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How to Redefine the Goth

"Changing a Subculture from Outside and Within: How popular culture and mass media
shape the Goth Scene"

UW20 - 15

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On April 20, 1999, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris gunned down classmates and teachers at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The response by the television media and the press was, at best, playing on the fears of Americans instead of simply reporting information. Television and newspaper press blamed multiple aspects of Eric and Dylan's lives for the assault on their school. They dressed in trench coats and army clothing, and were said to have spoken German to each other (Donaldson 1). Music, video games, Hitler, and the internet were all blamed for their behavior, but their alleged ties with a sub-culture known as "the goths" really struck fear into Americans' hearts. Just eight days after the shootings 20/20 did a special on goths, whereby they were blamed for the most violent and antisocial behavior in our society. Sam Donaldson gave his audience warning signs to look for to ascertain whether their children were part of "the goths", while Diane Sawyer listed a haphazardly assembled group of bands and artists that were supposedly goth (Donaldson 3).

1999 was my freshman year in high school, and as it were, I wore a black trench coat, and when too warm for that, a German army jacket. I listened to metal bands, played violent video games, and surfed the internet. So far, that description of me fits every bit the description of Eric and Dylan as reported by the media. However, appearances aside, I was actually quite different than them. When my English class discussed the shootings the day after, every head in the class turned to me when a girl said, "Well, they listened to Marilyn Manson. People who like his music are typically scary people. I wouldn't put it past them to shoot up our school." I was shocked that they thought I listened to Marilyn Manson. Aside from being astounded at this accusation, I could do little more than shrug and tell the class quite bluntly that I did not listen to Marilyn Manson. My teacher *encouraged* me to share

my feelings about the incident with the class. This of course was a trap for any student who had actually sympathized with Eric and Dylan in their assault on those who picked on them. But as it was, I found the shooting to be just as loathsome as any other person at my school. What I was soon to find out was that I and others at my school would be targeted by faculty and students alike for the rest of the year due to our non-mainstream image. In a single day, everyone began to fear us, avoid us, and several times make attempts at an intervention to mend our unorthodox ways.

Several weeks before the Columbine incident, I went with a friend and my church youth organization to help build homes in a maquiladora town near Tijuana. A particular girl who disliked me and my friend happened to remember a conversation I had with him, in which we were quoting *The Simpsons*. Because she remembered our conversation included a joke about killing someone, she discussed this with the church's youth councilor. A connection was drawn between Eric and Dylan, and me and my friend. The church councilor was required by law to report this to the police and our school, and our school was required to report this to the police. The girl had even gone out of her way to warn my school about my friend and me incase our church councilor did not follow through. This multiplicity of warnings and allegations that stemmed from a single report caused an onslaught of letters from the church, the school, the police department, and the district attorney's office. My father viewed this as an attack not just on me but on him for being a bad parent. Luckily, complaint letters written by my father, my clean record, and good grades saved me from a police search and other reactionary measures.

The ironic part to mention here is that I was not a goth. I knew goths, and they were the nicest people I knew at my school. Yet I was classified as a goth, and somehow an

incorrectly informed mass of people looked at me, goths, Marilyn Manson, trench coats, and obsessions with Hitler as all part of the same thing, some sort of unknown monolithic dark society characterized by one feeling, fear. The most notable part of this whole experience followed. Soon I found myself taking part in a dialog with goths at my school. I came closer to their group and began to adopt aspects of their dress and music, but I still retained my clothing style and my music tastes. I began to hang out with them, and I maintained all the while that I was not a goth. My new friends certainly did not see me as a goth and neither did I, however, the majority of people surrounding us, largely informed by the mass media, did.

"[T]he media, since their inception, have turned criminals into folk heroes. They just created two new ones when they plastered those dip-shits Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris' pictures on the front of every newspaper. [...] These two idiots weren't wearing makeup, and they weren't dressed like me or like goths. Since Middle America has not heard of the music they did listen to (KMFDM and Rammstein, among others), the media picked something they thought was similar."

