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# The Evolution of the Perceptions of the Goth Subculture

Sabrina Newman

*Johnson & Wales University - Providence*, [snewman01@wildcats.jwu.edu](mailto:snewman01@wildcats.jwu.edu)

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**The Evolution of the Perceptions of the Goth Subculture**

**By Sabrina Newman**

**A Thesis**

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## **Introduction**

The Gothic subculture has a rich and interesting history, despite being only approximately 40 years old (Gonzalez). From its origin in the late 1970s to today, the subculture has evolved significantly, and with it the perceptions of said culture. This study seeks not only to educate on the origins of the Gothic subculture, but also to compare public perceptions of individuals within the culture from over 40 years ago to today. Portrayals of Goths in news and media have played a large role in how they are perceived, and often in how they are misunderstood.

To understand Goth subculture and its evolution, it must first be defined. A subculture can be defined as a “segment of a culture which (while reflecting the dominant aspects of the main culture) [shows] different customs, norms, and values,” according to Christopher S. Dawson, author of *Leading Culture Change* (Dawson). Goth is one such subculture, and its definitions vary depending on the source. Karin Gonzalez, an online anthropology instructor with a master’s degree in social work, defines a Goth as someone who enjoys Goth music and the ‘darker’ side of life, and death; someone who has an appreciation for Gothic literature and romanticism, and horror in general. They often wear all black or dark colored clothing, ranging from long trench coats to corsets. She also mentions the correlation between Goths and depression, loneliness, and cynicism toward society (Gonzalez).

In comparison, Marcia Montenegro of the *Christian Research Journal* defines Goth culture as a lifestyle rather than just interests; Goths appreciate what mainstream society finds taboo and unsettling, such as horror and death. According to her, it is a state of mind rather than a mere fashion statement. While some Goths love to dress in extreme outfits that will grab

attention, others prefer to express themselves through art and poetry. Goths defy stereotypes, even of themselves, and rarely are two Goths the same. The biggest part of defining Goth is to start inward, not outward. Most Goths have the sense of being disconnected from mainstream culture and have a strong fascination with things that most would prefer not to think about, such as death (Montenegro).

In contrast, *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace*, written by Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje, focuses solely on the post-punk and Goth movement between 1978 and 1992, and recognizes that defining something as broad as the Goth subculture is nearly impossible, as everyone has their own perceptions and ideas. However, the compendium does describe members of the subculture as “works of art in their own right,” reflecting the music and artists that started the movement in the first place. A word often tied to the movement was ‘dramaticism’; Goths at the time emphasized the glamour of 1930s Hollywood and the club life with extravagant outfits, makeup and hairstyles. It was a ‘melting pot,’ where everyone was welcome despite how uninviting it may have seemed to those outside of the movement (Harriman). Because its members were often so different from each other, it was and still is hard to solidly define “Goth”. This compendium focuses mainly on defining the subculture by its origins: the music and the artists of the post-punk era.

It is easier to describe the origins of Goth culture, as it is a matter of history rather than observation and opinion. However, that does not mean that everyone would say the same thing about it, as certain points of origin and timelines are still debated. Karin Gonzalez teaches a course in anthropology surrounding the Goth subculture. She explains its origins by stating that the early days of the subculture began in the late 1970’s to early 1980’s with British Goth rock,

defined as a dark and somber evolution of punk rock. She goes on to say that Bauhaus, a British punk rock band, played a large role in Goth's origins with the song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' in 1979. However, the first person to start referring to the movement as 'Goth' was Siouxsie Sioux, lead singer of Siouxsie and the Banshees. Gonzalez then refers to Siouxsie Sioux and Peter Murphy, lead singer of Bauhaus, as the grandparents of the Gothic movement. Gonzalez becomes vaguer by the end of her course, stating that a second generation of Gothic bands emerged in the late 80's & 90's, and a third generation in the late 90's. She briefly states that first wave Goths look at the second wave of Goths with a wary eye due to their evolutionary differences. However there are still common elements between the two movements (Gonzalez).

Marcia Montenegro, writer for the *Christian Research Journal*, continues explaining the origins of the subculture a bit differently, as she is writing to educate a very specific audience: Christian readers who may dislike or even fear Goths due to negative misperceptions. She first explains the historical origins of the word 'Goth' and that it was originally linked to barbaric tribes that initiated the Dark Ages by invading the Roman Empire. She also states that 'Gothdom' truly started in 1981 rather than 1979, as Gonzalez believed, referring to the post-punk movement as something else entirely that eventually evolved into 'Goth', and explains that this term doesn't even come into popular use until 1983. The article agrees that the subculture started with the same dark and brooding music, listing Bauhaus and Siouxsie and the Banshees as two notable bands. The Goth movement was then able to spread across the world, causing the creation of Goth clubs. The article explains that the subculture took strong influences from writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, John Keats, and many other classic romantic & horror authors (Montenegro).

Returning to *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace*, there is much more detail in this source than in the prior two sources. First, Harriman and Bontje once again disagree on the starting date of the movement, stating that the post-punk movement began in 1978 rather than 1979 as Gonzalez says, and adds that the movement ended in 1992, though the subculture itself continued to evolve beyond that. In general, the compendium refers to the movement as post-punk rather than Goth, since the term ‘Goth’ did not come into popular use until later. The book continues to explain that post-punk evolved from the punk movement of the 1970’s, which was already meant to be vibrant and rebellious. Post-punk was a more artistic and poetic form of this rebellion; original punks could not stand it. The compendium then explains how punk music evolved into post-punk music, which was the true beginning of the subculture; post-punk was more refined and melodic, and often aimed to get listeners to think rather than just enjoy the music. ‘Glam rock’ is explained to be a large influence on post-punk’s aesthetic, leading to a heavy emphasis on dress and makeup, and eventually leading many post-punks to identify with the term ‘New Romantic.’ These New Romantics quickly formed a very intimate club scene that was unlike anything before it, giving those within this new subculture a place to feel at home, though it still had a much stronger presence in England (specifically London) than it did in the U.S (Harriman).

*Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* lists the same iconic Gothic bands as in the previous sources, though it also lists many more, such as The Sound, Christian Death, 45 Grave and The Cure. Authors Harriman and Bontje agree that Bauhaus is the grandfather of the subculture, and add that both Peter Murphy and ‘his army’ were strongly influenced by David Bowie and his theatrics. It was in 1982 that the post-punk movement truly began to take on a much darker tone and began to resemble what we know as Goth today. This is thanks to the

opening of the Batcave, a Goth club in London, which encouraged the dark evolution with its accentuated macabre and horror scene. Though it was not until 1985 that post-punk fully transformed into Goth with the release of *First and Last and Always* by the Sisters of Mercy, who had adopted the Goth style of music and shifted it into a dark and gloomy style of rock. By the late 1980's, members of the subculture were beginning to diversify, the music and fashion styles were evolving, and Goth music was gradually becoming mainstream, causing some upset within this new dark community. By the early 1990's, the first wave of Goths felt that their musical and cultural movement had come to an end, and second wave Goths began coming into the scene as Goth music was becoming more and more popular (Harriman).

