

A Nerd, a Geek, and a Hipster Walk into a Bar

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As with all things in the human experience, life offers up various paths and obstacles that allow some of us to be what we want and require some of us to be what we are not, or otherwise hide what we are. This is true in almost all matters of identity and orientation, which is the heart of trying to understand, accept, verbalize, and communicate ourselves to the world. When this true self is rejected, many try to hide by donning costumes that are accepted or stand a better chance of not being rejected.

Nerds and geeks have been simultaneously celebrated and scourged by society, especially in this age where technology is pocket-sized and very infrequently out of reach. It's a confusing place to be, especially when there are not adequate words to communicate identity. This autoethnographic piece explores my attempt to create an ease in the strained communications between the outside world and my people: geeks and nerds. That we are different, both from those outside of our subculture and from each other, is obvious. What is not obvious is the delineation between nerd and geek and the socially accepted hipster.

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I AM A NERD (JUST NOT *THAT* KIND?)

I openly and wholeheartedly proclaim myself to be a nerd! It has taken many years to not only come to this conclusion but fully embrace it. According to people who have known me for decades, I used to refer to myself as a geek. I do not remember this. I've seen the notes: they are in my handwriting, and folded ever so precisely. I cannot deny them. I can see myself in middle school, clinging to that last shred of hope that I could be cool, and maybe at that point in my life, *geek* seemed less socially suicidal than *nerd*, and so it makes sense that I would claim it.

Spotting the geek or nerd in a group is not a challenging task. Stereotypically we are pasty, pimply, poorly dressed, socially awkward, get overly excited about esoteric topics, wear glasses, and are not popular with the opposite gender.¹⁻⁴ According to Nugent, this image has been floating in the ephemera of popular culture since the 1920s, though the words *geek* and *nerd* have not always been associated with this particular imagery.⁵

I am not this kind of nerd, maybe.

I am pasty, but this is because I'm very aware of sunburns and skin cancer and how easily I get them, not because my hobbies are "indoorsy." I have great skin, but that's because I take care of it and personal hygiene is part of my daily life and not a superfluous habit that gets in the way of obsessing. On a regular basis, I do not dress up, though I do have a rather impressive collection of fandom-based T-shirts. I wear reading glasses. I am not socially awkward all the time, especially not with the opposite gender. I actually prefer the company of males, be they nerds, normals, jocks, etc. I am, embarrassingly enough, most socially awkward around other women. I just do not know how to relate to or read their social cues.

Yet, superficially fitting the stereotype is still not what makes me a nerd.

The D4

There are several necessary components that I believe are necessary to making a nerd or a geek:

- High or at least above average intelligence; otherwise we could not do what we do

- Elitism, or the belief that, while someone is always going to be better, it's our job to hold them and ourselves to a higher standard
- Obsession—the ultimate love for esoteric knowledge which is the basis of our social currency
- Fandoms, the objects of our undying affection, manifestations of which include TV shows, books, computers, actors, movies, science, space—anything as long as it's complex

It's fairly simple. All of these elements intertwine and, without one, all of the pieces suffer.

The beauty of this description is that it does not include commentary on appearance or necessarily mean we're social outcasts. Though these traits can and do feed into making the stereotypes seem true.

Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?

According to Hollingworth's research, there is a social sweet spot for children with high IQs.⁶ At the point someone has an IQ of 155 or greater (normed and standardized to the Stanford-Binet tests of the 1930s), they have a tendency to not be able to relate to others. At 155, asynchronous development of intellect over emotion or physicality rules. In childhood, the difference between someone's biological age and their intellectual one often challenges their ability to understand and interact with others, and unless they make a concerted effort to learn social skills, this pattern is destined to repeat.