--Marilyn Manson, "Columbine: Whose Fault is it?"

What is it about the media that shaped this tragic event? Marilyn Manson made the connection and so has Michael Moore, director of *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). In this controversial documentary about gun culture in America, Moore links a paranoid and fearful American state of mind to American demand for protection, namely the demand for guns. This fear is propped up by American television media and press, who tend to report gun crime and violence as opposed to other news-worthy events (Moore "Bowling for Columbine"). The media frenzy to cover violent gun related news showed itself most bluntly during and after the tragedy at Columbine. The television programming after Columbine did the most damage, because the onslaught of child psychologists, interest groups, and specialists who were interviewed had a narrow understanding of the situation

among teenagers across America (Katz 2). Their ill advice translated into a hysteria, driving Americans to *whitewash* their communities of goths. However, the ramifications of the media's false assessment would lead, firstly, not only to a characterization of goths as the enemy, but secondly, to cause a transformation within goth subculture. Loosely associated people like myself began to integrate into the goth scene, bringing our different styles and tastes in dress and music with us.

The first ramification leads one to question why goths were turned into the enemy. Indeed, for goth subculture to be viewed as formidable, the media had to have made some terrible miscalculations. Harris and Klebold simply were not characteristic of goths. We run on an assumption that the media was naive in its task to find the root of the problem of teenage shootings in America. But if television crews, reporters, and journalists had wanted to, they could have researched the goth scene in depth. This could have allayed all suspicions of goths as being school-shooting risks. That this did not happen, and that the media conveniently switched coverage from the war in Kosovo and impeachment hearings to Columbine and the school shootings raises doubt that the media had been so innocent and careless in its decisions. Perhaps a new threat was required to refocus the attention Americans were placing on the presidency. In order to examine the second ramification, if and how the goth scene has changed as a result of limelight and false media reports, one must understand the nature of the goth scene, its beginnings, its peripheries, and the nature of the scene as subculture.

Although the term subculture is perhaps outdated in its application to the goth scene, even newer terms like "neo-tribe" fail to capture the precise essence of the phenomenon in a single term. But the definition of subculture depends greatly on which

school of thought uses it. Paul Hodkinson, author of *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture* makes a detailed notation of the varied conceptions of subculture and devised his own interpretation which does fit the goth scene. He asserts that "even the most substantive of subcultures will retain elements of diversity, that some individuals will adopt elements of their values without any particular commitment, and that even the most committed participants are not somehow isolated from other interests or priorities" (Hodkinson 33). This deviates from an image of subculture characteristic of, for example, the Amish. A traditional definition of subculture is a deviant group whose members come together and establish their own common values, separate from the norm (Hodkinson 9).

Hodkinson identifies the beginnings of what became known as the goth scene in the band Bauhaus with their 1979 release, 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. Bauhaus put forth the first motifs for goth dress, such as black, death-mourning-oriented clothing. Their music is a somber, low-toned set, which contributes only one single style to today's broad range of goth music (Hodkinson 36). What may be surprising to most is that the other two significant bands found at the roots of the goth scene are Siouxsie and the Banshees and The Cure. The former, Hodkinson suggests, took punk music down a darker path, as the lead singer began dressing in black fishnet stockings, applying dark makeup, and wearing her hair dyed black (Hodkinson 36). The latter dressed in dark tones, typically a black blazer and a white dress shirt. These styles are still imitated today in the goth scene. What may really have brought the goth scene into its own level of distinctiveness, finally making a break from post-punk, was the band Sisters of Mercy. Formed in 1981, this group provided a more sinister feeling in their music as they incorporated heavy bass, deep

vocals, and a drum machine. They dressed in black jeans and boots, and also has their hair dyed black (Hodkinson 37). Perhaps most quintessential of their style can be found in their indie hit song 'Cry Little Sister', which was used as the theme music for the vampire horror film, *The Lost Boys* (1987).

