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Hypebeast: A Misunderstood Identity

I remember the day clearly in my head, September 14, 2012. This was when one of my classmates Brandon made me think about something I never paid much attention to. While we were in line waiting to enter math class, he looked at my feet and whispered in my ear, “Yo, what are those shoes on your feet man?” I turned around and responded “high tops, what about them?” he then gave me a smirk and replied, “Dude why don't you get a pair of Jordans or something you would totally rock them!” At that moment, my identity changed.

When I was on the bus going home that afternoon, I could not get what Brandon said out of my head. It was on a loop and made me feel like an outsider. As I looked around at people's feet on the bus I could see what Brandon meant. Nikes, Jordans, and Adidas were present on nearly everyone's feet. Amidst that bus ride, I decided that since my parents would not let me get a new pair of shoes without a reason, I would lie to them and say that my shoes were too small for me and I needed a pair of Jordans.

After convincing my mom that I needed a new pair of shoes, we went to my local Footlocker. While we were there, I remember frantically looking for a pair of Air Jordans and at first, I thought there were no Jordans in my size. I then panicked in my head and that was the first moment I realized why I was doing this, to promote my image. After finding out that this

Footlocker did have one pair of Jordans in my size I gave my mom the “please buy these for me” face and she grudgingly bought them for me dropping seventy dollars on the counter. I was happy as could be.

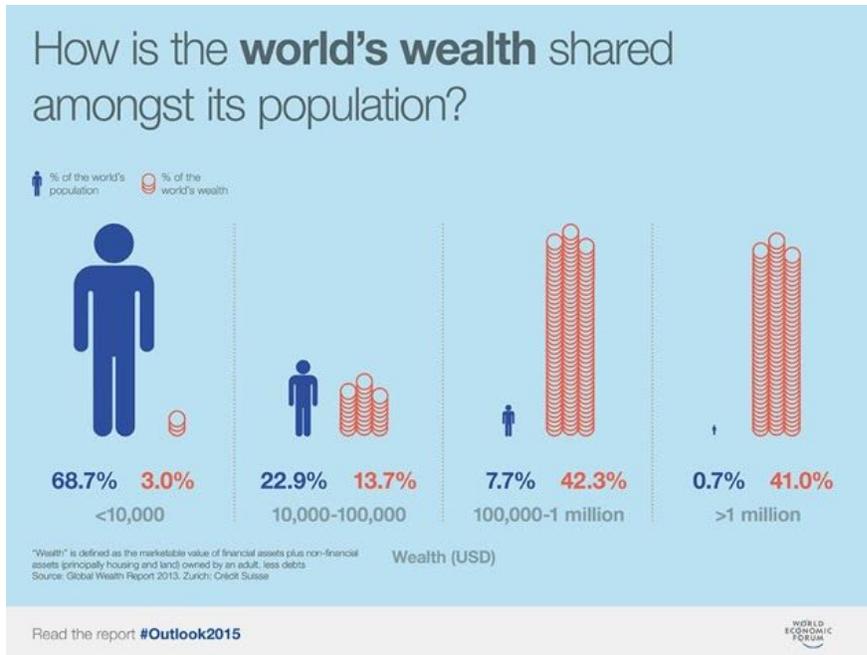
That Sunday night, I kept inspecting the shoes running through all the scenarios that could happen at school, *what will people think of me? Are these ‘real Jordans’? What if people don't like them?* Then Monday came and I knew what I had to do. I put my new kicks on and when I walked through the doors at school, I immediately started getting comments on my shoes on how awesome they were. Hell, even my homeroom teacher thought my shoes were fire! Everyone kept raving about how awesome my shoes were and all day long I kept getting comments about them. There was one moment in particular when I was in gym class where one of the most popular people in my grade called me out and said, “Look at Ari rocking those Jordans!”

Since then, my love for shoes has grown immensely and at times out of control. At college, I have fifteen pairs of shoes and another twenty pairs of shoes at home and this number keeps on rising. It took me a long time to realize it, but I now understand how privileged I am to be able to afford all of my footwear. In thousands of people’s eyes, people like me are considered hypebeast which according to [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) is a slang term for someone who follows fashion trends to make a social statement. In their minds, being a hypebeast is a privilege and only those who are wealthy enough are truly able to embody this identity. For example, QrewTV an up-and-coming YouTube channel run by a man named Qias with just over a million subscribers created a [video](#) labeling 20 different types of people that are deemed as hypebeast.

The video outlines how hypebeast represent their identity (both children and adults) and sheds light on how people believe hypebeast act in public as well as around others.