You Say That, Like It's a Bad Thing

What, more often than not, does us in socially, is the elitism. Less than 2% of the population of the world has an IQ of 130 and above.⁷ We are smart. We have abilities most others do not. Unfortunately, we know it. We obsess over things that are purposefully complex. We strive for elegance in function and simplicity of use. Elegance and simplicity are not easy to come by, so we spend inordinate amounts of time obsessing. The problem is that we're cognizant of this as well. We're protective of our knowledge about our fandoms, and before we allow others to claim they are just as smart or have the acumen, we're going to test that claim. If someone does not measure up or surpass us, we're going to inform them of this and seem like pompous, elitist jerks. Pompous elitist jerks,

in general, make others feel poorly about themselves and their abilities, whether we intend it or not.⁸

6F6273657373696F6E0D0A (Obsession)

It is the obsessive love of knowledge of esoteric topics that drives us, because information is social currency. I relish the smallest details of the things that I love and will participate and study them even to my social detriment. In my circles, if a person is not knowledgeable enough, is unwilling to learn, claims to be an expert in an area in which they are actually ignorant, or, worse still, is just unapologetically wrong, their nerd credibility goes into the red. Being able to prove we not only know things but can access that information at the right time is how we decide who our ruling class is. Benjamin Nugent is a prime example of losing “nerd cred.” In his book *American Nerd: The Story of My People* he confuses the characters of “Booger” and “Poindexter” from the iconic *Revenge of the Nerds* movies.⁹ Before this, I was thoroughly enjoying his book. This simple error changed the way I viewed all his work, to the point that I found it very challenging to finish his book and am hesitant to quote his other pieces. However, I am doing so, because, even though he showed weakness in not being able to tell the difference between Curtis Armstrong and Timothy Busfield, he shows strength everywhere else.

Studying Never Stops...

When I am around others, I usually have a notebook on hand or a note open on my phone. Even while setting up Dungeons and Dragons I note particular rituals that help players decide which dice set to use or their ticks and tells during various challenges. I started being mindfully observant when learning to mimic girls in middle school. I started writing things down when I began working on case studies for a psychology class in high school. This escalated and became verbally invasive when examining how Dungeon Masters create their worlds, so when I did something similar for a study, I understood the process. After the study concluded, I continued the written habit in my real life to try to understand more deeply how people think and problem-solve.

In taking the notes and debriefing, I tried to use the information to understand my friends better and hopefully be less awkward. However,

while my being a better friend helped, my taking notes made my friends uncomfortable. I have had to learn to be more covert about it, again.

Oversharing

The coping mechanisms that were created for dealing with my own asynchronous development reappear and look a lot like a social detriment. I love days spent sitting around repeatedly binge-watching *Sherlock*,¹⁰ while writing or crafting a piece for my latest cosplay project. I would much rather be doing these things than participating in unwanted social interaction, even with the people I love the most. Not because I do not love them, but because doing these things give me a sense of purpose. Fulfilling what I perceive to be my purpose at any particular time is going to give me greater satisfaction than hanging out with people engaging in small talk. Partially because participating in small talk often displays my asynchronicity.

During public social functions, I have panic attacks. I do not react this way because I'm misanthropic or have social anxiety disorder—on the contrary, I love people. I also know I am an acquired taste. Possibly, because I do not know when to stop talking until it is too late and I have overshared or inadvertently displayed elitism. I never mean to be or to do this. I hate that it comes across this way. Knowing I have behaved this way causes a physical pain in my chest and stomach that I cannot adequately describe. It's like heartburn, sadness, and a Goliath pressing down so hard that I swear I am an inch shorter. Genuinely, I'm just overly excited about being able to share what I know with someone. Somewhere in my psyche is the notion that my knowledge has value. It is so dear to me that my sharing knowledge is sharing a piece of me. I am vulnerable, open, almost free when I'm presenting, writing, or oversharing (like I currently am), hoping that this will incite others to share. When I finally read the cues that I have overshared, I am embarrassed and then desire nothing more than to hide with *Sherlock* and grommet pliers.¹¹

Mimicry

This obsessive love and social awkwardness are not to say that I do not also have an aspect of myself, like most people do, that allows for interaction with those who do not enjoy my fandoms or who are not nerds. Once upon a time, I became really good at mimicking personality

archetypes (probably explains my love of Dungeons and Dragons). The one that was most socially acceptable was that of the “airhead.” I played dumb. I practiced coquetry. I learned to play the role of the social butterfly. Much like Clark Kent, I can take off my glasses and themed T-shirt, put on a different outfit, and, with that act, put on a different persona. I have no problem wearing a hockey sweater, going out to a bar, eating hot wings, drinking beer, and screaming at the screen with the best of them. Or, I put on make-up, jewelry, and something that accentuates my feminine figure and pretend I have a clue about fashion or celebrities or whatever it is that normal women talk about.