Film and movies contributed to the goth scene by fusing it with the horror genre, most notably, the vampire. The aforementioned film may not be as well known today, but certainly *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) are.

Despite these movies being in the main stream, The Victorian dress and pale faces of the vampires in these films only strengthened the already existing male goth image (Hodkinson 45). Female dress, that associated with the gothic novel, has a Victorian tone to it as well. Dark bodices, corsets, and velvet clothing bring the scene into an even closer relationship with the vampire image (Hodkinson 46). But just as well, this association with vampires has brought strangers into the scene who do not necessarily fit in with the crowd.

Gothic dress in general is considered rather feminine. Its roots in Siouxsie Sioux's and Bauhaus's style emphasized jewelry (today piercings and collars), makeup, velvet dresses and shirts, and overall tightness of fit (Hodkinson 49). For many males in the scene, having an effeminate trim is looked upon as a positive aspect. This in turn allows many males in the scene to feel safe exhibiting traditionally non-male emotions--or rather, emotions at all. As a result, music emanating from the scene has been imbued with emotional lyrical themes (Hodkinson 54). For females wearing such tight dress combined with ripped fishnet stockings, the goth scene is often the safest place to dress in this style without fear of accidentally making a suggestive sexual connotation (Hodkinson 52). Case in point, one evening I accompanied two female friends to a Monday night goth club in San

Francisco by the name of "Deathguild". It meets at the "Glas Kat", on any other day, a typical run-of-the-mill hip-hop club. I had to convince my friend's father that neither I nor his daughter were part of some cult group hinged on drugs and sexual experimentation, and that she would be perfectly safe. The other friend correctly remarked, "If she went to the same club location on any other day of the week, she would most certainly face aggressive sexual males rubbing their genitalia against her while dancing, then attempt to drug her drink and take her somewhere to rape her." Although this statement may be somewhat exaggerated, partly for comical effect, and may not reflect what always occurs at the "Glas Kat", it certainly exhibits popular female fears and anxieties about frequenting such dance clubs.

Though it is important to realize that there is a general sense of accepted clothing in the goth scene, different locations yield different styles, but the general rule is - anything dark, goes. Another type of dress that has fused with the goth scene today is the style associated with metal bands, the t-shirt, but it must be noted that these t-shirts display goth/industrial bands and not metal bands (Hodkinson 57). Also ever more popular is the dance club/raver style clothing termed cyber-goth. It consists of reflective, ultraviolet, and fluorescent colored clothing (Hodkinson 58). Industrial music has made large contributions in this respect to both the metal t-shirt and cyber-goth dress, as industrial music is personified as a mix of metal and noisy electronic music.

Goth attitudes are perhaps a more difficult area to define, mostly because it is difficult to assess the motives that every goth has for being a part of the scene. In Hodkinson's survey of goths at the Whitby Festival in England, he found that a significant portion of goths "perceive that their subculture encapsulated diversity, creativity and

individuality" (Hodkinson 77). One of his survey respondents claimed that "I've never met a goth that's been sexist or homophobic or anything. [...] every goth is very open-minded because they've been taken the piss out of and they know what it feels like" (Hodkinson 77). An interview with Philip Shade, a DJ at Thursday night "Alchemy" at The Nation in Washington, DC, reveals attitudes of the older goths in the American scene: "Then there's your old guard who want to do nothing but hear Skinny Puppy and the Banshees all night. They like to sit around talking smack about how other people don't belong in the scene" (Shade 3). True, the older goths are less accepting as the newer ones, but it is the older goths who keep the scene tied to its history.