The way Gothic subculture has been perceived has evolved along with the subculture itself. *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* notes that even when the Goth subculture was at its 'best,' according to first wave Goths in the mid 1980's, it was still a fairly unknown genre or community in many parts of the world. While it had spread to many countries by that time, those who lived in more rural or suburban areas most likely would not have heard of it until the 1990's or even later, or perhaps not even at all. It was most common in large cities, especially New York City, and most prevalent in London. It wasn't until 1986 that Goth music was beginning to become mainstream, with later aid from MTV, though even then there were still many people mostly unaware of it. In general, Goths were viewed as outcasts by the majority of society, even as the music genre was becoming more popular. One specific instance noted within *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* involved a group of Goths attempting to go to Disneyland, only to have security prevent them from entering, despite having already purchased tickets (Harriman). They were not allowed in due to their extreme clothing and makeup. It took a long time for



people to move past this stigma when thinking of Goths, though some still hold this negative view even today. This is often due to the media's portrayal of the subculture.

After the Columbine shooting in 1999, shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were misidentified as Goths, leading many to incorrectly associate Goths with violence, aggression, and suicidal tendencies. Technical analyst Gabor Por explains in his essay, *Goth vs the Mass Media*, why this connection was made and how it severely damaged public perceptions of members of the Goth subculture. He explains that shortly after the shooting occurred, media outlets began describing shooters as 'Goth' because of some of the music they happened to listen to. Simply listening to the music alone does not make one Goth, but this was unfortunately the 'birth of the stereotype.' Por explains that because news media is always looking for the 'next big thing,' they do not have time to properly research and accurately portray such complicated topics, thus giving very shallow and at times inaccurate comparisons that media consumers eat up without doing their own research. This media failure led to an entire group of people being clumped together as violent, suicidal and dangerous individuals that should be avoided. This stereotype can lead sensitive individuals, such as twelve-year-old Tempest Smith in 2001, to commit suicide to get away from verbal and physical abuse due to their appearance and interests (Por). Even after such tragedies, negative views of the Goth subculture did not subside for many years.

These negative perceptions of Goths were not limited to English speaking countries such as the United States and the UK. They were commonplace wherever Goths happened to be, simply because they were different. Such is the case in Japan, where the Goth subculture has evolved into a new thing altogether: Gothic Lolita. Isaac Gagne of Yale University wrote about

this evolution of the subculture and the Japanese reaction to it. He writes that this form of Goth came about at some point in the latter half of the 1990's and was inspired by the visual aesthetics of Goth as well as the mannerisms and appearances of Victorian women. Some would say members almost look like dolls with their frilly dresses, bonnets, and other elaborate accessories. Girls and women who took part in this new subculture were quickly viewed as outcasts by many, both because of their strange appearances and for their behavior. The Gothic Lolita subculture makes use of a different form of the Japanese language compared to the general public, using words and phrases that had long since fallen out of common use, as well as creating their own unique terms such as *kurorori* (Black Lolita), *shirorori* (White Lolita), *amarori* (Sweet Lolita), and *itarori* (Painful Lolita). These terms are unfamiliar to those outside the subculture, or 'counterpublic' as it is referred to in the paper, further setting these girls apart from the rest of society. Unfortunately for many Gothic Lolitas, they find little acceptance outside their own community. Gagne quotes a young Japanese woman's blog; "What are you, an alien?" Having an ignorant mother who doesn't want to acknowledge Lolita and calls it 'cosplay' is really tiring." This is a thought that many outside the subculture have; that Gothic Lolita is just cosplay, or 'costume-play', meaning that these girls are just playing pretend for attention, rather than expressing themselves and showing what they are passionate about. News media, both within and outside of Japan, also often incorrectly group Gothic Lolita with sexual practices such as bondage or *roricon* (Loli-con), which is the sexualization of and attraction to young girls. Needless to say, Gothic Lolitas do not appreciate this grouping. Many of the girls dressed in elaborate Lolita outfits suffer from unwanted photographic attention, often from middle-aged men, and fear where these photos may end up (Gagne). They cannot refuse the pictures short of taking away the camera, so there is not much that they can do to stop this. It is unfair to these

girls and women that they should be treated as sexual objects simply for dressing and acting in a way that is meant to emphasize innocence and purity, with a dark twist.

Tragically, it took until 2007 for prejudice against Goths to be officially recognized as a problem, and only after a horrific assault and murder. Sophie Lancaster and her boyfriend Robert Maltby were both young adult Goths who lived in Lancashire, England. Mark Hodkinson of *The Guardian* reported on the attack, explaining that Sophie and Robert, aged twenty and twenty-one respectively, were assaulted by a gang of teenagers in a local park. Robert was attacked first, and Sophie attempted to aid him, but unfortunately it did not go well. They were kicked and stomped on and left covered in blood before emergency services were called by a fifteen-year-old witness, who told dispatchers, “This mosher’s just been banged because he’s a mosher,” ‘mosher’ being a common term for Goths at the time. The article goes on to state that when the teenagers were being sentenced, the attack was considered a hate crime by judge Anthony Russell during sentencing. This was important, for an attack on a member of a specific subculture had never been officially considered a hate crime before. Hate crimes were always about religion, race, or sexuality up until that sentencing. It was a major step for society to see exactly what was going on. Sophie unfortunately passed away from her injuries, and Robert continues to suffer from depression and a lack of coordination due to brain damage because of the incident. Sophie became a martyr for Goths everywhere, and her MySpace page became a sort of memorial to her, with other Goths offering their condolences and sharing their own experiences with prejudice against them (Hodkinson). It is unfortunate that something so terrible had to happen for perceptions to begin to change.

Even once the public image of Goths began to improve, they still were not fully accepted. Many people still have negative ideas of them, and it takes convincing to change their minds. Marcia Montenegro of the *Christian Research Journal* attempts to educate readers on the Goth subculture and dispel these negative stereotypes. She tries to make it very clear to Christian readers that Goths are not all Satanists and certainly are not violent, which are two strong stereotypes among the majority of Christians, many of whom being unaware that Christian Goths exist as well. Her article emphasizes that Goths are people first and foremost and should be treated as such. She acknowledges that Goths may appear intimidating to Christians with their intense and dark attire, but she urges readers to engage in discussion with Goths and see them for who they are, not what they wear (Montenegro).

Unfortunately for members of the Goth subculture, even when someone may be trying to help them and their public image, they can still be ignorantly promoting harmful stereotypes. Karin Gonzalez does this in her anthropology lesson on Goth culture. The majority of her lesson shows Goths in a positive light despite how the public may ignorantly view them, and she seeks to educate on their origins and lifestyles. However, towards the end of the lesson she explains ‘Characteristics of the Goth Subculture’ where she lists many positive things such as their creativity and individualism. She explains that Goths enjoy diverting from social norms and relish in subjects too taboo for the rest of society. However, she then lists the negative characteristics, explaining that these Goths are ‘troubled and problematic’, and identify with Goth subculture because they feel alone or are deeply depressed. In addition, she says that they could be at risk of self-harm, or suicidal tendencies; or they could be ‘hateful, aggressive, violent, and even homicidal’ (Gonzalez). These last few characteristics are negative stereotypes that have plagued the Goth subculture for many years, and Goths have been trying to prove it

wrong. Even while trying to educate others on the subculture, Gonzalez does not state that these are mere stereotypes, but that they are in fact characteristics of those within the Goth subculture, which simply is not true. She may have meant well with her lesson, but its ending only damages society's impressions of Goths.

