

From the seed of social deviance that punk rock initiated, the Gothic culture began its birth into the shadowy realms of nightclubs and eventually, the streets. It is an aesthetically exciting interpretation of the rejection of mainstream fashions and common perceptions of beauty and attractiveness. Some people use the Gothic subculture as a direct form of rebellion, others as a transient step to "something else". For a handful it is a way of life, a set of beliefs and ideas. The roots of the Gothic sub-culture can easily be traced back centuries; the seeds of which were sown in the Gothic literature of the 1800's. A dangerous and hostile world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, coupled with the curiosity, excitement and insecurity of youth, has created a pattern of exclusion and tribalism. The formation of various youth sub-cultures, all with individual rules, codes and beliefs, are an empowering response. Thrust into a system created for and benefited by adults, they are forced to territorialise certain meaning systems, modes of expression or lifestyles,' and find identity and belonging.

Gothic fashion and style is possibly the most visually noticeable presentation of a sub-culture available on today's social kaleidoscope of the streets. Clothing and body ornamentation is highly stylised and indicative of a dark or morbid underground existence. Obviously rejecting anything remotely popular or mainstream, it can range from slightly off-kilter to explicitly sexual and deviant. Punk Rock styles and their rejection of the typically attractive heavily influenced Goth dress style.

The most common form Gothic style appropriates bondage gear and fabrics, such as PVC, leather, buckles and zips, and thigh high boots, as well as accessories such as whips and chains. Fetish is a theme that dominates the theme of dress, with sexual overtones and lots of skin.ⁱ Such overtly sexual dressing blatantly informs the public of the wearer's Gothic status and attitude. Through such extreme deviation from social norms, the wearer is displaying an explicit resistance to the normalised, dictated indicators of sexuality, and a preference for an alternative route.

Other variations on the Gothic style include the Romantic Goth, and the Industrial Gothic. Romantics tend to draw inspiration from clothing of the 18th and 19th centuries. Always theatrical, this kind of Gothic trend indicates a deeper resonance with the origins of Gothicism, in literature and history. Images, like those of Dracula and the Vampire are emanated often in the look. The uses of capes, velvet, waistcoats, lace, brocade gowns and corsets, nowadays often worn with modern materials. While Industrial Gothic can attribute its origins to that of the traditional Gothic, it has today evolved into an entirely separate sub-culture. It has grown to such proportions, especially in countries like German

and Japan, that it deserves a separate analysis, independent of the traditional Gothic culture from which has now surpassed.

The Gothic style pushes the boundaries of taste, with body piercing, tattoo's, makeup and hairstyles all vying for centre stage. White make-up, blood red lipstick and very dark eye make-up are all used to create the appearance of death. Fake blood, fangs, and contact lenses are also popular, often in a vampiric look. Normally black or dark and almost always dyed, hair is another indicator of creativity. The Mohawk, another adaptation of the punk look, is popular, as is dreadlocks, extensions and braids. Body piercing is a popular mode of decoration. Often permanent or in obvious places, it is another indicator that the Gothic has no desire to submit to mainstream labour market, as it is generally unacceptable to sport extreme piercing in many corporate arena's.

Music is the unifying factor and the cultural force that brings the various kinds of Gothic's together. In 1979, Bauhaus released the song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead', inspiring a new type of Gothic music and culture. As punk was dying, new sounds began to take the stage. The Gothic label wasn't yet coined, but a culture of introspective, creative, and frenzied sounds, was beginning to form. Bands like 'The Damned' and 'The Banshees' paved the way and the late 80's introduced the first wave of self-labelled Gothic bands.ⁱⁱ Dark, moody and melancholic, this seemingly morbid music, to the untrained ear, may represent a clan of sombre, depressed youths, with a morbid fascination for death. Gothic's, however, describe this genre as 'full of passion, majesty, beauty, mysticism.'ⁱⁱⁱ The Gothic love of introspective music, penchant for dark imagery and romanticising of death is often blamed for teenage suicide. This is a reactionary response and a fallacy. It also ignores the fact that many people gain stability and friends from the Gothic culture, and are out to have fun rather than withdrawing into themselves.

In contemporary culture, music a tool which can be used to defining ones identity. It gives people, especially, youths with questions about identity and their place in the social structures of teen culture, a more solid reference as to where they belong. The nightclub culture is a huge part of the Gothic community. It is a sanctuary, away from the mainstream culture, and a meeting place for other Gothic's. Music is obviously an integral part of any club scene, and integral in the unification different people with similar tastes.

Religion and spirituality are important beliefs in the Gothic culture. Witchcraft, Shamanism, Druidism, worship of Mother Goddess, and The Cult of the Dead are all popular and visible in religious symbols, popular as decoration and symbols of faith.^{iv}

This is, in some ways a reaction to many modern day religions, such as Christianity and Catholicism, which are often considered alternative or outdated, empty and repressive. Paganism and magic hold philosophical principles, rather than instructional lessons. Christianity often represses and tries to eliminate alternative forms of religion, demonising those they deem wrong or evil. The rituals and beliefs of these alternative religions offer a more active role and appeal to those who will question the notion of mindless belief in oppressive doctrines that may not still be relevant in today's society.

While today's adaptation of the Gothic culture may often be considered superficial, the 'real' Gothic's owe more than just a label to historical literature and schools of thought. The Gothic novel, first noticed in the first half of the 18th century, focussed heavily upon the questionable morality or rationality of the human mind. Authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley, Kafka and H.P. Lovecraft are still widely read, as are poets and philosophers such as Baudelaire, Byron, Shelley and Nietzsche. The two most prominent books of Gothic relevance were Bram Stokers 'Dracula' (1897) and Mary Shelly's Frankenstein (1818).^v Gothic literature often focussed upon the morbid or the marginalised pockets of humans in sociality, often questioning the assumption of wisdom in society and mainstream culture. The Vampire of Dracula has been adopted as a cultural mascot and remains a much-imitated icon. Unsurprisingly, many Gothic's like to think they share an understanding and affiliation with this character. Suspended in an existence between life and death, day and night and expelled to the margins of society for his morbid and perverse lifestyle, he thrives on an unsolicited substance. He is condemned him to seclusion by mainstream social values and norms.

