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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15304/volumes/v37/NA-37

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ABSTRACT
This study identifies the determinants of status within a consumption-oriented counterculture. The results of an ethnographic study of the Australian Hip Hop culture suggest that embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital confer status on countercultural members. In contrast to previous findings, these two forms of capital were found to more consistently confer status than a member’s commitment to the culture’s consumption values or their commitment of time and resources. This distinction is most prevalent amongst hard-core members who vary in both levels of commitment and their objectification of subcultural capital. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of status within a consumption-oriented counterculture. The paper begins with a review of the literature, specifically that which deals with the nature and structure of consumption-oriented countercultures and their relationship with subcultural capital. An overview of the methodology, a four-year ethnographic study of the Australian Hip Hop culture, is then provided. An analysis of the findings which identify the determinants of status within a consumption-oriented counterculture follows, and a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications concludes the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Consumption-Oriented Countercultures
Consumption-oriented countercultures are entities that provide space for members to develop and express their self-concepts alongside other members with similar interests, while at the same time allowing them to position their unique values, attitudes and opinions against the dominant and mass culture. Consumption-oriented countercultural theory emerged in the 1970’s, largely from researchers at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies who investigated the punk (Hebdige 1979), mod (Hebdige 1975), motorbike boy (Willis 1978), ted (Jefferson 1975), skinhead (Clarke 1975a), and hippy (Willis 1975, 1978) cultures.

These studies found that members of countercultures consumed distinctive, yet uniform styles opposing the dominant and mass cultures which they found to be politically manipulated and undifferentiated (e.g. Clarke 1975a; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978). In doing so, counterculture members consumed in a manner which strictly adhered to their counterculture’s rules and expressed their allegiance to the counterculture’s values and attitudes (Clarke 1975b). The expression of a culture’s values through the consumption of a style that closely parallels the culture’s ideology has been termed ‘homology’ and was the focus of many of the early counterculture studies (Willis 1978). For example, Willis (1978) found that ‘the motor-bike boys’ did not dress with the functional requirements of riding a motor cycle in mind, instead their dress was found to be a formidable expression of identity which was powerfully developed around many of the culture’s central values. Similarly, homologous relationships were also found between the values of the hippy, ted, punk, skinhead and mod cultures and their members’ consumption habits (Clarke 1975a; Hebdige 1975, 1979; Jefferson 1975; Willis 1978).

While more recent studies of consumption-oriented countercultures have not focused specifically on their homologous nature, their results tend to support the earlier findings and describe a homologous relationship between the consumption of the subculture’s members and the values of the group (Arthur 2006a; Kozinets 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). For example, Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of the new bikers found that the core values of the counterculture were based around personal freedom, patriotism and machismo, and were visually expressed through the consumption of long hair, bushy beards, loud powerful bikes, the American flag, the bald eagle, tattoos and black leather. One exception, a study by Kates (2002), found that no single homologous style existed in the gay community. Instead, Kates found consumption to be characterized by a multitude of shifting, malleable meanings open to multiple interpretations and considerable debate. Hence, unlike the consumers presented in previously mentioned studies, these subcultural members did not sacrifice creative self-expression in order to communicate their belonging to a group, they accomplished both simultaneously.

The Structure of a Consumption-Oriented Counterculture
Consumption-oriented countercultures have been found to be comprised of individuals who vary in their level of identification and commitment, with some members being very closely tied to the group and others being only peripherally related (Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Kates 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Fox (1987) first described the structure as a series of three concentric circles based on one’s level of commitment to the subcultures ideology. Those participants most heavily committed to the counterculture were located within the most inner-concentric circle and hence became known as the hard-core members.

Hard-core members devotion and commitment to their counterculture’s values has been found to be a full time and enduring process, and can represent a major dimension in their lives and conceptualization of self (Fox 1987; Hebdige 1979; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). As such, previous studies suggest that hard-core members must be relatively uncommitted to other cultural groups, and have the freedom and spare time to devote themselves wholly to the counterculture’s cause (Irwin 1973). In contrast, the next concentric circle consists of ‘soft-core’ members whose commitment to the subculture is less complete and whose roles are subordinate to, and dictated by, the hard-core members. While these individuals are less dedicated to the subculture, their degree of involvement with the subculture is still high, though not necessarily enduring. As such, while they outnumber the hard-core members, they are less respected and do not occupy the same social status or demand the same level of influence (Fox 1987). Furthermore, soft-core members tend to be more interested in the symbolic qualities of the products, brands and activities consumed than their functional attributes, as they rely on such consumption to communicate their self and group identity to others.