I try to walk the line between both worlds: normal and nerd. I can play the role of normal, though not very well and not for very long, but the effort is there. The interesting aspect of these identities is that they are often just as comfortable as slipping into my tabletop gear to play Dungeons and Dragons. The problem is that I know I am just role-playing. I could never permanently live in any other identity—even when I try blending them.

The clearest manifestation of this was when I started trying to get into shape. I got a trainer. I chose him not just because he came highly recommended, or because he insisted on performing scientific tests to determine what my actual health situation was and what my goals should be. The deciding factor was that he had a Ph.D. in Exercise Science. It crystalized for me then that even the most jock, least nerdy thing I do still has a soft and pasty nerdy underbelly.

The Spectrum

In the realm of social situations, there is a spectrum of popularity. In high school, as in life, there is a definite hierarchy to how the social system functions. In general, jocks, cheerleaders, and rich kids are at the top. Normals fall into the middle. The bottom rung consists of various types of people who are beleaguered by the notion of lacking cool, the geeks and nerds. Then, like social nomads, among the various strata, the hipsters are allowed to roam.

Hipsters seem to have an easier time working themselves into the various realms of social acceptance. One would believe that, because they look like nerds, they should be cast with us; however, they possess a seemingly magical ability not to be. They are often accepted in places where nerds are not.

GEEK VS NERD (ROUND 1)

The difference between the nerd and the geek is hotly debated. Those outside of the subculture of nerds and geeks use the words indiscriminately and as insults, but to those inside the culture, we often claim that we are completely different species.

“Cohen the Barbarian,” a self-identified geek, who has one of those interesting jobs where no one can know what he really does, claims that “geeks make the gadgets and toys that nerds merely play with.”¹² While “Airwolf,” a nerd with a very similar job, claims the opposite.¹³

The academic literature about the cultures is no help in forming a delineation. Most authors work with the theory of the stereotype lumping geeks and nerds together. For other authors, geeks seem to be more technologically adept.^{14–16} Though even this is still countered with the notion that geeks are serious fans, nerds are academics, and those who care about the difference are dorks. (Am I actually a dork?)

I cannot espouse the academic literature. I believe the bulk of it, at this point in cultural time, has overlooked the concept that there is really a difference. What I am certain of is that, until the research is no longer being conducted by scholars like Kinney, etc., who believe that people like me should have the goal of being *normal*, as if we need to change because there is something inherently wrong with us, these titles and subcultures are going to remain largely amalgamated, and subject to socially accepted bullying.¹⁷

For the record, I do not want to be normal. I want to be myself. I do not want to have to fear running the risk of personal and professional mockery because I want to share and display what I am most passionate about.

GEEK VS NERD (ROUND 2)

As the academy has failed to give a solid understanding, perhaps pop culture can help.

John Green, the author of *A Fault in Our Stars* and founder of Nerdfighteria states:

...nerds like us are allowed to be unironically enthusiastic about stuff... Nerds are allowed to love stuff, like jump-up-and-down-in-the-chair-can't-control-yourself love it. ...When people call people nerds,

mostly what they're saying is "you like stuff." Which is just not a good insult at all. Like, "you are too enthusiastic about the miracle of human consciousness."¹⁸

Simon Pegg (2013), an actor/writer/producer/director, states:

Being a geek is all about being honest about what you enjoy and not being afraid to demonstrate that affection. It means never having to play it cool about how much you like something...¹⁹

Wil Wheaton (Ortiz 2014), another actor/writer/producer/director, muddies the waters further with:

I use "nerd" and "geek" interchangeably—I don't make a distinction. I've said that being a nerd is not about what you love, it's about the way that you love it

... Someone who I would describe as a "geek" or "nerd" is a person who loves something to its greatest extent, and then looks for other people who love it the same way, so they can celebrate loving it together.²⁰

And therein remains my problem with crafting definitions that draw the line. All that can be surmised is that nerds and geeks love.

