collective subordinated identity however and male hipsters tied it into larger symbolic consumption practices. For example, vegetarianism is sometimes coupled with a stance on music tastes, reaffirming that food is part of a wider consumption constellation, or style, for hipsters: "*You'd rarely hear of vegetarians talking about rap*" (Tanner). Specifically, informants' discourse pertaining to vegetarianism was sometimes punctuated with associations to indie rock bands with vegetarian members. Indie rock as a brand choice can be considered more feminised to mainstream hip hop music which has traditionally been tied closely to hegemonic masculinities, chauvinism and explicit misogyny (Arthur 2009):

> Black Flag would be the main (band) where I knew they were vegetarians but I can't think of any that are pushing that anymore like. Definitely not in the charts, like it's not associated with hip hop, well not the new rappers. They're ridiculous, just like muscle flexing and singing about girls in thongs. (laughs) That doesn't appeal to me. Same way really not eating meat wouldn't appeal to them. (Steve)

To be vegan or vegetarian is to continuously find oneself in the minority, challenged, and reminded of one's difference: "being a vegetarian, you can get a lot of stick … Living with other people that aren't vegetarians, when I walk into the room with [vegetarian] food people are like 'What are you eating? Oh, what's that? That's s**t!'" (Caoimhe). In this sense, the rejection of meat serves as an incessant critique of the mainstream and signifier of otherness, for which they are vilified. All informants described being fairly passive to such vilification however and never tried to convert others to their diet. They are not evangelical like anti-GE activists or organic food movements (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

Not every hipster was a vegetarian as the researchers' sample would show. McMahon (2008) who categorises eating recommendations by a hipster referred to as Zevon in the *Hipster Eating Code* suggests:

> Zevon made it clear that hipsters are too diverse a group to all be vegetarians or vegans. He explained that vegetarianism is just one way to be a food contrarian, going against the cultural mainstream. "It doesn't matter what contrarian eating position the hipster takes", Zevon said. "Whether it's gluten-free, anti-diary, pro-dairy, detox, all-raw, anti-oxidant, pro-soy, anti-soy, (…), it's not the diet that matters so much as the level of expertise".

It is with this point taken under consideration that hipsters' food-based resistance can be considered malleable. Strategies such as vegetarianism are not ubiquitous across the community but the message that the strategy carries is relatively stable – the cohort's own style in opposition to the mainstream. They must possess expertise in assembling their style and justifying it against mainstream norms.

Discussion: a new perspective on communal resistance and the mundane

As the analysis highlights, hipsters' inconspicuous consumption of food and alcohol products demonstrate a collectivised resistance to dominant market logic and mainstream consumerism. This process is managed by means of shopping venues, brand choices, recipes, preparations, and social rituals: the most important is that of kitschy dinner parties where deliberate re-appropriation of something high brow is constructed through a cheap, alternative aesthetic. The outcome is an ironic appreciation of that

which might otherwise be considered corny. During such rituals where food is created and eaten and alcohol is drunk, conversations and anecdotes which refute the commercial strategies of food enterprises help construct an emancipatory atmosphere steeped in the edible. During this discursive resistance, hipsters use word-of-mouth and shared personal product judgements as a major component in their food consumption behaviour. Through discussion about organic and locally sourced foods, hipsters create a shared sense of pride and pleasure and differentiate themselves from the typical food choices of the mainstream. There is, however, an interesting contradiction in the cohort's selection of consumables as their celebration of discount, over-the-counter alcohol products suggests. Hipsters' ironic downscale choice of alcohol brands with a cheap reputation and almost see-through image; does not share in the same communication of esteem and difference that their refined food preferences do, but nonetheless still serve as a marker for distinction. Drinking discount alcohol demonstrates voluntary avoidance of the mass marketed popular brands of mainstream young adults. These strategies act as way to incorporate symbols from the disadvantaged and the marginalised into hipsters' relatively safe status as third-level students or college graduates.

The mainstream Irish food systems that frame the hipsters of this study's microbehaviours mirror in many ways those of other developed economies, particularly those of English-speaking nations such as Britain and America. However participants' socially orchestrated consumption of vegetarian foods was found also to be a way of subverting these systems. The serving and consumption of multiple, undifferentiated vegetarian dishes breaks the structure of a meal with one centrepiece dish of meat and accompaniments (Lupton 1996) while also being a repudiation of what participants argue to be a fast food industry driven norm to eat meat.

There is a tension at work within hipster processes – the community wishes to distance itself from the mass market through vegetarianism and also a preference for organic foods but, because of the structurally imposed frugal lifestyle of this college aged cohort, is forced to work within the mass market also. This tension results in the hybrid construction of ideal food choices outside of market-led norms while reconciling mass-marketed food choices through decommodification. These findings have a clear parallel with Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard, and Kristensen's (2011) work on moralising food consumption where they suggest that conscious consumers will engage in various decisions and processes to minimise mass market food offerings and "to wash away the nastiness of industrial processing" (p. 229). However the salient difference between hipsters' food-based resistance and that of moralising social movements which form specifically around food concerns or beliefs, such as the organic food movement (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and anti-GE food activists (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), appears to be largely an issue of identity maintenance or statusseeking. While the data demonstrate discontentment with the commercial food marketing system and attempts to avoid certain brands, the social objective of hipsters is not to forcibly bring about the changing of principles, practices, and policies but possibly to further develop the participants' own ideology and culture of consumerism. Though food can form a moral ideology for social movements, food is a material for identity enactment within the hipster community – a symbolic object for group consumption where the shared identity is formed, confirmed and strengthened, and where status is developed and displayed. It might also be argued that it is the embedded role of food in identity formation that the hipster can be separated from the pretender or hipster mythology (Arsel and Thompson 2011).