In her study of the punk counterculture, Fox (1987) described the outer circle of peripheral members as ‘preppie punks’. While these individuals frequent the countercultural site and consume in a homologous fashion, the hard and soft-core members do not necessarily see them as part of the subculture as they lack the
ideological commitment. These individuals are often only inter-
ested in the counterculture for the novelty it provides and because,
at a particular point in time, it is deemed fashionable. As such, for
many it is seen as a passing fad, or a bit of light relief from the
monotonous but none the less paramount realities of school, home
and work (Hebdige 1979). Hence, these members treat such cul-
tural experiences as identity play and are able to quickly abandon
their associations in situations that would sanction them negatively.

Whilst the framework for viewing the structure of a consump-
tion-oriented counterculture as three distinct categories has re-
ceived much academic support (e.g. Fox 1987; Schouten and
McAlexander 1995), Kates (2002) suggests that such a categorisation
imposes a fixed, rigid structure that does not resemble the reality of
the neo-tribal consumer (Maffesoli 1996). In contrast, Kates found
an individual’s position in the gay community to be based on a fluid,
contested and negotiated assessment of the individual’s accumu-
lated subcultural capital.

Subcultural Capital

In her study of club cultures, Thornton (1995) coined the term
subcultural capital to describe the knowledge, experience and skills
that bestow status within a subculture. Her work is guided by that
of Pierre Bourdieu, and specifically his book ‘Distinction’ (1984),
in which he used the term ‘cultural capital’ to describe the knowl-
edge that is acquired through our upbringing and education and
which confers status and enhances one’s standing within society.
Bourdieu conceptualized the structure of society as being dictated
by the consumption of markers of distinction which affirm one’s
taste. While Thornton has been credited for taking the concept out
of the realm of ‘high class’ consumption via her definition (Bennett
1999; Kates 2002), a closer reading of Bourdieu (1984) reveals that
he did not mean for the term to be so confined. In fact, throughout
his work he argues that in all fields, including subcultures, a system
of differences exists where expressive consumption and social
differences are made explicit.

Expanding on the concept in a later article, Bourdieu (1986)
argues that capital can present itself in three fundamental forms: as
cultural capital, economic capital and social capital. Cultural capi-
tal, being the knowledge one has acquired that is expressed through
one’s taste, can be found in three states: embodied, objectified, and
institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital is the knowledge, skills
and expertise that exist within an individual that is acquired through
the process of education, both formal and informal. This may be
expressed through an understanding of a culture’s values, rituals
and traditions. For example, within high class culture good manners
and an appreciation and understanding of fine art and wine are
examples of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). In con-
trast, amongst Thornton’s (1995) ravers, subcultural capital was
embodied in the form of being ‘in the know,’ understanding and
using current slang and performing the latest dance styles. The
accumulation of such embodied cultural capital presupposes a
personal cost of time and other sacrifices and cannot be transmitted
easily or instantaneously (Bourdieu 1986). It can however be
acquired over time, and the accumulation can be hastened if one has
freedom from other commitments.

Once one has acquired embodied cultural capital, it may be
objectified through the consumption of symbolic goods that infer
such knowledge. For example, in the high class culture the display
of books and paintings in the family home constitute objectified
cultural capital. Alternately, in Thornton’s (1995) rave culture,
subcultural capital was objectified in the form of fashionable
haircuts and carefully assembled record collections. Hence, knowl-
edge of the symbolic properties of goods and consumption styles is
an example of embodied cultural capital, whereas the consumption
of these symbolic goods is an example of objectified cultural
capital. Economic capital will facilitate this process, however,
knowing what products to consume and the manner in which to
consume them to enhance one’s standing in society requires the
accumulation of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Lastly,
institutionalized cultural capital is expressed in the form of qualifi-
cations which are presumed to guarantee cultural capital, such as
formally recognized education (Bourdieu 1986).

In addition to cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) describes
social capital as the value that is created through the use and
influence of social networks. The value created is dependent on
how much cultural and economic capital is created upon mobilizing
one’s social network. Hence, those with many and/or powerful
connections have an abundance of social capital and an elevated
status within society.