The version of this discussion that rings truest to me, and comes close to drawing a firm and comprehensible line, comes from the depths of YouTube. Rhett and Link (Rhett McLaughlin and Link Neal), with their lovingly acerbic video for their song "Epic Rap Battle: Nerd vs Geek," describe the differences between the two breeds as being not about technical skill, interests, or even topics of obsession.²¹ Rather, according to Rhett and Link's lyrics, it's more about the ability to be social and interact with people, especially the opposite gender.

The main difference, according to the "Epic Rap Battle," is in the respective social skills of the geek and the nerd. In several lines, the "geek," played by McLaughlin, insults the "nerd" about his physical appearance, yet it is the line "There're some things you can't learn in a class/Or else I'd sign you up for 'Intro to How Not to Be a Social Outcast'," speaks directly to the possible difference between these two breeds: the ability to socially interact with others.²²

If sociability is really the difference between the geek and nerd, where does it come from? Why are geeks able to interact, while nerds seem to have a difficult time of it? Perhaps it is a matter of self-interpretation.

SOCIAL LUBRICATION AND NICHE POPULATIONS

The bars at the heart of this exploration of cultures and identities are vastly different, both in how the populations interact and how they create communities.

Green

“Green” is not an interesting place, on purpose. The concept behind it is simple: food and alcohol. It’s designed to be a local hangout, but it still has a niche crowd it’s striving for. According to the menu and napkins, Green is a “sports bar”—that only has one piece of sports memorabilia. What it does have is televisions stuck on the walls, and more in the windows facing the patio, so the patrons outside can watch whatever sport the season has to offer. The patio of Green is integral to its business as most of the patrons smoke or have smokers in their parties, and thus, at some point, almost everyone ends up outside. Green relies almost exclusively on the company patrons keep to build the patron’s experience. Honestly, if patrons do not bring their own fun, they’re probably not going to have much.

The doorman, “Galahad,” is stone-faced while working. Women in their early 20s will run up to this 40-something and flirt, but most of the time he rolls his eyes, claiming they’re only paying attention to him to “work out their daddy issues.”²³ Galahad’s job is vastly different from that of the doorman at 10 Forward. At Green, he has to break up fist fights and forcefully remove both male and female patrons for various reasons. Again, it’s the patrons that build the experience, and different ratios of people create diverse atmospheres at Green almost every time the doors open.

10 Forward

“10 Forward,” on the other hand, is a rather interesting place. It prides itself on being a geek and gamer pub, as is poorly scrawled across their front windows in what could be shoe polish. 10 Forward hosts cosplay events and seems to specialize in overly complicated drinks with geeky/nerdy themes that all taste precisely like Robitussin. At 10 Forward, socialization occurs around the center set of tables, which is flanked by walls of TVs available for video gaming. At the beginning of the night, these tables are split up so a set of four can sit around and play a card

or board game. By the end of the evening, the tables are frequently slid together so that larger and larger groups can play the same game, or engage in conversation.

The “Shaman” and the “Imp” run 10 Forward, from behind the bar and at the door. The Imp collects the cover charge, though once the status of regular is earned, female patrons should expect to hug him in lieu of paying the cover. The Shaman is the mastermind behind the place, yet after beholding his glorious waist-length beard and Birkenstocks, one would assume he was a hippie, not a geek.

These bars may as well exist in two different worlds due to their styles of approaching the same types of people. Green practically forces patrons to interact, but never welcomes it when they do, whereas 10 Forward will not force interaction, its décor actually creating invisibly cordoned sections for video games, card games, talking, and even reading that can be imagined as social study carrels. When the bar is busy, the carrels act as a secure base from which people are able to explore what is going on around them, without having to take any additional social risk if they are not ready for it. This design, though unintentionally created, is precisely what most of the patrons need in order to find ways to become more social.