Arsel and Thompson (2011) report that it is when hipsters' stylistic endeavours in consumer resistance become co-opted as "fashionable counterculture" and begin to pose little threat to the capitalist system that members' identity investments are undermined. It is arguable then that while conspicuous aspects of hipster style can be and have been co-opted, food is part of the shared experience and identity work of hipsters in a way that clothes and other visible or more conspicuous affectations of the cohort are not. Whereas any consumer can buy into rebellious hipster aesthetics by wearing their style of clothes or listening to their types of music, the modification of enduring, mundane behaviours such as food choice, preference, preparation and shopping to fit the tastes of the hipster community may be more difficult for mainstream adoption. This was made clear in Caoimhe's vilification by her non-hipster housemates for her vegetarian meals. Authentic hipsters' food-based resistance strategies are more intimate and seated in a structure of beliefs around resistance and communal gathering than other more visible aspects of their consumption. The strategies were ultimately more observable in this study during times of communal action among fellow hipsters and not in interactions outside the community. These strategies can be seen as what Arnould and Price (2000) refer to as "authoritative performance," (defined as "collective displays aimed at inventing or refashioning cultural traditions" by those with authority in a community, i.e. authentic members; Arnould and Price 2000, 140). They are largely invisible to outsiders, but express rejection of mass-produced meanings and offer a collective sense of identity and integration among participants. Therefore in a community that is constantly under surveillance and co-optation by non-members (Arsel and Thompson 2011), food is an inconspicuous but powerful way of performing difference from mainstream norms.

The findings extend and complement Arsel and Thompson's (2011) perspective on the grounds that the authoritative resistance observed in this study can be conceptualised as additional "demythologizing practices" by legitimate indie consumers (who we brand as hipsters) to insulate their individual and collective identities from devaluation. Rather than expressing outright rejections of the mainstream or of indie's commercial cooptation, hipsters were observed to display a cultivated taste for specific consumption practices within the parameters of their community. By resisting the mainstream in a way that is not loud or conspicuous and mostly observable by other insiders, hipsters "de-emphasize the overall significance of their investments in the indie field" to outsiders thereby avoiding their behaviours "becoming a moving target that at some point could gravitate away from the indie field altogether" and simply becoming a fashionable counterculture (Arsel and Thompson 2011, 801). In this way, the communal resistance observed in this study is qualitatively different to that which is sometimes identified in the literature as spectacular in its revolutionary nature and thereby attractive to hoards of "tourists" (see Kozinets 2002) but is also dissimilar to studies which identify less glamorous ideological performances to correct and integrate market functioning (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). While community-supported agriculture movements (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and communities such as Apple Newton devotees (Muñiz and Schau 2005) are evangelical in their collective resistance to the dominant market behaviour and are quick to preach to the unconverted, hipsters' were observed to indulge only in their discursive market distancing processes among themselves and not outsiders. There was no desire to truly bring about their way of thinking to the wider population.

This advances our existing understanding of consumer resistance as it highlights a middle ground between distancing oneself from dominant consumerist culture and

establishing one's own norms of expected consumer behaviour during occasions with like-minded others. We can interpret the mundane, when used in the context of community rituals, as being a vehicle for idiosyncratic resistance – an inconspicuous market distancing tactic that should not, by its very nature, attract the attentions or efforts of wider social currents. This type of resistance is principally for internal recognition among like-minded others who share a view of how the group they participate in should be represented within the marketplace and not how it can fight the marketplace. In this way, communal resistance within the domain of the mundane is interpreted as playing a role in internally structuring collective identity much like the subcultural capital thesis (Thornton 1997), but in ways that are a lot less overt or rebellious. This extends the present body of knowledge on communal resistance as it ties in closely with Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard, and Kristensen's (2011, 233) findings that individual resistance through mundane consumption lacks revolutionary potential but can be based on shared views of how to decide what is "good" from the marketplace. This study's communal dimension suggests that whatever resistance through mundane consumption may lack in revolution, it makes up in status. The mundane is important to the internal performances of a community that is aware of surveillance by outsiders and its ultimate inescapability from the market. In particular this study suggests that if consumption communities wish to maintain their distinctive identities they need to identify these idiosyncratic investments that reduce the permeability of the ingroup–outgroup barrier. This should alert researchers to the continuing importance of mundane consumption within the forever burgeoning micro-social arrangements of consumer culture.

As an acknowledgement of this study's limitations, the investigation fixated solely on one consumer group and explored its behaviours for the purposes of theoretical abstraction. Thus comparisons with other consumer communities were not undertaken. In further empirical work, a comparative approach may provide additional insights into the uniqueness or otherwise of the observations made here. A further limitation of the research is that the informants sampled are largely college students or recent college graduates. Future research on hipsters may benefit from investigating the prevalence of indie consumption ideology beyond the college-aged cohort.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how hipsters use food as a mechanism for resistance through a series of insider strategies to preserve their shared identity. Achieving distance from the marketised mainstream via these strategies is a balance between what is desirable (consuming non-mass-marketed food products) and what is feasible and can be reconciled through collective decommodification practices. Importantly the resistance strategies are operationalised mainly within community rituals and shared practice, thus enabling a covert distinction among participants, i.e. a way of subtly performing difference from the mainstream, the ordinary, the unenlightened. The paper has uncovered food to be an inconspicuous yet intimate, authentic and social aspect of hipsters' indie lifestyle. In doing so, the study discusses how the mundane dimension of a community's consumption is integral in supporting and maintaining members' collective identity while distinguishing them from their more superficial imitators. As an implication for our wider understanding of consumption, markets and culture, this study reveals mundane consumption to be both a surreptitious marker for inclusion and a device for identity production within marketplace cultures.

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