There is so much up for interpretation when it comes to subcultures, especially that of Goth. It is hardly a surprise that the definition is nearly impossible to fully flesh out, especially when even parts of its origins are up for debate. There is clearly a lack of agreement on various characteristics of Goth, and much of its characteristics are a matter of opinion. Even Goths within the community do not always agree with one another, especially in more recent years. For the sake of my thesis, I conducted interviews in hopes of getting a wide range of opinions and observations of the subculture from people today, and hopefully educate some and dispel certain negative stereotypes. To start, the origins of the subculture and its roots in music will be explored in depth to get a solid grasp of where this unique subculture began.

## **Chapter 1 – The History of the Music**

While it is debated when the Gothic subculture really began, different sources generally agree on what music started this movement. *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* offers an in-depth history of the music that started and influenced what eventually became known as 'Goth'. As authors Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje explain, the Goth genre of music evolved from post-punk, which evolved from punk, and was heavily influenced by glam rock. Punk music had a focus of "in-your-face aggression and realism" and was a rebellion against rock'n'roll and disco.

The punk movement thrived on the idea of the lower-class anti-hero who had suffered enough suppression from the government and state,” according to the authors. However, as the late 1970’s came along, this aggressive culture began to evolve into a slightly softer version of itself. Its messages were similar, but were presented in a more romantic way with “old elite values: a combination of art and individuality with an air of aristocracy. (Harriman)

The original intensity of punk never left, but post-punk translated its raw power and harsh chords into melodies with refined lyrics. Meanwhile, glam rock, a musical movement that also took place in the 1970’s, utilized keyboards and programming, along with elaborate stage performances. David Bowie was an icon for glam rock, and defined the genre with a focus on “glitter, androgyny, excessiveness, and theatrics.” His image, and that of glam rock in general, became a strong inspiration for the developing Goth movement’s sound and aesthetic (Harriman).

By the late 1970’s, this movement was dubbed “New Romantics”, and it truly began to embody glam by the early 1980’s. New Romantics were post-punks that had a flair for theatrics, dress and makeup. From here they began to establish an intimate club scene that was like nothing anyone had known before. Groups of New Romantics would go out in extravagant outfits, “dressing up to be seen”, and gathering with those of a kind. New York City and London had especially strong club scenes by 1981. “From the gritty realism of punk to the cinematic demeanor of the New Romantics”, these clubs drew crowds that were the exact opposite of those who were listening to pop music at the time. The Batcave in London was a famous example of this, having been one of the most well-known post-punk clubs in the world at that time; it was

here that the term ‘Goth’ began coming into use in 1982, and even today the club is still considered legendary (Harriman).

To help create their iconic sound, post-punk and new-romantic groups began using varying technologies. Synthesizers and samplers were common, even in their early years, and were the source of experimentation for many post-punk musicians, such as the Netherlands’ Clan of Xymox. They utilized computers and early samplers to combine synthesized sounds with natural ones. Their keyboardist, Pieter Nooten, cites this experimentation as a main source of their success, as it helped them stand out from other musical genres at the time. The computer was almost like another musical instrument to them. Other groups, such as Severed Heads, began using this sampling to take samples from movies or recorded sounds of hammers and other industrial tools and splicing them into their songs. Not only did computers and sampling help create a unique sound, but they helped bands that may have lacked certain instruments entirely. Many bands lacked a real drummer, so they made use of drum machines instead. The Roland TR-808 and Alesis HE-16 were the most common and had uniquely massive reverb. This sound helped create numerous iconic songs, namely “A Forest” by The Cure. It also aided in creating an almost spiritual sound and aura, and the experimentation and creativity required in using such technologies allowed outsiders to finally feel they had found a place where they were welcome in expressing themselves (Harriman).

It was not just the sound that welcomed these outsiders, but the lyrics as well. Songs such as “Every Day is Halloween” by Ministry were an example of these lyrics; “Well I live with snakes and lizards, and other things that go bump in the night. ‘Cause to me everyday is Halloween, I have given up hiding and started to fight.” These people would no longer hide who

they were to fit in with the rest of society; rather, they would ‘fight’ against social norms and be themselves, regardless of what others thought. Other songs such as Sexbeat’s “Sexbeat” describe acceptance for those who otherwise would not receive it; “Some wear leather, some wear lace, some wear makeup on their face. Some are young, some are old, some too hot, some too cold. Some are poor, some are rich, some so lonely, and some they bitch. Some are lovers, some friends in bed, some have listened to the things we said” (Harriman). The people within this movement were from all different walks of life. Yet, despite their differences, they were welcomed into this blossoming cultural movement with open arms.

By the mid 1980’s this post-punk, new-romantic movement was truly becoming what is now seen as Goth. The community was playing up its macabre horror style and came to the informal consensus that its fashion included long, dark, spiked hair, all black clothing, and intense makeup, taking elements from glam rock and twisting them into something darker. When The Sisters of Mercy came onto the scene in 1984, they brought with them something more serious and refined - ironically, as punk and post-punk were meant to be a sort of rebellion against rock, The Sisters of Mercy incorporated elements of rock music into their songs, though they still used iconic Goth elements such as drum machines and synthesizers. Their drum machine, Boss DR55, was so successful and popular that it obtained official member status under the title of ‘Doktor Avalanche’. The Sisters of Mercy’s 1985 album *First and Last and Always* is considered one of the most iconic pieces of Goth music (Harriman). If Bauhaus is the father and Siouxsie and the Banshees is the mother of Gothic music, then The Sisters of Mercy is its godparent, as they had a massive impact on its sound.



The success of The Sisters of Mercy was not the only notable thing to happen within the Goth scene in 1985. Around this time, a divide began splitting members of this subculture apart as certain bands began to achieve mainstream success, and different groups were achieving vastly different sounds. Bands like The Sisters of Mercy had more of a rock-like sound, while bands like Clan of Xymox had a more electronic, futuristic sound. Subgenres were formed: futurism, rock, industrial, and electronic body music (EBM). This diversity and experimentation, which once brought strength to the post-punk movement, now divided its members and was seen as a decline by some, but a breakthrough to others that still valued this creative experimentation. Television channels like MTV began broadcasting Goth bands and their music, allowing it to become truly global. By the early 1990's, even more subgenres began to enter the scene, grunge and techno specifically. Clubs that once played post-punk and industrial began to fade, being replaced by those that played dance-focused techno; the underground Goth scene was then considered dead by many of its members. Fan bases divided, creating the second wave of Goths that opposed the first wave. The first believed that the Goth scene was 'tainted' by this mainstream success and essentially killed off by it, while the second embraced the change and evolved along with it (Harriman). However, despite the disagreements between first and second wave Goths, they both agreed that the eventual third wave were distasteful.

Karin Gonzalez also briefly describes the third wave of Goth. It began in the late 1990's with artists like Marilyn Manson, and continues to influence Goths today. While Manson leaned towards heavy metal or death metal, his aesthetic and lyrics were considered Goth by some, helping to influence this third wave. People began to associate this heavier sound with Goth, despite it being incredibly different from what was once post-punk and Goth rock (Gonzalez).