Socially Awkward, Party of One

When meeting new people, the inevitable question about employment always pops up. I start off quite obviously by saying something to the effect of “Oh, um, I’m a professor.” I am almost embarrassed to say it. I play off the value of what I do and give a self-effacing description. “I, uh, just teach the intro teacher prep classes. You know, it’s like teaching future teachers why they don’t want to teach.” At 10 Forward, depending on the direction the conversation would take, I might hand over a business card, suggesting they get back into or start college, and saying I would be happy to point them to the right person, or even discuss ways to collaborate on projects. Occasionally this would become awkward if Big Red was present, as I would be accused of being “pretentious.” I found this really hurtful, mainly because she was my friend outside of the bar and knew I was being self-effacing in order to network while not seeming elitist. I tried not to allow Big Red’s commentary to affect my strategy of handing out cards to perfect strangers; however, it still does, and that’s part of what makes me a nerd. Big Red’s reaction, while atypical at 10 Forward, was a common reaction at Green.

My first night at Green, I was greeted by Galahad. We had known each other in high school and I decided to set up camp near him. Being at a bar where alcohol and sports are the only social lubricants, I had to do the awkward thing—eavesdrop and walk up to random people whose conversations I felt I knew something about and ease myself into the group. Being a nerd, I'm not very good at this. However, I had my normal persona on that day, and a drink in front of me, so, ham-fisted as the initial encounters were, I was able to engage and interact.

When the game I was watching went to commercial, typical conversation topics came up and I had to once again discuss my job. "Oh, um, I'm a professor" came out of my mouth again, and once again I was self-effacing about what I teach, even completely avoiding my topics of research. I would never come out and say "I'm a professor. I research the application of ludic pedagogy in learning environments on non-traditional learns and nerds. I'm so lucky because I get to spend all day thinking about video games and the human brain!" I am proud of my work. However, I know that most people will not understand it or see its value. Other professors have even used my work as an opportunity to pick on me. (Yes, other Ph.D.s mock my nerdiness, to my face.)

In this first encounter at the bar, the reaction to my title alone actually caused a physical change in the cluster. The group of guys I had been talking to minutes earlier about bad calls and player stats, who were buying me drinks and making room for me by the television, crossed their arms, rounded off their shoulders, and took steps back. Sensing I had screwed up, I excused myself and finished my beer chatting with Galahad.

Obviously, it was not my study of nerds or video games, or even being a nerd, that made these guys uneasy. What made this patch of patrons at Green uncomfortable was the notion that I was both educated and an educator. According to Galahad, I made them feel stupid and inferior, like I was going to judge them because I had this degree and this title.²⁴ It was as if the very fact of my being a professor, in spite of being self-effacing and modest about who I was and what I did, was performing an emasculating act. I apparently damaged the barrier of heteronormative masculinity by acting as if I never could.

Being what I am and knowing I make the normals feel this way, the next time I was up at Green, I had Galahad introduce me to people. This time, when the topic came up, I said I was a teacher, pulling up my middle-school teacher personality. "I teach English at so-and-so middle

school. I love this age—it takes a special kind of crazy to, though,” I said, followed by a wink and a smile. This did not garner crossed arms or greater physical distance, but instead, my physical gestures were mirrored and I was bought several rounds of drinks. In the realm of Green, I was in “my place.” I was not challenging anyone’s opinion of who or what I or they should be.

My personal reaction to this is at the root of the difference between the geek and the nerd. When nerds get treated poorly for being themselves, instead of being able to let it roll off of their backs, the attack becomes internalized and has one of two effects. The first is where our behavior is overrun by empathy, and thus there is overcompensation and a willingness to attempt to lessen the negative effect we feel we have on others. The second is to build up walls or even create false bravado. Neither of which lends the nerd any social skills. This is linked to self-interpretation. “Ethel” has degrees from well-respected universities and thinks nothing of sharing this information. She is confident in displaying her intellectual wares and became irritated with me for being willing to feel bad for being successful. “If Big Red feels threatened, that’s not your fault, that’s hers. Why let yourself feel bad because she does?”²⁵

Ethel is at one end of this continuum, though, and much like the nerd, there is another version. This pride in their abilities can easily turn into hubris. These are the geeks who are happy to show someone how to fix their computer and feel so good about their display of ability that they develop a “god-complex.” So, while they want to help, the fact that they can fix the computer while the owner cannot, can make them smug and self-important.