As explained, each of these forms of capital may be used to
enhance status; yet, the majority of research investigating the
structure of consumption-oriented countercultures has overlooked
this finding and assumes commitment to be the primary determin-
ant of one’s position in the status hierarchy. The findings pre-
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METHODOLOGY

Status within the Australian Hip Hop culture was investigated
using five methods of ethnographic research: prolonged participant
observation, researcher introspection, semi-structured in-depth
interviews, non-participant netnography, and an ongoing review of
the literature. Ethnography was chosen as this approach has been
found to be particularly effective when little is known about a
targeted group (Mariampolski 2006). A grounded approach to
theory generation was utilised as it is the standard approach adopted
by ethnographers and has been acknowledged to have considerable
potential within the field of consumer behaviour (Goulding 1998).

The first author undertook the ethnographic research between
June 2002 and June 2006. Extended presence and participation in
the field allowed the researcher to ‘learn the language’ of those
under investigation, and to experience life as one of the subjects
(Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). The Hip Hop culture revolves
around four key activities: rapping, graffiti art, breakdancing and
DJing. An Adelaide Hip Hop DJ who was an acquaintance of the
researcher facilitated initial entry into the Hip Hop culture in
Australia and the researcher accompanied the gatekeeper and a
number of his friends to around 150 Hip Hop nights held across
Adelaide, and around Australia. In addition, the researcher
accompanied the gatekeeper through a wide variety of contexts that
Agar (1996) would describe as ‘hanging out’ such as playing
records, playing basketball, watching television, shopping, socialising, drinking and partying.

Becoming a member of a counterculture meant entering as an
aspiring member and undergoing a process of socialisation whereby
status was obtained. Hence, the nature of the ethnographic process
was evolving, which allowed the researcher to interact with different
elements of the counterculture and to experience the signifying
practices of Hip Hop consumption as an insider. During this period,
the researcher kept field notes of his observations and informal
conversations, which were then written up as soon as possible after
the event. Furthermore, the researcher kept a personal diary of the
process, which was a useful record of his cognitive and emotional
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experience, and allowed him to conduct personal introspection (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000).

During the course of the study, 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with peripheral, soft-core and hard-core members of the Australian Hip Hop culture were undertaken. The researcher utilised guided introspection to obtain the necessary data: as he had obtained membership status himself, a good rapport with the interviewees was established, and hence the information was of quality (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003; Shankar 2000). This technique was chosen as it has been found to be particularly useful when cultural categories are under investigation (McCracken 1988; Wells 1993). Furthermore, netnographic research of a web forum regularly visited by members of the Australian Hip Hop culture www.ozhiphop.com was conducted using the methods prescribed by Kozinets (2002b).

The researcher’s field notes, personal diary, interview transcripts and netnographic threads were imported into QSR N6 for coding. Selective coding was used to synthesise and relate data to conceptual topics of interest, such as subcultural commitment and symbolic consumption. This process ensured that the resulting interpretation reflected persistent themes, and enhanced the researcher’s familiarity with the data, thus facilitating the derivation of meaning (Pettigrew 2002). Finally, every effort has been made to conduct the ethnographic investigation into the Australian Hip Hop culture in an ethical manner and as such the names of all the participants have been changed.

**FINDINGS**

The subculture investigated was inherently countercultural in nature. It provided members with the opportunity to develop and express their unique and local identities alongside likeminded individuals and to position their values, attitudes and opinions against the dominant and mass culture. In addition, the Australian Hip Hop culture was found to be a gender salient, neo-tribal, male enclave where the rebel model of masculinity was enacted (Arthur 2006c; Holt and Thompson 2004). Furthermore, it should be noted that the predominantly white members of the Australian Hip Hop culture overcome their race and claimed Hip Hop authenticity via proficient knowledge of and respect toward the culture, and truthful representation of their identity (Arthur 2006a).

The overall findings of the ethnographic research have been summarised and presented in Figure 1. The analysis revealed that one’s position within the counterculture’s status hierarchy was a factor of one’s embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital. Hence, over time, as individuals advanced their Hip Hop skills and acquired further Hip Hop and specifically Australian Hip Hop knowledge, their status within the Australian Hip Hop community was enhanced. This discovery supports previ-
ous findings which suggest that subcultural capital confers within-group status amongst countercultural participants (Kates 2002; Thornton 1995b). However, the results of this study further our understanding of the nature of status within consumption-oriented countercultures through the inclusion of subculture-specific social capital as a determinant of status. That is, the findings revealed that the standing of an individual’s social connections and the individual’s ability to influence them also had an impact on their position in the status hierarchy. For example, personally knowing a well-respected DJ enhanced one’s standing in the status hierarchy, and securing his services for a party advanced one’s standing further.