This only further divided the Goth community, aiding in creating subcultures within the subculture, or different types of Goths.

## **Chapter 2 – Subcultures Within the Subculture**

Divides between fans of Goth music in the mid 1980's to late 1990's split them into different waves and groups of Goths. While the music is the foundation of the Gothic subculture, the fashion and particular interests of its members are the branches of it. Their taste in music, fashion, activities and topics influence them one way or another into choosing a specific type of Goth to call their own. To fully understand Goth, and why it is increasingly difficult to define, some of these different subcultures within the subculture will be explained. Something to keep in mind is that many of these different types can be considered stereotypes. Many modern Goths are a mix of more than one of these types, and even then, they do not fall under all of the 'requirements' or traits listed for the different types. This is just meant to be a sort of guide to show how vastly different Goths can be from one another.

The types of Goth previously mentioned by Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje in *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* are typically known as 'old school' Goths, or 'trad' Goths: traditional Goths (Harriman). Though even among these trad Goths, there are subtypes, such as glam Goths. The number of subtypes of Goth can vary depending on who is asked, but for the sake of this thesis, the most common ones will be described. It must first be noted that a Goth does not need to fall perfectly in line with any of these types; in fact, many Goths are a combination of more than one of them. To start, a lengthy blog post titled "Different Types of Goth" from [Gothsociety.xyz](http://Gothsociety.xyz) will be summarized; this post does not include all the known subtypes, but it is a good place to begin. As stated above, 'trad' Goths, or 'old school' Goths, are

generally what was described by Harriman and Bontje in *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace*; they cherish 80's Goth music and combine some punk components with their Goth attire; they often tease their hair and have very stark makeup looks, and accessorize more casual-looking black attire with chains, fishnets, skulls, and bats ("Different").

Another subtype of Goth is the 'Cyber Goth', which can be described as one with an affection for techno or mechanical music with a dismal feel; they enjoy wearing bright neon colors to complement their mostly black attire, and accessorize with gas masks, goggles, neon dreadlocks, and fairly basic cosmetics mostly comprising designs drawn with eyeliner. From personal experience, these are the types that would often be found at raves, and they are very intense people. In contrast, the 'Romantic Goth' generally focuses on lovely and dark imagery such as dead roses and moonlit cemeteries. They are often creative, though most goths are to an extent, and like to dress in combinations of black and red, sticking to more formal attire than chains and leather. Romantic Goths, such as myself, often prefer a 'cat-eye' or Smokey-eye look when it comes to cosmetics, and are not usually the club-going type like cyber-Goths are. When it comes to music, Romantic Goths lean towards traditional music with a sense of drama and with an agonizing or delicate disposition ("Different").

There is then the 'Victorian Goth'. Victorian Goths can be considered similar to Romantic Goths, though they take their aesthetic influences from the Victorian era with their huge outfits, corsets and girdles, elegant hairstyles, and simple, delicate cosmetics. Victorian Goths portray themselves as though they were nobility, emphasizing poise and propriety. As for music, they enjoy dark theater and classical music with a melancholy feel. Similar to this is the 'Medieval Goth'; instead of taking their influence from the Victorian era, they take it from

medieval times. They cherish tales of dungeons, wizards, dragons and magic, and they are able to run free with little inhibition at events like Renaissance Fairs. They enjoy old folk music, as well as combinations of folk, Gregorian chanting, and Celtic metal (“Different”). It is important to note that most Victorian and Medieval Goths do not wear their extreme attire on a daily basis, though there are some that do.

There is also the ‘Vampire Goth,’ though this subtype is different in that it cannot generally stand on its own, and needs to latch onto another subtype, mainly Romantic Goth. They have been described as “Romantic Goths with teeth” by Aurelio Voltaire, modern Gothic cabaret artist. Romantic Goth is not always the one Vampire Goths most identify with, though they do have the most in common. They have similar musical and non-musical interests as Romantics, but with vampires added in. Characters such as Lestat from Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* are idolized by Vampire Goths, who take his agonizing outlook on life to heart. Pale skin, long flowy outfits, silks, cemeteries and red wine are all staples of the Vampire Goth (“Different”). However, a Vampire Goth may choose to identify more with a different subtype instead, adding their own vampiric flair to it.

‘Steampunk Goth’ is almost like a combination of Victorian and Cyber Goth, and is equally intense but for different reasons. Much of their aesthetic is DIY-type accessories that add a sci-fi flare to Victorian attire. Such accessories include pocket watches, cogs and gears, and goggles. Black, brown, copper and bronze are their preferred colors. Like Victorian Goths, they enjoy Victorian styles of writing, but like adding their own sci-fi twists to them. They are not linked to any particular music scene, though certain bands like Rasputina and Abney Park appeal to them, as said bands incorporate Steampunk elements into their performances. ‘Cabaret Goth’

is similar to Steampunk in that it is another subtype that combines modern looks with those of an older style. Cabaret Goth is also known as 'Burlesque Goth', as it takes strong influences from vaudeville performances. Members of this subtype want to be both sexually attractive, but still very tasteful in their appearances. Their attire has a 50's vibe to it, though with darker colors. Fishnet and plumes are a must for the ladies, while suspenders and fedoras are a must for the men ("Different"). Once again, this subtype is not linked with a specific type of music, though one could argue that they may enjoy 1950's styled music.

Moving on to another intense subtype, there is the 'Fetish Goth,' which is often what more conservative people think of when they picture Goth if they are not familiar with it or have a negative attitude towards it. Fetish Goths tend to lean towards BDSM-themed clothing such as collars and leashes, and are not linked to a particular kind of music, though they do enjoy songs that describe unusual or perhaps forbidden sexual acts with their lyrics. Fetish Goths enjoy many PVC garments along with intense accessories that help them to express their sexuality, such as leashes, collars, whips, handcuffs, etc. They enjoy feeling as though they are 'on the edge' at most times. Another intense, yet less outwardly sexual, subtype of Goth is the 'Tribal Goth'. This can also be referred to as 'Goth Belly Dancers,' as it takes significant visual influence from classic belly dancing attire. They use bones and gems to accessorize this attire, adding a dark tribal flare. Egyptian and Arabian themes also play a part in their aesthetic. There is no specific type of music linked with Tribal Goth; in fact, many of them take any type of music they enjoy and can turn it into a dark and hypnotic belly dance ("Different").

Next is the 'Gothabilly,' a Goth twist on the Rockabilly/Psychobilly, mixes of rock and 'hillbilly' music scenes. Goths under the Gothabilly subtype have a fondness for Goth rock

mixed with soul and nation styles. They have a sort of retro feel, taking fashion inspiration from the 1950's, but with a dash of black and spikes. Pencil skirts, 50's hairstyles, fasteners and heels are all staples of their look. Another variation includes the 'Metalhead'; some debate on whether or not they are truly Goth, as they did with the Marilyn Manson controversies. However, Metalheads do have enough similarities with other Goth subtypes to be considered Goth themselves, at least in this thesis. They adore all types of metal music, especially dark metal and symphonic metal, as they generally fit more with Goth interests. Dark leather seems to make up much of their wardrobe, along with other 'spooky' accessories. Metalheads can be compared to 'Deathrockers,' which are Goths who take more from Punk than Goth as far as music goes, but aesthetically fit in more with the Goth subculture. Like Metalheads, Deathrockers are extremely passionate about their music, which contains darker twists of Punk music without the gentle twist on the music itself, which first wave Goths enjoyed. Harder 80's Goth rock as well as more modern Punk rock, Horrorpunk and Psychobilly are favorites of Deathrockers. Aesthetically they make use of torn fishnets, band logos, large 80's styled hair, strong and impactful cosmetics, and anything that could be considered visually 'off'. Bloody, gory movies and the like attract them, as does anything traditionally repulsive or horrible ("Different").