Even though this video is supposed to be shed in a comedic light, there are a variety of themes that are present. For example, if you did not know brand prominence such as Supreme and Nike tend to be a recurring theme in the hypebeast identity. In addition to this, this video outlines hypebeast as people who are a little bit crazy which in reality the video is definitely over the top. However, after looking in the comment section, it never occurred to me how upset some people got from the video. One person in the comments section felt inclined to say that, “if you buy Supreme or Gucci, you are lowkey brain dead.” Many people have a hard time understanding why the hypebeast identity exists. When the video outlines the ‘flexin hypebeast’ (Type number 17), this is the perfect example of how the concept of privilege falls in line with the term hypebeast. It is important to note when the person to the left (Jacob) asks his friend (Qias), “how’s the fam?” he (Qias) instantly responds with how awesome and expensive his outfit is multiple times. This then makes his friend (Jacob) concerned when he asks, “have you fed your family?” This view of hypebeast across the world has caused people to become outraged and has made them feel like all hypebeast are privileged selfish individuals that are hindering society.

In the world population today, privilege has never been more prevalent. From an economic standpoint, the elite class of citizens although small in number owns 41% of the world's wealth while 68.7% of the world's population owns only a measly 3% of the world's total income. This graph displays how many people (in percentages) account for the world's wealth.



This is a [Pew Research Center](#) Graph representing showing how the world's wealth is shared among different income brackets

As you can see from the graph above, income inequality has been a strong culprit for causing the concept of privilege to become such an important topic of conversation. This has caused the topics of money and privilege to become heavily intertwined with each other and has led us to believe strongly that the more money you have, the greater the amount of privilege you possess. Although this is not true in all circumstances, the research shows that a lot of money does generally lead to higher amounts of privilege by being able to buy daily needs such as food and water as well as own a house. Money also allows people to chase after their dreams by being able to afford post-secondary education and create an identity such as being a hypebeast.

This idea of privilege has become ingrained in nearly all of us if we were born after the year 2000. From personal experience, I have heard this word more times than I can count and at college, this concept has been more prevalent than ever. In one of my classes recently, we talked

about how we as individuals need to check our privilege when we talk about race. We thoroughly discussed the fourth chapter of the book, [*So You Wanna Talk About Race?*](#) by Ijeoma Oluo a Seattle-based American Writer who has written many pieces on feminism, race, and social justice. In this chapter, she talks about how her skin color has affected her while living in Seattle, Washington, and how her privilege has fluctuated as she has joined different racial groups and moved to different neighborhoods in the Seattle area. After reading this chapter myself, one claim that she made caught my eye in which she said that “I’ve found from my conversations and from witnessing the conversations of others that very few people know what privilege is, let alone how they would go about checking it.” From her perspective, she has come to think that people do not know what privilege is and have little to no clue how to check it properly. From my perspective, she is only half right.

After thinking about what she said though, it clicked in my head that the situation is similar to the one that the views of the hypebeast identity are taking today. In this circumstance, the concept of privilege blindness is what I suspect people are upset about. Privilege blindness is when someone is unaware of their privilege and thinks of the rest of the world as being on their level. On Oluo’s first point from the quote above, I disagree with her though on people not knowing what privilege is. Nearly everyone knows what privilege is and if they do not know then they can look it up on the internet or research this topic since it is well documented. However, checking our privilege is much more difficult for people because of what I see as privilege blindness, an ideal that has manifested itself in the hypebeast community for a long time. Yes, I will be the first to admit that many people who identify as hypebeast are blind to the privileges they possess over others flaunting their outfits to everyone and are the ‘flexin

hypebeast' in the video from earlier displays. The blanket thought that all hypebeast are like this though is simply untrue. Hypebeasts come from all walks of life and are not simply the rich, privilege-blind people that pop into our heads once we hear this word. We often forget that the main reason why the hypebeast identity has become so popular is that it has made wavelenghts in the fashion world and is creative in its mission to foster individuality.

Since the inception of the hypebeast identity, people within this community have been dedicated to creating new trends and art for the world to see. Websites such as Etsy and thrift stores across the world have also become a huge part of what fosters the hypebeast identity. This idea of creativity and ingenuity takes away from the argument of critics believing that people who are hypebeast have to be privileged. In fact, anyone can be a hypebeast if they are contributing to the art and/or fashion world. From the video, this type of person is described as the "artistic hypebeast" which recently, these types of people have been growing rapidly in number because anyone can be this type of person.