Beards, Scarves, and Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR)

If one can believe all the infographics on the Internet, or even Rhett and Link’s lyrics, a geek is just a “hipster wannabe.”²⁶ Defining and delineating the difference between the geek and the hipster is almost as difficult as with geek and nerd. Yet, once again, these are very different species.

Hipsters currently hold the status, *ironically* enough, of being mainstream—even though part of the unofficial manifesto of hipsterism is the wholesale rejection of the mainstream while encouraging a new mainstream. Memes would go so far as to say a hipster needs to wear a scarf, fedora, or 1860s-style beard, even in the swelter of summer, while drinking PBR, and wearing T-shirts “ironically” that are of an 80s or 90s “vintage” style or have quirky graphics.

However unfairly, hipsters, according to the denizens of 10 Forward, do not “belong with our kind,” an unfortunate concept thanks to 10 Forward’s location in a southern city stained by the role it played in the civil rights movement. The patrons would often voice their derision when obvious hipsters walked into the bar and could not prove their “right” to hang out with the nerds, usually resulting in shunning or mockery.

Rejection in nerd culture often comes after discussions with outsiders about a seemingly common cultural hallmark (*Doctor Who*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, etc.), based on, for instance, the person’s clothing or vocalizing the desire to play “old school” games.

At one point a pair of hipsters were asked to leave 10 Forward for their own “comfort,” after a geek (self-identified) questioned “Handlebar Mustache” about his favorite villain from *ThunderCats*.²⁷ According to the crowing geek, the hipster not only could not identify a villain, but couldn’t identify any of the characters on his shirt either. This incited a group of more than slightly intoxicated geeks and nerds into bullying Handlebar and his girlfriend until the Imp asked the hipsters to leave, suggesting they “find a place where they belong.”²⁸

IDENTITY ON MY SLEEVES, OR WHY HIPSTERS RUIN EVERYTHING

Part of the stereotype is that my people are not fashionable dressers. It is the most obvious way to spot one of us. Function over fashion is the style or, in the case of many of us, it’s just perfunctory. Yet, when we are free to dress as ourselves, clothing takes on meaning and becomes the ultimate way of achieving elegance and simplicity in communication that—something we strive for, but rarely, if ever, achieve. Certainly, most clothing choices, nerd or otherwise, express the wearers’ inner intentions and thoughts. The wearing of specific clothing items telegraphs information in the clearest way possible. Any item can share with the rest of the community what the wearers’ nerdy predilections are. Excessively long scarves or bow-ties shout messages to those who are in the community that outsiders will not understand. These items function not just as interesting accessories but as calling cards of the wearers’ identities, and thus are crucial to understanding the wearer and allowing us to socialize as freely as others.

For a group of people notorious for having social issues and difficulty talking, let alone making small talk with strangers, announcing to others what is an appropriate or comfortable topic for discussion is not only

an excellent ice breaker, but sets both people at ease. It's wonderful to know, when I walk up to someone, that I don't need to be afraid of sharing my pure and unadulterated passion. Better yet, I know I could possibly find something else to love if they are willing to reciprocate.

The problem with this unofficial system of communication is that we created an argot, and now it is being usurped by the hipster, and their version of irony, which is not actually ironic at all. Every time I see a hipster wearing nerd paraphernalia, I have to wonder if this is a genuine attempt at expressing their love and identity, or if it is being worn "ironically"? Not only is there a level of mockery to the act, but they are breaking our elegant communication system, which has taken decades to create—so now there is fear of communicating with people who look like us.

When the Mustache walked in wearing the *ThunderCats* shirt, he told the rest of us that this was something he had a passion for, or at least an interest in. His having no knowledge of the show was interpreted as an attack: either coming to the bar to watch the nerds in their native habitat or just openly mocking.