As stated previously in the introduction, Japan has its own variation of Goth culture, which has made its way to the Western world as well. J-Goths, or Japanese-Goths, can often be split into two subtypes of its own: Gothic Lolita and Visual Kei. Gothic Lolita types cherish innocence and the appearance of classic porcelain dolls and attempt to recreate this style on themselves with elegant dresses, lovely hairstyles, and pristine makeup that accentuates and draws attention to large eyes. Gothic Lolita differs from normal Lolita in that they do not wear light and gentle colors, focusing mostly on black, white, gray and red, as well as adding in

‘spooky’ accessories like bats and skulls. Their music tastes vary drastically, though there are some Japanese artists such as Kanon Wakeshima that make use of the Gothic Lolita aesthetic, drawing in others of the same ilk. Meanwhile, Visual Kei is much more aggressive and in-your-face than Gothic Lolita, taking inspiration from Western Punk styles. They take a mix of Goth, Punk, and other musical elements to create their style; said style is most often worn on members of Visual Kei bands in Japan, which their fans try to emulate (“Different”).

As stated previously, the “Different Types of Goth” blog post does not describe all the types, as there is still debate on exactly how many types in total there are. To go into further detail, artist Megan Balanck’s pieces shall be examined. Each of her works describes a different subtype of the Goth subculture, and will help fill in blanks left by the previous source.

Mentioned early on in this section was ‘Glam Goth’, which has a proper description thanks to Balanck. They take elements from the New Romantics and the Glam Rock scene of the 70’s and 80’s, as well as punk elements such as crosses, leather and studs. Dark clothing, frilly costumes, heavy cosmetics, androgyny and theatrics are essential to the Glam Goth aesthetic, and they are heavily influenced by the late David Bowie. Glam Goths enjoy New Wave and New Romantic music, along with the obvious Glam Rock they take their title from. A similar subtype would be the ‘Haute Goth’, or high-fashion Goth. These are mainly very wealthy individuals that use Goth as inspiration for their high-fashion and luxury brands. This is something mainly seen on the catwalk, and while many true Goths take offense to seeing their style worn by non-Goths purely for attention, it does lead to the creation of cheap Gothic-styled clothing and accessories being readily available for purchase once copies are made of the runway attire (Balanck).

Then there are 'Pastel Goths'. Pastel Goth is strikingly different from other forms of Goth in that their favorite color isn't black, but rather bright and light colors like pastel pinks and purples. They take elements from metal and death rock scenes such as pentagrams, inverted crosses, skulls and spikes, but then combine them with flowers and bright colors. They have been described as 'sickeningly sweet' or 'creepy-cute'. They have an appreciation for retro and 80's Goth music, along with more modern bands that have mixed cuteness in with their creepiness. While they are certainly unique, they are not the only type of Goth that foregoes black for another main color, as there is also the 'White Goth'. White Goths, as the name implies, wear almost all white, giving them an ethereal and ghostly appearance. White Goths are often a subversion of a pre-existing subtype of Goth, simply taking their attire and making it all white. It is especially common among Romantics, Vampire Goths, and Cyber Goths (Balanck).

Lastly, there is the 'Casual Goth'. They are less flashy and showy with their attire, and many Goths revert to this type when staying home or simply are not up to spending over an hour on their appearance before going out. Despite the fact that they are dressing down, they still stick to mostly dark colors, and other aspects of their appearance can still help identify them as Goth: dyed and/or teased hair, piercings and tattoos are some such aspects. They may also wear Goth band t-shirts and may include accessories from their more eccentric outfits (Balanck). A Casual Goth appearance is very convenient for running errands or going to school or work, in order to save time in the morning and not be a distraction to your classmates or coworkers.

Because there are so many different types of Goths, it is easy to see why defining the Goth subculture is quite difficult. People may have only been exposed to one or two types and judge the subculture as a whole based on what they have seen with those few types. Perceptions



are easily influenced initially and later much more difficult to change, as those within the Goth subculture know all too well.

### **Chapter 3 – Impressions of Goth Throughout the Years**

Since its origin in the later 1970's, Goths have been considered outsiders. This has slowly begun to change over the years, as have general perceptions of the subculture. It is important to see how Goths have been viewed and treated, and how this treatment has changed over the last few decades. There are still several common misconceptions that must be addressed, and negative perceptions explained. Various events from years past will be detailed in chronological order to aid in this explanation. Some were already mentioned in the introduction but will now be explained in more detail.

When the Goth subculture was first forming in the 70's to the 90's, those within it were already considered outsiders by the rest of society. They were drawn to the post-punk and eventual Goth movements to gain the acceptance they had not been able to find anywhere else. As described in *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace*, Goths are much more open with their sexuality and interests, however dark, leading those outside the subculture to look down on them or completely ostracize them. Their extreme dress, makeup and hair made them stand out wherever they went, which was the point for many of them, though it caused problems for some. *Some Wear Leather, Some Wear Lace* mentions an incident in the 1980's in which a group of Goths were barred entrance from Disneyland. Valerie Vaughan, a contributor of photos and personal stories for the compendium, recalls being specifically invited by Disney, only to be denied entry at the door. She and a group of her friends who worked at Poseur, an alternative clothing store in Los Angeles, received a letter inviting them to attend as a group, so they

purchased tickets by mail and headed to the park on a Saturday morning. When they arrived, they were stopped by three security guards at the gate who stated that they could not enter the park “looking like [they] did” (Harriman). The guards could not give a legal reason for keeping them out other than that they simply did not like how the Goths looked. This was an act of discrimination, plain and simple. The group of Goths did not fit what the guards deemed ‘socially acceptable’ or within appropriate ‘norms’ for the park, despite not wearing anything inappropriate. Their clothing did not have foul language, nor was it inappropriately revealing. They were just too ‘scary’ for Disney.

Unfortunately, over the years there have been several events that affected the public’s view on Goths beyond just their appearance, as in the Disneyland incident. One such event was the Lillelid Murders; the brutal slaying of the Lillelid family in Greeneville, Tennessee, 1997. An episode of the TV series *Deadly Women* covered the case, focusing mainly on seventeen-year-old Natasha Cornett, one of the young people involved in the killings. Natasha Cornett had a large group of other teenaged Goths that all went on a road trip in the hopes of having a nationwide killing spree. During this trip, they stopped in a public park and were approached by the Lillelid family, who were Jehovah’s Witnesses, hoping to spread the word of God. The group of teens then carjacked the family, taking them hostage. They were driven to the end of a dead-end road in the woods before being shot through the eye, one by one, before being run over by their own car that had been stolen by the teens. The only survivor of this atrocity was two-year-old Peter Lillelid, who was severely disabled from his injuries. Due to their carelessness, the teens were arrested within days, and received life sentences for their crimes. Natasha was a Goth, and the show blamed this lone fact about her for her homicidal desires. Even just in the first minute of the episode, the narrator states that Natasha “doesn’t have much of a chance in life” due to her

being a Goth, as well as her suffering from severe bipolar disorder. This is something far too common in media coverage of Goths; media demonizes Goths for their appearance, interests and possible mental disorders. Natasha's murderous actions were not caused by her being a Goth; Goth culture was an unconnected interest. And yet the show claims that she only found comfort in this subculture due to her 'disturbed mind.' (Mavety).