Gothic today is concerned with recognising beauty in what most of Western society fears. The horror images of Industrial wasteland and the Victorian Gothic novels, the music both evil and romantic, the use of religious and pagan imagery, all highlight the dichotomy of the enchanting and repulsive found in every facet of the Gothic culture. The strength of the Gothic subculture lies in the force of it's rebellion against mainstream society, and it attracts those people who feel alienated by society, giving them an identity and sense of belonging.

Most people in large societies want to feel as though they belong somewhere. This seems to be a natural human instinct. Just as tribes in remote regions of Outer Mongolia or Africa feel the need to group together, so do people from overpopulated cities. Subcultures often form when the cultural norm of the times exclude (and exclusion is an integral part of any form of inclusion) those who don't fit the standardised stereotype.

Often the subculture will try to compensate for the failure of a larger culture to provide an adequate status, acceptance and identity.

An argument that I feel would be viable in today's consumerist and capitalist's society, is that many of the sub-cultures exhibited by youths of today exist purely in a representational or visual display. A short trip down memory lane reveals an indisputable need that past (and current) generations have had to oppose mainstream norms of an oppressive society, however I don't feel that such revolutionary sentiments can be attributed to the mass-produced teenage punk, Gothic or hippies that roam the streets today. While today's youth do submit themselves to certain sub-cultures, it often through the appropriation and bricolage of consumerist signs and symbols rather than a belief in the meaning behind them^{vi}. One can now experiment with many different subcultures and look the part, as the search for identity and belonging becomes increasingly important to an adolescent in our image conscious society. Access to money and spare time are catalysts, as teenagers from Westernised cultures, not yet old enough for burdening responsibilities or concern about their future, can afford the luxury of self-analysis. The adolescent consumer is able to choose from a range of ready-made sub-cultures, ideologies and movements. From the local shopping mall they purchase the visual indicators. They click on the Internet for a brief overview of the history and meaning and voila, a more defining role and identity within teenage social structures.

The popularity of sub-cultures in the teenage age bracket has been partly attributed to the structure of the education and labour systems that have produced a kind of extended limbo period between early school and childhood and adulthood and work^{vii}. Shaking off the parental dependency of childhood, but not yet indoctrinated into the responsibilities and corporate pigeonholing of the workplace, youths are forced to spend more time developing and displaying their identity. Adolescence is hailed as a time in which youths can find themselves. The 'halfway house' of being a child and being an adult can produce hostility and anxiousness about a hostile world, in which they are at the bottom of the food chain. Tribalism thus becomes a tool of survival, as youths look for support in a world they don't quite understand or hold power in.

The authority and class structure imposed upon teenagers is intrinsic in this scenario, as the dominant authorities (parents, teachers or police) are often seen by youths as the enemy, consistently trying to oppress the rebellious youth and impose their class structures. As a youth feels disempowered by system, they will break away and create a new class system, through which they are empowered.

Parents, reminiscent of their child's innocence and aware of the dangers their child will face in a hostile world will often, quite understandably, try to protect their child. As the adolescent grows and the rules that once kept them disciplined as children begin to have less authority, a sense of curiosity and the search for acceptance and identity often overrides the rules that their parents try to enforce. Often a communication breakdown between parents and children develops. Mis-communication leads to mis-understanding and suspicion. Secrecy is natural tendency of teenagers, possibly a result of the constant assumption by older generations who adhere to a patriarchal system, that teenagers are not 'old enough to know best,' and require direction and instruction from authoritative figures. Often, as I know from experience, deception is an easier way to gain freedom in ones activities, thus propagating a pattern of dishonesty and lack of trust between parent and child.

Is is true, nonetheless, that many of the activities that youths of today partake in, such as drugs, unsafe sex, fighting and drink driving are dangerous and do warrant suspicion. Moral panic is often caused by popular media playing on stereotypes to create a sensational story and sell more papers. Due to poor media coverage in other instances, it arouses fear amongst the community due to ignorance. The fact remains, however, that teenagers need to experiment and explore. Humans learn from their mistakes and need life experience in order to grow. If the line of communication, respect and acceptance can be upheld between a parent and their child, unnecessary levels of ignorance and suspicion are lessened and the dangers involved in teenage pastimes reduced.

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I also used a friend of mine, Primrose Campbell, who was much more heavily into the Gothic sub-culture as a teenager as a source of information.

NB I just wanted to note that, although factual and historical information and some other ideas were sourced from research, the majority of the information, references and speculation on both Gothic and youth sub-cultures, was sourced from personal experience. It wasn't that long ago that I was another one of those teenagers questioning identity and authority, looking for belonging and experimenting with different sub-cultures. I feel that this information and personal experience within the topic of discussion that I have chosen, is just as relevant as an academic opinion or the speculations of other people.

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- ⁱ Smith, A.P. 9/28/03, <http://www.gothicsubculture.com>
- ⁱⁱ Thompson D. and Greene J.1994, <http://www.darkwaver.com/subculture/articles/undead.php>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Finnriorden, M.1995.
- ^{iv} Robinson B.A. 2004, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/goth.htm>.
- ^v Robinson B.A. 2004, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/goth.htm>.
- ^{vi} Hebdidge, D. 1979.
- ^{vii} Mark. T, 1999.