When sports fans wear team merchandise, I do not wonder if they actually like the team. When they wear a specific player, I assume they like that player. Seeing someone in a shirt should not make me second-guess their intentions. Why do hipsters own and wear things that make announcements about themselves that are lies? And why are they then offended when others assume their intention is not irony but connection with others who are like-minded? Does wearing the paraphernalia earn them hipster credibility? Regardless of the reason, it's confusing and sends the wrong message. At least, I hope it's the wrong message.

Costume Pieces

After this slightly bigoted incident, I decided to start a conversation about why it had happened. The main themes that emerged when discussing their general and automatic dislike of hipsterism were that hipsters are:

- Fickle and fake. Ethel stated that "If their love of something (music, movies, comics, games, books, etc.) can come to an end because other people love it too, or it becomes "mainstream," they

obviously never really loved it in the first place. They only loved the obscurity of it.”²⁹

- Constantly misusing and abusing the concept of irony, and claiming that most things they do are ironic, like drinking tea at a coffee house.
- Appropriating the culture of the 80s and 90s, i.e., the Mustache in the *ThunderCats* shirt.
- “Cosplaying” being a geek or a nerd.

Samus, a 10 Forward patron, says, “They’re the worst kind of poseurs. Like they know what *up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A* means, or what it goes to.”³⁰ But then they’re gonna [*sic*] come into *my* bar and want to play ‘old school’ games on the Play Station 2. Yeah, so old school...” The sentiment came complete with a deep and penetrating eye-roll and oozed disdain and sarcasm.³¹

Some of the patrons of 10 Forward claimed this interest in the culture of the 80s and 90s was directly related to the “J.J. Abrams-style remake of our childhoods, and so suddenly it’s cool.” Others claimed, with more nodding in chorus, “They only want the old T-shirts and shit because they’re so concerned about people thinking they were ‘into it’ before it was cool.”

Deadpool’s speaking tone became very mocking as he mimicked a dialogue he’d overheard between a pair of hipster females:

[Fake girly hipster voice 1] Like omg I was a Rogue fan before she got her streak.

[Fake girly hipster voice 2] Oh like what the first 10 minutes of the movie... wow so deep. I liked her before she could fly.

[Fake girly hipster voice 1] [snorting noise] Dumbass, Rogue can’t fly.

[Deadpool’s actual voice] I had to get away from this bitch as fast as possible. The level of stupid hanging in the air was either gonna [*sic*] lower my IQ or my sperm count.³²

Egon summed up the general opinion at 10 Forward very succinctly: “It’s like they’re making fun of me, and I think I’ve experienced enough of that.”³³

Gift Wrap

At Green, the normals do not hate or resent the hipsters. Hipsters at Green seem to be able to mesh blend. Hipster girls are appreciated by the normals, garnering much of time and attention from the male population. They are treated like new exhibits at the zoo. Men walk up and flirt, and perhaps get shot down, or perhaps they get to buy her a PBR.

While sitting at one side of a four-top table, an uninvited couple shared a slightly intoxicated moment with me, while he pretended not to wince with every sip of his PBR:

[Mr. Normal] Good lord, you are such a nerd. It's really cute. I love how excited you are about artisanal ice. [His nose crinkled at her as he spoke.]

[Hipster Chick] Well, you know, NPR did a special on it and so I just had to try it out. You've never really tasted all of the nuances of a sangria until you've tried it with artisanal ice.³⁴

The following weekend, I saw Mr. Normal again, only this time without Hipster Chick. He recognized me and saw my facial expression of curiosity and amusement when we made eye contact. He generously bought me a beer as a "peace offering." He said he felt the need to apologize for crashing my table. I noted that Hipster Chick was not with him, and asked through a laugh how the rest of his date went. Apparently, "It didn't."

Being my nerdy self and unable to shut off my socially awkward quest for knowledge, I asked him why he had been interested in Hipster Chick, since it was so obvious he knew it would never go anywhere:

[Mr. Normal] It was the braids and the glasses. Nerdy chicks are hot. It was like her braids were gift wrap. You know, like in those old movies where the secretary takes off her glasses and lets down her hair and she's hot.

[Me] Okay, but why is she hot? You were so bored. She spent the whole time talking about the nearly magical qualities of ice. It's like her Disney obsession has gone a little too far.