Those who watched the show back when this episode first aired in 2012 may not have known much about the Goth subculture and allowed their ideas of it to be influenced by this episode. Candace DeLong, the show's host, even states that Goth is 'just a phase,' the infamous phrase that makes many genuine Goths twitch. What these young people did is appalling, and they are where they belong: in prison. However, they are not there because they are Goths. Their story could have been told in a much different way that did not demonize the subculture. Unfortunately, though, they chose to blame these acts on the subculture, leading many who watched this episode to have their view of Goths further tainted.

Not only do television shows demonize Goths, but news and mainstream media do as well, especially in the 1990's. They have even misidentified delinquents and murderers as Goth solely for how they dressed, further harming the public's view on the subculture. One such example of this was the Columbine Shooting in 1999. A research paper written by Gabor Por, a technical analyst with a BA in religious studies, sociology, and economics, details the bias showed by media outlets when covering this tragic event and how they demonized the Goth subculture. Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were both troubled teens who enjoyed the darker music of their time. They were loners, dressed in all black, and even wore trench coats, a popular Goth fashion trend at the time. Because of these factors, they were labeled as Goths, and this

label was heavily emphasized in several news stories covering the incident. This led to the widespread dissemination of the negative stereotype that Goths were violent and dangerous. In reality, one cannot judge someone's character by these interests. All Goths are individuals, and so such broad generalizations are obviously inaccurate. This did not stop media outlets at the time from spreading this negative stereotype, however. And while many people, including students from the victimized school, tried to debunk the claims that the shooters were motivated by Goth subculture, they were widely ignored. The media was able to make much more money off spreading fear rather than accurate facts; they spread panic about Goths and made them out to be a dangerous enemy, in order to make their news story more interesting (Por). These stories thrust Goth subculture into a spotlight tainted with bias, heavily influencing many people's perceptions on any who identified themselves as Goth.

Negative views and stereotypes of Goths led to the harassment and bullying of many people within its diverse subculture. And sadly, this had tragic consequences. Many people, young and old, Goth and not, take their own lives due to various factors. And while people cannot save them all, society can at least stop pushing them further with unnecessary harassment. If the world were less cruel and judgmental, people like twelve-year-old Tempest Smith might still be alive. Gabor Por's research paper lists Tempest Smith's suicide as a reaction to the media's negative portrayal of Goths at the time. In 2001, two years after the tragedy at Columbine, negative stereotypes regarding Goths were still rampant in mainstream media. Tempest Smith was only in the second grade, but the young age of her and her peers did not stop them from endlessly ridiculing and harassing her for her appearance and interests. She did not 'fit in' with 'normal' children, and she was made an outcast. Then on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001, she

hung herself in her room – a tragic end to such a young life, purely because she was different (Por).

Negative perceptions of Goths cause everyday discrimination alongside the more devastating events such as suicide. *Becoming a Goth* details a 2003 social experiment conducted by Maria Adelman, along with friends Carrie and Amanda, in which they attended their local mall dressed as Goths in order to see how they were treated when they appeared this way in comparison to how they were treated when dressed ‘normally.’ Immediately upon entering the mall they so often visited, they were met with curious glances before rude pointing and laughter followed. They were not surprised by this, though they were taken aback by some of the other rude reactions they received as their trip went on. One mother steered her child away from the group as they walked by, looking completely disgusted. The girls were whistled at and called ‘hoes’ by a group of young men, as they believed the girls’ Gothic attire made them less respectable. Employees in various stores they entered were visibly disgusted with their attire and refused to serve them. In a bookstore, when asking an employee where poetry could be found, the employee rudely responded that it was in a back corner, but when going to said corner, no poetry could be found; the employee simply wanted to get the girls out of sight. Later returning to the same mall, on the same day, in their ‘normal’ attire, the three girls received complete opposite reactions. Upon re-entering the mall, no one gave them a second glance, as they completely blended in. One woman approached them to ask for directions, which was something that never would have happened in their Goth attire, as they were deemed unapproachable or not respectable. The bookstore employee that was once so rude to them kindly showed them to the mystery section as they asked, rather than misdirecting them to the back corner of the store

(Adelmaan). The girls were simple ‘nobodies’ again, blending in with the crowd, not worthy of a second glance or reactionary comment.

Adelmaan and her friends received some rude reactions when dressed as Goths but thankfully were not physically harmed in any way. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for all Goths who face discrimination for their appearance and interests. The infamous murder of Sophie Lancaster demonstrates this all too well. An article from *The Guardian*, written by Mark Hodgkinson, details the gruesome event. The attack took place on August 11, 2007, when twenty-year-old Sophie Lancaster and twenty-one-year-old Robert Maltby were brutally attacked by a group of five teenagers in a public park in Lancashire, England. They were beaten so badly that they were left unconscious, covered in their own blood. A fifteen-year-old witness later found them and called emergency services. Poor Sophie died in hospital due to her injuries, while her boyfriend Robert survived, though he has never fully recovered from the incident. During the assailants’ sentencing, judge Anthony Russell stated that this attack was a hate crime, as the victims were attacked purely because they were Goths, thus marking the first time where an attack on a specific subculture was publicly recognized as a hate crime. After her death, Sophie Lancaster’s name spread worldwide. Her MySpace page was made into a memorial for her, flooded with posts from others recounting their own stories of being discriminated against for their looks or interests. Sophie’s mother, Sylvia, set up the S.O.P.H.I.E campaign; Stamp Out Prejudice, Hatred and Intolerance Everywhere. Various S.O.P.H.I.E products were sold to spread awareness of the campaign, including wristbands, CDs, and T-shirts. Sylvia knew that Goths were often subject to prejudice, but she never thought it would reach the point where someone died because of it. Sophie was a bright young woman who planned on studying English in college as she was an incredibly talented writer. She lived with her boyfriend Robert and the two

were some of the kindest people you could have met; very open-minded and accepting, talented, and ready to make a proper future for themselves (Hodkinson). Unfortunately, their future together was cut short by five young men who could not stand the sight of someone different.

It was mentioned that Sophie Lancaster's death marked the first incident where an attack on someone of a specific subculture was viewed as a hate crime. This specification marked an important moment in time for not only Goths, but all subcultures. An article from the BBC explains that the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) Department is the first in the UK to treat attacks like this as hate crimes, and they have continued working with the S.O.P.H.I.E foundation since its conception. Both the GMP and the S.O.P.H.I.E foundation have been able to make those in alternative circles feel safer as they educate others and make it clear that any attack on someone due to subculture hate is a hate crime. Unfortunately, without an actual change in legislature, the sentencing for said crimes will not be any worse than a non-hate-motivated crime, and so all the GMP can do is record subculture hate as a factor in a crime. Assistant Chief Constable Garry Shewan believes that changing this legislature would be a 'major breakthrough' in understanding hate crimes and potentially preventing them. However, despite his and the rest of the GMP's beliefs, legislature was not changed ("Hate"). There are attacks motivated by hatred for a group of people due to their subculture, but this hatred is still considered different than that for one's specific skin color or religion. It is still hatred, and perhaps one day legislation will reflect this.