In addition, the results of this study further our understanding of the phenomenon by revealing that the objectification of subcultural capital through consumption was not necessarily more common as one’s status advanced. That is, while Thornton’s findings were mirrored in that both embodied and objectified subcultural capital conferred status, only embodied subcultural capital was found to be consistently associated with one’s position within the status hierarchy. In contrast, the use of objectified subcultural capital as a marker of distinction varied as individuals evolved through the status hierarchy. Peripheral members used objectified subcultural capital to assert their membership, whereas soft-core members were found to use objectified subcultural capital to represent their culture through homology. In contrast, the consumption of objectified subcultural capital for hard-core members was found to vary depending on the individual, as illustrated in the following quote by hard-core member Kab:

Kab: People who get involved in something, anything they feel passionate about, once they get to a point of being sort of accepted, say socially in those kind of groups, and they’re doing something of a quality level, there’s no need for any kind of identity clothes-wise... Some of the best dudes that do graffiti, you could not pick them out in the crowd man. They just wear nothing that’s related to Hip Hop. Usually the better ones go into other areas as well because they don’t feel confined by subculture. That’s basically what happens, as people get older and better they tend to sort of move into other areas as well. And then there’s guys who are into Hip Hop one hundred per cent, four element theory, all that stuff, dress that way and they’re wild writers as well.

It should be noted that whilst Figure 1 presents the findings as if an individual progresses through a structured transformation commencing as a non-member and culminating with hard-core membership, the researcher rarely found himself or others being placed in such distinct, fixed and rigid categories by the countercultural participants. Rather, as individuals furthered their Hip Hop skills and knowledge, and advanced social relationships with Hip Hop members, their status within the Australian Hip Hop culture was enhanced. Henceforth, status within the Australian Hip Hop culture was viewed as a continuum ranging from those individuals with no embodied subcultural capital or subculture-specific social capital to those with an abundance of it. Furthermore, an individual’s position in the status hierarchy was found to be fluid, contested, frequently negotiated and dependent on the individual making the evaluation. That is, gauging one’s status was in effect an approximation of one’s accumulated skills and knowledge and the value of one’s social network. These approximations were often revised as new information came to hand that provided a more accurate indication. In addition, evaluations of both subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital varied considerably depending on the subcultural capital of the individual making the assessment. Hence, while an individual’s subcultural capital and the extent and influence of their social network may have remained constant, perceptions of their position in the status hierarchy differed depending on the Hip Hop knowledge of the individual making the evaluation. As such, an individual’s position within the status hierarchy frequently moves up and down as different members make and revise assessments of their capital, however, over time, as they expand their network, advance their relationships, and further their Hip Hop knowledge and skills, they generally advance up the hierarchy. While the structure encountered was more fluid and negotiated than the three distinct groups reported by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), these broad categories did exist, and as such, as displayed in Figure 1, have been transposed upon the status continuum to enhance the analysis of consumption as an individual evolves through the status hierarchy, and to enable the comparison of findings with previous studies.