[Mr. Normal] [cocking his head to one side like the RCA dog] Disney? Oh, right, right, right—that movie with the song. She was talking about ice? I had no idea what she was saying most of the night, I just took the

last word of whatever she said and turned it into a question. It's a trick my uncle taught me.

[Me] Dude.

[Mr. Normal] What? It's true. Nerdy girls just want attention and to be listened to.

[Me] I think most people want that in general.

[Mr. Normal] Probably. But here's the thing... other girls get excited over stuff I can't imagine giving a shit about: celebrities, or make-up, or shoes. Ugh. At least these girls can sometimes come up with something weird, or something I would like—you know like drinking, or Batman.³⁵

We continued to talk (about Batman) until another secretary-type showed up and he was lost to the ether of Green. He helped me understand that hipsters are hotter than actual nerds or geeks because their look is purposeful. They try to make the perfect messy bun or find a treasure in the trove of Goodwill. They overgroom lumberjack beards and wear accessories. They still pull together an ensemble in the general style of nerd that fits their bodies well, that compliments them. An outfit that does all the things nerds would never think of doing.

This goes back to the notion of geeks being hipster “wanna [*sic*] be[s]”,³⁶ as in Rhett and Link's lyrics. The nerd accuses the geek of having a “dumb haircut.”³⁷ In the video, McLaughlin has a goatee and short pompadour. This is “dumb”³⁸ to the nerd because it is nearly mainstream fashion, and he has no idea why someone would waste their time even bothering.

This might be the threshold that geeks and nerds see but are unable to cross. It's not the fashion sense per se, but the notion that things such as grooming aren't worth doing beyond utilitarianism. It's taking the time and making the effort to be aware of, or even study, mainstream culture, so we can demonstrate a desire to be part of the cool group, while remaining confident in ourselves.

THOU SHALL NOT COVET THY NEIGHBORS' SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

For the record: hipsters are not hated by nerds. We are simply both jealous and envious of them.

They have taken what was ours and made it (whatever *it* happens to be) cool. They made it mainstream and popular, while we, as true and passionate fans, could not. Our fandoms and obsessions are huge parts of our identities. They are how we communicate with each other and interact with the world. We are jealous because there is a real threat that what made us special, i.e., fervently loving something weird, is now going to make us seem average, mundane, boring, and fake.

Hipsters are envied because they are social creatures. They took our things and made them mainstream and popular, while we, as fanatical devotees, couldn't have done that, even if we'd wanted to, proving to nerd-kind that the problem is not with the things we love, or how we love them. It's far worse....

The problem is—us.

Hipsters make us look and feel like the losers we've been called for decades. They can blend in with normals and still look like us, but it's only a role they are playing, a persona that can easily be taken off and then claimed as being ironic. It seems our passions and pains are just generic, disposable costume pieces. They have the ability to hurt us with our own ardors. How can we possibly welcome that?

A LITTLE TOO IRONIC?³⁹

In the spirit of truth and sharing...

For all of my anti-hipsterism cosplay rhetoric, I admit that I hypocritically cosplay normal when needed. I try to dress like a normal. I try to cover up my nerdy argot and speak like a normal. I unsuccessfully try to act like a normal in public. I am not a normal. I do most of what hipsters do without the irony or success. I do it so people won't immediately reject me, not so they'll think I'm cool for by acting like I'm not cool before that was cool. I know I will never be cool. I have accepted this about myself. (Does that make me cool?)

I am married to a jock who thinks nerdy girls are hot because we are smart (and the Princess Leia buns don't hurt). We're raising a mixed household of children: a jock who wants to be a lawyer, a nerd who is nearly a black belt, and a kid who loves *Doctor Who*, but hides it behind grammatically incorrectness and sporting events.

In sociological terms, a "nerd" is N.E.R.D.: norms evolving in response to dilemmas. Maybe this is what we are experiencing. If the lines between geek and nerd are so blurred that even we, the geeks and

nerds, cannot firmly decide what the differences are, then maybe the next stage of our evolution will be a blurring with the normals, and hipsters are just that begrudging first step. Maybe if we accepted this it would make us cool.

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