Over the last ten years, perceptions of Goths have gradually improved, in general. However, some people refuse to change their judgmental attitudes and reactions towards the subculture. As recently as 2017, Goths have still been harassed for who they are. Freyja

NicLeòid, or “It’s Black Friday” on social media, is a Goth from New Zealand who has a fairly popular YouTube channel. In a vlog she uploaded in January of 2017, she describes a trip that she and her at-the-time husband Matthias took to Paris, France. On the first day of their trip, they went to visit the Louvre. Despite waiting in the security line and while security checked their bags and found absolutely nothing wrong with them, guards at the door refused to allow them into the museum. They were not allowed in because of how they looked; they both had large, teased hair, various piercings, intense dark makeup, and all-black clothing along with macabre accessories. One of the guards claimed that they looked “too interesting” and would “attract too much attention” and detract from the art within the museum, and that other guests would “cluster around” them and cause a scene. At this denial of entry, Freyja began to cry, and her husband was very upset, but they both obliged and left the museum. As Freyja herself states in her vlog, it is extremely ironic that an art museum that celebrates eccentrics and artistic types would not allow people to enter because they looked too eccentric and artistic. Staff at the Louvre later claimed that Freyja was “too famous” and should have arranged a private visit to avoid causing a scene, but it is clear this was just an attempt at damage control. Her YouTube channel has only slightly more than 500,000 subscribers, which is not much when compared to actually ‘famous’ YouTubers (NicLeòid). Security at the museum clearly did not know who she was and simply turned her away because of how she looked.

The event at the Louvre was unfortunately not the only moment of discrimination Freyja NicLeòid and Matthias suffered during their trip to Paris. On the second day of their trip they decided to visit the Pere Lachaise Cemetery, a gorgeous cemetery with incredibly interesting and unique tombstones. It is also known as the resting place of many famous individuals, some examples being Oscar Wilde and Jim Morrison. Freyja and Matthias took videos and pictures



during their visit, as many tourists do. However, unlike other tourists, this Goth pair was eventually stopped by security. The two security guards spoke only French, immediately causing some communication problems. They insisted on seeing what photos Matthias had been taking before blatantly lying to the couple, stating that they could not take photos in the cemetery. This was completely false, as other visitors had been doing the exact same thing but had not been stopped. There was also a sign at the entrance to the cemetery stating what was not allowed within it, such as bicycles, dogs, alcohol, etc. Cameras were not on the list. The couple was irritated by this incident, but obliged and put their cameras away before continuing their visit. Later in the evening when it was getting close to closing time for the cemetery, security had begun ushering people towards the exit to ensure no one was locked in after closing. On their way out, Freyja and Matthias were stopped by different security guards than the ones seen earlier. Once again, though, none of the guards spoke English. This time, they demanded to see Freyja's phone to see the photos and videos that she had taken. The guards were being loud and aggressive, not caring that the pair clearly did not understand much French. The couple was not allowed to leave with the other visitors and were ordered to follow the guards into a security office. They were then informed by a woman in the office that they needed to wait there for the police to arrive, which was incredibly frightening for Freyja because she still had no idea what they had even done wrong, if anything at all. This woman claimed that the two were being disrespectful within the cemetery due to their appearance; she specifically pointed out Matthias's bone necklace. However, after more prodding by Freyja with the aid of a translator on her phone, she soon realized that these people did not have a proper reason to be angry with them; they just were because they did not like how the pair looked. Freyja was then forced to delete all the photos and videos she had taken of her time within the cemetery and was also forced to show one

of the guards all of the remaining photos on her phone just so he would know that she had deleted everything from within the cemetery; a clear breach of privacy. Freyja did not take this discrimination lying down, however. After it was over and she had returned to her home in Germany, she reached out to journalists to spread the story of what had happened (NicLeòid). Despite general perceptions of Goths seeming to have improved over the last decade, events like this are still not uncommon. All Goths will be able to tell you of at least one moment in time where they were discriminated against for their appearance.

People see someone who is different and immediately judge them; this is not something that just happens to Goths, it happens to everybody. With certain appearances come some automatic judgments due to stereotypes that have been ingrained in us by popular culture, mainstream media, and the people around us. *If they don't grow out of it eventually there must be something wrong with them. It's just supposed to be a phase, right? They must really hate their parents to be acting like that. It just looks like they're wearing a costume. They must all be violent Satanists. They're probably depressed, they must hate themselves. I bet they cut themselves. They're all so antisocial. They're just trying to be edgy. Look at what they're wearing, they must sleep around. They just want attention. They need to grow up.* These are all common thoughts that pop into the mind of people who know little about the Goth subculture.

While all of the previously mentioned judgements are just stereotypes, sadly there is a connection between a Gothic lifestyle and depression. A study was conducted in 2015 by psychologist Lucy Bowes, along with several other doctors, to see if there was a correlation between depression and those who identify as Goth. Of the 5,357 participants that self-identified as Goth, 3,694 of them had some history of depression; this is nearly 69%. In comparison, of the

1841 participants who did not identify as Goth, only 105 of them had any history of depression; this is less than 6%. According to Bowes and colleague Niall Boyce, young people (around the age of 18) who identified as Goth were more likely to be girls, specifically girls with mothers who also had a history of depression as well as other emotional issues. These young Goths, both male and female, often have depression themselves and are frequently victims of bullying.

Bowes and Boyce believe that those that are vulnerable to depression and who are bullied may be drawn towards certain subcultures, specifically Goth. The Goth subculture is known for being very welcoming to outsiders, to outcasts and all marginalized groups, making it seem to be a safe place for those who suffer from bullying and mental health issues. This is where the proposed idea of peer-contagion comes in; Goths make friends with and continue to associate with other Goths who suffer from depression and potentially self-harm or suicidal thoughts. When they are around such negativity so often, it can end up spreading to them as well, as some Goths may view self-harm as a good way to negate any negative emotions and may recommend it to their peers. Bowes also believes that Goth music itself may worsen feelings of depression due to its often dark or upsetting lyrics (Bowes).

Personally, I disagree with the idea of the music worsening depression and am skeptical of the idea of peer-contagion. However, the thought that those with depression already are more likely to be drawn into the subculture seems more accurate. When someone is suffering from a debilitating disease such as depression and find a subculture that is welcoming to all regardless of their personal lives, their struggles, their problems, this subculture seems to be the only place to go. People who are drawn into the subculture at a young age due to depression are the ones that will eventually 'grow out of' Goth. This does not mean that there are not 'true' Goths who suffer from depression. It is just incredibly difficult to actually pinpoint a proper reason for the

correlation between depression and the Goth subculture. Not all Goths are depressed, but unfortunately many are. This leads to the creation of the ‘depressed Goth’ stereotype, which only worsens outside perceptions of the subculture. If those who already look down on ‘alternative’ individuals believe they are already vulnerable to depression, it makes it all the more tempting for them to harass Goths or try to ‘push them over the edge’; these Goths are perceived as easy targets. This is evident by previously explained events, such as the bullying and harassment of Tempest Smith that eventually led to her suicide, as well as the assault and murder of Sophie Lancaster (Por).