The results presented in this study, specifically that one’s position within a consumption-oriented counterculture was dependent on one’s embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, is in contrast to previous research findings by Fox (1987) and Schouten and McAlexander (1995). As previously discussed, their findings suggest that one’s position in the status hierarchy is dependent on one’s commitment to the ideology and consumption values of the counterculture. As such, these studies found that for hard-core punks and bikers, participation was a full-time commitment that was displayed conspicuously in a homogenous style, such as through the consumption of amphetamines and mohawks, or a Harley Davidson and associated garb. While these studies should be commended for drawing our attention to the evolution of a subcultural self, their theory could not be applied to the current case for two reasons. First, within the neo-tribal Australian Hip Hop culture a full-time commitment was not a necessary requirement of hard-core membership. Whereas the hard-core punks and bikers were found to have looked down upon those with a less than full-time commitment (Fox 1987, Schouten and McAlexander 1995), part-time participation was accepted within the Australian Hip Hop culture, as it was for Goulding, Shankar and Elliot’s (2002) ravers. While the results show that a full-time commitment to the culture’s ideology was the norm for soft-core members, and this commitment increased steadily as they had progressed through the status hierarchy, hard-core members were found to be more likely and capable of compartmentalising their work, family and leisure. As a number of the hard-core members had aged beyond their teens and early twenties, the responsibilities of work and family had, for many, encroached on their countercultural lifestyles. Furthermore, the leisure pursuits of hard-core members had often broadened beyond Hip Hop. These hard-core members were still admired and respected for their embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, despite their current lack of full-time commitment. Hence, the results suggest that a near full-time commitment was necessary for members as they climbed the countercultural hierarchy as much time and effort was required to enhance their subcultural skills and knowledge, and to develop and nurture social relationships with other Hip Hop members. In contrast, hard-core members had already obtained much embodied subcultural capital and the amount of time required to keep these skills and knowledge up-to-date was less substantial. Similarly, their social networks were well established and their maintenance required a less significant time contribution by comparison. Hence, hard-core members’ abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture specific-social capital exonerated them from the full-time subcultural commitment required for gaining Hip Hop knowledge and skills, and developing social relationships.
In addition, the results of this study show that in the case of the Australian Hip Hop culture one’s commitment to the subculture’s consumption values did not necessarily increase as one advanced up the status hierarchy. Once again, this contradicts the previous findings by Fox (1987), and Schouten and McAlexander (1995), where hard-core members were found to display their extreme commitment to the subculture’s values through the consumption of a homologous style. In the current study, commitment to the subculture’s consumption values heightened as members advanced through the peripheral and soft-core membership stages, but varied considerably once an individual had achieved hard-core membership. As indicated in Figure 1, due to their abundance of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital, it was not necessary for hard-core members to display extreme levels of commitment to the subculture’s consumption values. Rather, commitment to the subculture’s consumption values was found to vary depending on the individual.

The results of the analysis were consistent with the views of the countercultural participants who flatly rejected the assertion that one’s position in the status hierarchy was in part determined by one’s commitment to the culture’s consumption values. Members perceived Australian Hip Hop to be a masculine and esoteric counterculture and members remarked that status based on one’s consumption habits implied shallow, weak, conformist and feminine qualities. In contrast, the assertion that a subcultural hierarchy was based on one’s Hip Hop knowledge and skill was met with strong support. In fact, on occasions, members of the Australian Hip Hop culture referred to ‘Hip Hop knowledge’ as being the fifth element of Hip Hop culture (in addition to DJing, MCing, graffiti, and break-dancing), an interpretation that was promoted by Hip Hop DJ and Pioneer Afrika Bambaataa (2008). As such, obtaining a basic understanding of Hip Hop’s history was viewed as an essential criterion for Hip Hop membership and having an advanced knowledge of Hip Hop history enhanced one’s position in the hierarchy. Take the following extract from an interview with OB MC for example:

OB MC: It’s poisoned man… You’ve got kids coming out of school that are listening to all that pop, that real faggot shit… It’s really destroying our culture, because music like that has got no culture. I want to see 50 Cent here in front of me, I’ll give him a spray can and tell him to do a piece or I’ll put him on a deck and say scratch to this beat, he wouldn’t know what’s going on, and I think that’s wrong. To get into Hip Hop, the real Hip Hop, you’ve got to know the elements, you’ve got to know who started it, you’ve got to know who Grandmaster Flash is, who Africa Bambaataa is. You’ve got to appreciate the thing you’re in not just because it’s great to be in, but you’ve got to pay homage, you’ve got to pay respect to the people that invented it, you’ve got your KRS-Ones, you know people like that, there should be temples where people can go and pray to these fucking people, you know what I mean? I think you’re missing the point if you don’t know who these people are and who’s done this, or who was the first person to scratch, or who was the first person to do a blockbuster piece, you know? Who the first person was to ever do a train, who was the first person to do a tag in New York, or in the Bronx, the first break dancing crews, you know what I mean?

