

Gothic Teenagers: Misguided or Misunderstood?

Linda C., Grade 6

They dress weird, look different, and keep to themselves...Do we need to be worried about these mysterious teenagers?

In the spring of 1999, two teenage outcasts shot and killed thirteen students and wounded twenty-eight others before turning the guns on themselves. This tragedy at Columbine High School was felt across the country. The two students wore black trench coats and many in the press immediately labeled them as Goths. This led to widespread "Goth hysteria" with people fearing anything related to the Gothic subculture and the people involved in it.



Misguided

Mainstream America, whose only contact with Goth ideas is usually through the media, believes that Goths are all about strange makeup, depression, and death. Goths are often victims of weird looks, name calling, and even having things thrown at them.

Adults often take the attitude that they are looking out for teenagers' best interests by trying to steer them away from Goth culture. Carolyn Sommer, a teacher at Wilson Academy, explains her concern: "It's one of those doors where you open it and you don't know how far back it goes. I think it is good that [Goths] are finding an identity, but I don't think most people realize that it is centered around death." Alicia Porter, designer of the Web site "A Study of Gothic Sub-Culture: An inside Look for Outsiders," explains the mainstream attitude. "Three words best sum up what the Goth stereotype is all about: death, pretension, and angst." She adds, however, "Like any stereotype, the Goth stereotype is a one-dimensional exaggeration and people are not usually so one-dimensional."

Misunderstood

Despite the fears that people have, the Gothic subculture is not really all that bad. "Parents think it grabs hold of teenagers and warps them. It's quite the reverse. Instead of causing suicide and depression, it gives them people to talk to. It's a catharsis," says Gavin Baddeley, author of *Gothic Chic: A Connoisseur's Guide to Dark Culture*.

Many teenagers who become involved in the Goth subculture are already depressed and feel that they are isolated from the rest of the world. By getting involved with the Goth community, it gives them people who are feeling the same way to talk to and it makes them feel better knowing there are other people out there like them. "I like the clothes, I like the music, I feel comfortable. It doesn't make you more depressive, it makes you happy explains Alison Ehrick, 22.

Even the Goth subculture's focus on death can be healthy. "Many Goths say that Gothic represents acceptance of the inevitability of death and the existence of the darker side of life. That does not mean that Goths possess an obsession with either one," explains Porter. Baddeley has a similar perspective: "I think it's healthier to be intrigued by vampires and thinking about ideas of mortality than to watch wrestling."

"Gothic Teenagers...?" continued

Coming to an Understanding

Goths are like any other group of people. Some will do bad things, but the majority won't. Dr. Jamie L. Miller, a psychologist in Escondido, explained that in her practice she sees some Goths who get involved for negative reasons and the Goth subculture has a bad influence on them. However, she also sees some who do it to be different. For these patients the Goth subculture may have a good influence, depending on the person.

Many Goths do very well in school, get good grades, and don't have any behavioral difficulties at all. Few Goths are ever involved in crimes. "[Goths] don't cause us any problems at all. They just dress different," reports Officer Rob Newquist of the San Diego Police Department.

Most Goths just want to be left alone to pursue their interests and have no desire to cause the chaos that people fear. Jennie Dinh, a fifth-grader at Wilson Academy, understands this. "[Gothic] is what they believe in, what they do. It shouldn't be any of our business, unless they're doing things they aren't supposed to."

What's your view: Are Gothic teenagers misguided and lost or *simply misunderstood*?

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