Every time I go on Etsy, it always amazes me how people from all walks of life can create a piece of fashion that is unique and at the same time says something about your identity, take this post for an example of two custom pairs of shoes. The one to the left was posted on Etsy while the one to the right was posted in an article in the [Detroit Metro Times](#),



This is a custom pair of Nike Air Force 1's and are hand-painted by an Etsy creator



This is a pair of custom Yeezy Boost V2's and are popular in the hypebeast community

As you can see, these pairs of shoes are unique in their own right and the possibilities for customization are endless. Hypebeast can alter their identity whenever they please as there is no one set definition of who or what a hypebeast is. No two hypebeast identities are alike as everyone has their unique taste in art and fashion. This identity gives people the ability to create a sense of individuality while also being socially accepted by others.

This side of hypebeast fandom has also taken off in magazines and local publications such as [Print](#) which is a publication that promotes people's work in the hypebeast community throughout the United States. In this publication, it is loaded with artwork and designs that were created by people who want to get their work out there and recognized by others. Take for example the fifteenth entry of this publication where the hypebeast magazine appears. As you will notice, this magazine is not just a dull boring magazine like many others in the United States but is colorful and is created by a designer named KAWS who is trying to get his identity out to the rest of the world, not just the hypebeast community.

It is also important to note that, according to the article [“That Hypebeast: Identifying Hypebeast.”](#) Erica [no last name] mentions that “the identity of the hypebeast is created through the clothes they wear and in achieving this style, it dictates a particular lifestyle invested on the hype trends of pop culture and culture of hypebeasts.” This quote from the author speaks to what many people who are hypebeast are hoping to achieve by becoming apart of this identity. People want to fit in and hypebeast do this by creating new trends in the fashion world as well as creating new cultural phenomenons. This includes trends such as new art styles like urban graffiti. This, as a result, has caused companies like Gucci and Nike to jump on board as the study of, [Signaling Status With Luxury Goods: The Role of Brand Prominence](#) from *The Marketing Journal* highlights, “Contemporary research in marketing recognizes the symbolic role of possessions in consumers’ lives. It is widely accepted that people make inferences about others based on their possessions.” Due to this, company interference has caused a huge shift in people’s hypebeast identity and has made many individuals believe that hypebeast are privileged. This is because some hypebeast are willing to spend thousands of dollars on clothing from name brands like Nike and Gucci.

From all the research I have conducted on this niche topic and after looking at all the work and culture hypebeast have contributed to society, it is important to note one last quote from a person who held the hypebeast identity head-on throughout college. [Ben Fullon](#), before becoming a hypebeast was a person who wore uniforms for most of his life, he was socially awkward, and as he describes it, was woefully unprepared for city life. After reading the ups and downs of his hypebeast identity phase he says this,

Whenever I mention my hypebeast past, the question I'm always asked is "Was it worth it?" When this happens, I pause. And I think about all the time spent on lines in front of stores in the chilling cold. I think about all the money that could

have eventually gone to paying back my enormous college debt. I think about all the friends I made talking over sneakers and clothes, however short or long those friendships may have lasted. I think about how I finally felt like a person with an identity, how I finally stopped worrying about being socially weird. And I'll reply, "I think so?"

Although he wasted a lot of money and waited hours on end to grab clothes that were probably not worth the price, he was creating a unique identity every hypebeast strives for. Ben was improving the world by showing his individualism and creating his own sense of fashion. In my mind, without his hypebeast identity, Ben would have been a gray cloud in the sky on a rainy day like everyone else. We would not know that he was Ben since there is nothing special about him. But, since he took a leap of faith and owned the hypebeast identity, we now know who Ben is and in that same scenario of clouds being in the sky on a rainy day, Ben differentiated himself by changing the color of his cloud to red and now everyone is talking about it. He was able to differentiate himself from the crowd in his own way and created new friendships which in reality is what every hypebeast strives for.

So this begs the million-dollar question of why does the hypebeast identity exist? No, it does not exist because of the brand's prominence in the fashion industry or because privileged people want to differentiate themselves from the rest of society. This identity exists because it promotes the inner entrepreneurial being in people's minds across the world and as a direct result has created an up-and-coming pop culture that can define a large number of people in their own unique way. As a result of this, what comes with a lot of success must come some negativity. Hence, brands such as Nike, Gucci, etc have been capitalizing on this identity causing controversy about privilege concerning hypebeast. However, at its core, the hypebeast identity is a positive concept that has helped millions of people define themselves and will keep growing in the near future.

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