Throughout the interview OB MC reveals that he treats seminal people, places and events in Hip Hop history with what Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) would describe as sacred reverence. Such an admiration was common amongst hard-core Hip Hop members. Participation in the culture with ignorance of such valued knowledge, or a lack of Hip Hop skill, was perceived as inauthentic and profane as it failed to differentiate the Australian Hip Hop culture from the mass culture (personified by artists such as 50 Cent) which members positioned themselves against. Hence, OB MC perceives individuals who partake in Hip Hop with a lack of Hip Hop skills and understanding of the culture’s history and values as non-members who are ‘missing the point’ and threatening the subculture’s legitimacy. As such, esteem was placed upon members based on the assessor’s perception of the individuals Hip Hop knowledge and skills. Hence, in the above example embodied subcultural capital explained one’s standing within the community rather than one’s commitment to culture’s ideology and consumption values. While this may not have been the case in previous studies that link one’s commitment to the counterculture’s consumption values to one’s position in the status hierarchy (Fox 1987; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), it is possible that the researchers have misinterpreted their findings and confused similarity between the two constructs with causation, particularly as one evolves through peripheral and soft-core membership stages. For example, Schouten and Mac Alexander’s (1995) reading of the seniority, participation, leadership in group activities, and riding experience as commitment, could have just as easily been interpreted as the informal education necessary to have acquired much embodied subcultural capital. Similarly, the visible indicators of commitment described in the study (tattoos, motorcycle customisation, club-specific clothing, and sew-on patches), could easily have been interpreted as the objectification of subcultural capital by soft-core members and a limited number of hard-core members. In fact, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) even provide some indication that a small number of the hard-core bikers had abandoned the use of objectified subcultural capital or were consuming in a homologous yet distinctive style of consumption as they were ‘at liberty to deviate from established custumery and create individual styles’ (p.56).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study make several important contributions to consumer research. The identification of embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital as determinants of status enhances our understanding of status conferral within consumption-oriented countercultures. That is, in addition to one’s knowledge and skills, the value of one’s social network will enhance one’s position in the status hierarchy. Hence, a well-connected and influential countercultural member is capable of playing a pertinent role in shaping the consumption values of the counterculture. Also, hard-core members have been found to be opinion leaders (Donnelly 1981), and are often identified and targeted by marketers due to their influence, thus practitioners would also be advised to look for more than the skills, knowledge and expertise that a member possesses and also consider the breadth and power of their connections within a counterculture. Furthermore, researchers should theorize status within consumption-oriented countercultures in light of this new status continuum. In addition, future studies should verify whether a similar status continuum exists in brand-focused and non-brand focused consumption-oriented subcultures that are not countercultural in nature.

The findings outlined here differ from previous studies as they have identified embodied subcultural capital and subculture-specific social capital as the determinants of status within consumption-oriented countercultures rather than a member’s commitment of time, effort and resources, or their commitment to the culture’s...
consumption values. In a practical sense, this theorization is not necessarily problematic as a commitment of time, effort and resources will often facilitate the achievement of the relevant knowledge, skills and expertise. Thus the two processes are often paralleled. However, it should be noted that both the input and outcome are not the same. Much like economic capital, commitment of time and effort may help to achieve embodied subcultural capital, but alone does not necessarily generate the skills, knowledge and expertise that are valued. Thus, a highly committed member does not necessarily have the most embodied subcultural capital and members with an abundance of embodied subcultural capital are not always the most committed. This is an important theoretical distinction and contributes to a more accurate definition of the hard-core member. In addition to time and effort, the findings suggest that a commitment to the consumption values of the culture is not a necessary requirement for hard-core members. This finding has implications for consumer research as it refocuses the importance of consumption values to the earlier stages of subcultural membership.

The results also suggest that a distinction between embodied and objectified subcultural capital is important as both forms have different effects on status as the individual moves along the status continuum. Where embodied subcultural capital maintains a positive relationship with status, the objectification of subcultural capital does so only at the peripheral and soft-core membership stages. Moreover, hard-core members’ objectification of subcultural capital varied considerably ranging from an abandonment of symbolic consumption through to the consumption of a homologous yet distinctive style. As hard-core members are most influential in disseminating countercultural styles, marketing practitioners should engage hard-core members who continue to consume the homologous style to endorse their Hip Hop brands. Furthermore, as hard-core members who continue to consume the homologous style did so in a way that differentiates them from the group, new lines of Hip Hop brands will have great appeal to these hard-core members with an abundance of embodied subcultural capital as they provide a means for consumption that is simultaneously expressive of the subculture, yet distinguishes them as unique.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of status within a consumption-oriented counterculture. Our ethnographic investigation of the Australian Hip Hop culture identified embodied subcultural capital and subcultural-specific social capital as the determinants. How embodied subcultural capital was attained influenced its ability to act as a differentiating symbol. In addition, this study found that an individual’s commitment and use of objectified subcultural capital did not necessarily enhance as one’s position in the status hierarchy advanced. Theoretical and practitioner implications were discussed.

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