To see if these perceptions have worsened or improved, a survey was created in order to discover what people are thinking of the subculture now. The results may be slightly biased due to an unfortunately small sample size, though spreading the survey to a vast number of diverse people was attempted.

#### **Chapter 4 – Survey Results**

The survey was created January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and was shared via Facebook, DeviantArt, and professors at Johnson & Wales University sharing it with their students. Of the 112 respondents, only six of them stated that they viewed Goths in a negative way; this is only 5.4%. 42% of respondents stated that they viewed Goths in a positive way, while the majority, 51.8%, believe they view Goths in a neutral way. One respondent, making up less than one percent, was unsure of how to respond and stated “I don’t know” when they reached this question.

It seems as though most results were more positive than one would expect compared to previous sections of this paper, as the vast majority of survey participants responded either neutrally or positively to the Goth subculture. Of the six respondents that reported they view

Goths negatively, two were male and four were female, four were Christians and two were atheists, four were in the 18-24 age range while the other two were in the 25-34 range, and all but one of them were Caucasian; the last was African American. It is not surprising that most of them are Christians, as many Christians seem to have a strong misunderstanding of what Goth truly is due to generally conservative upbringings. However, because it is such a small number of people, it is not a very significant factor. Of the total respondents, 41 stated that they believed in some variation of Christianity; this is 36.6%. Therefore, less than 10% of the Christians that participated in this survey view Goths in a negative light. Of those that stated they view Goths positively, fifteen of them considered themselves Goth, twenty-four did not, and eight were unsure as to whether or not they considered themselves Goth. Of those that stated they view Goths neutrally, two were Goths themselves, 53 were not Goth, and three were uncertain if they were Goth or not. Of those that stated they view Goths negatively, none of them were Goth. There was only one respondent that stated they did not know how they viewed Goths.

It was nice to see that so many who do not identify as Goth still saw the subculture in a positive light, even if they may not fully understand it. Of the 85 non-Goths that responded, 24 of them view Goths positively, 53 view them neutrally, and only six view them negatively. From the negative responses, it is shown that they have serious misunderstandings of what Goths are like, believing all Goths to be inherently depressed, violent, and antisocial, according to their survey responses. However, those who view Goths neutrally or even positively seem to believe some of those stereotypes as well. When being asked what they believe to apply to Goths in general, 31.5% of respondents chose 'depressed', 36.9% chose 'antisocial', and 6.3% chose 'violent'. Of the more positive responses, 25.2% chose 'happy' when describing Goths, 60.4% chose 'deep-thinking', 36% chose 'romantic', 39.6% chose 'friendly', and 40.5% chose

‘attractive’. While in reality, none of the negative or positive descriptors necessarily describe all Goths, it is nice to see people associating positive traits with them rather than negative. And thankfully, most seem to understand that Goth is not inherently linked to any religion, as 69.6% of participants answered ‘No’ when asked if they thought Goth was linked to religion.

It seems that of these correspondents, there was little link between a person’s demographics and how they viewed the subculture. Perhaps the internet plays a factor in this phenomenon, as people nowadays have exposure to alternative subcultures that they may not have seen much of even just ten years ago. Regardless, it is good to see more positivity, considering how many tragic things have happened when people have misunderstood the subculture. This may be because of how society in general has changed over the years, as many people have become more accepting of those different from them. This is evident in how the treatment of all demographics have changed, specifically those of different races and sexualities. Media is becoming more diverse and society is learning to accept those that are different from them.

## **Conclusion**

The Goth subculture has been around for over forty years and has evolved along with the people within it. As the subculture evolves, so too do public perceptions and misperceptions of it. From being viewed as outcasts to violent freaks to romantic and deep-thinking individuals, the opinions on Goths have a very wide range. The fact that the subculture is so difficult to define does not help this, and many who have strong opinions on Goths have their own personal definition that has been influenced by multiple factors. If more people were educated about the origins of the subculture, its diverse music and the lifestyle that revolves around it, I believe that

many of these negative views could be lessened, if not completely removed. In recent years it seems that many people are more accepting of those that are different from them, though this does not apply to everyone. Many still suffer from discrimination due to their gender, race, religion, or in this case their subculture.

It is hoped that sharing this information on the Goth subculture can help people become more understanding of it and less judgmental. For something that can evoke such strong reactions from people, it is a generally harmless subculture that does not deserve to be viewed so terribly. Thankfully these perceptions have been improving, though there is still much to be done. People are people, regardless of their interests. So long as they are not hurting anyone, they should be treated with the respect that all people deserve.

## **Appendix A**

The following are the results of the survey conducted for this thesis:

1 – What is your gender?

Male – 33.9%

Female – 62.5%

Other – 3.6%

2 – What is your ethnicity?

White/Caucasian – 78.4%

Hispanic/Latino – 8.1%

Black/African American – 2.7%

Native American/American Indian – 0.9%

Asian/Pacific Islander – 7.2%

Mixed – 2.7%

3 – How old are you?

18-24 – 55.4%

25-34 – 33%

35-44 – 6.3%

45-54 – 3.6%

55+ – 1.8%

4 – Which of the following religions applies to you? Check all that apply.

Christian – 37.6%

Wiccan – 3.7%

Pagan – 8.3%

Buddhist – 4.6%

Satanist – 3.7%

Agnostic – 27.5%

Atheist – 27.5%

Other – 5.8%



5 – Which best describes the area you grew up in/lived in for the longest amount of time?

Urban – 25.9%

Suburban – 56.3%

Rural – 17.9%

6 – Do you identify as ‘Goth’?

Yes – 14.3%

No – 75.9%

I don’t know – 9.8%

7 – Do you know anyone who does identify as ‘Goth’?

Yes – 73.2%

No – 18.8%

I don’t know – 8%

8 – What is ‘Goth’ to you? Check all that apply.

A subculture – 71.4%

A way of life – 54.5%

A religion – 3.6%

A stereotype – 39.3%

A fashion style – 80.4%

A label – 42%

I don’t know – 0.9%

9 – Have you ever listened to Goth music?

Yes and I enjoy it – 60.4%

Yes but I didn’t enjoy it – 10.8%

No – 14.4%

I don’t know – 14.4%

10 – Would you say you view Goths in a positive way, or a negative way?

Positive – 42.3%

Negative – 5.7%

Neutral – 52%

11 – Check all that you believe applies to Goths in general.

- Depressed – 31.5%
- Antisocial – 36.9%
- Violent – 6.3%
- Happy – 25.2%
- Deep-thinking – 60.4%
- Romantic – 36%
- Old-fashioned – 26.1%
- Friendly – 39.6%
- Misunderstood – 83.8%
- Morbid – 31.5%
- Attractive – 40.5%
- Unattractive – 8.1%
- Religious – 4.5%

12 – Do you believe that Goth is linked to any form of religion?

- Yes – 7.1%
- No – 69.6%
- I don't know – 23.2%

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