With that overview, one should take note of what a goth is not, and why similar subcultures are commonly stereotyped as the same thing. In particular, the death metal scene has had a few crossovers with the goth scene. As mentioned before, the goth scene adopted the black shaded band t-shirt. In a reversal, death metal scene females appear to dress in dark clothes characteristic of the goth scene (Purcell 29). Aside from this, death metal also shares a connection with the horror film genre, yet there is a notable contrast between the types of film within the genre that are viewed by each respective group. The death metal scene associates with films such as *Halloween (1978)*, films that are, "presented as perverted, monstrous, and excessive. ... Sexuality is totally perverted from its functions, into sadism, violence, cannibalism (Purcell 172)." In contrast, the typified goth horror film is less gruesome and more fantasy filled, which in its own way has also led to groups of fantasy role-players (players of *Vampire: the Masquerade™*) to mistakenly show up at goth clubs believing it to be a meeting place for a plethora of dark role-players (Hodkinson 46).

Attitudes in the death metal community differ quite drastically from those in the goth community. In Natalie Purcell's book, *Death Metal Music*, attitude seems to play a relatively minor role in reasons for being part of the scene. The metal scene is truly about the music and ability to develop musical talent--not to be born with some innate gift. It embodies a spirit of success and achievement through hard work, exertion, and training (Purcell 115). This relates in no way to the goth scene: an umbrella of music types, similarity of dress and media, and attitudes of independent thought.

Why then, are goths mislabeled? We can look at several ways to examine this: a) the mainstreaming of goth culture and subsequent entry of new goths only familiar with the commercial culture, b) the inherent nature of the goth scene, allowing crossovers and even internalization of different subcultures similar to goth, and c) the effects of mass media on the general public's concept of the goth.

An already much researched part of goth subculture is its gradual mainstreaming which is perceived to be destroying the scene in terms of its existence as subculture (Hodkinson 32). The use of pop culture to mainstream something similar to the goth scene has created an audience that thinks of themselves as goth but really embody something completely different. For all intents and purposes, if being goth requires a sort of independence, then anything mainstreamed or commercialized is not reflective of the goth scene, for example, Marilyn Manson. One of Hodkinson's interviewees attested that "there's all these fifteen-year-olds jumping about with their Marilyn Manson T-shirts" (Hodkinson 79). Another said, "[t]hey've got short hair, and they've just got a little bit of eye-liner, a little bit of lipstick and they think, 'oh I'm a goth'" (Hodkinson 79). Marilyn Manson himself implies a separation between his music and dress, and that typified by a

goth when he stated, "[Harris and Klebold] weren't dressed like me *or* like goths (Manson 1)." Clearly there has been some miscommunication. Perhaps the chain store, Hot Topic, is in part guilty for this. Its website describes its merchandise as "reflect[ing] a variety of music related lifestyles, which include street wear, retro influenced lounge, punk, club, and gothic (<http://www.hottopic.com/services/Aboutus.asp?LS=0&>)." Whereas local stores have long worked with the goth community to build definitive scenes in major cities, Hot Topic seems to be homogenizing and blending scenes by selling their brand of goth apparel together and alongside other music genres. In Joshua Gunn's article, "Why Marilyn Manson is not a Goth", Gunn asserts that what makes the goth community a subculture is its constant resistance towards mainstreaming (Gunn 3). In addition, he assumes an "assimilation thesis" which holds, once the mainstream adopts the symbols of a subculture, it dies unless it succeeds in adapting new symbols to its culture, thus keeping it apart from the mainstream (Gunn 4). So while pop culture is trying to profit from the goth image, the goth scene has still prevailed in avoiding its assimilation, though sometimes as a consequence has undergone quite a transformation. It is a much different scene than that of the nineteen-eighties. DJ Solaries of Washington, DC's Alchemy best sums up the goth scenes' attitude toward Hot Topic when she says, "I fucking hate Hot Topic. I prefer to go to smaller, locally-owned stores... I choose not to go to Hot Topic, because of the fact that it is too commercialized" (Anderton 3). DJ Phae of Washington, DC's Midnight expresses her annoyance with stores like Hot Topic when she says,

Maybe it's good for some people, but I don't like the stupid new goth kids who think its cool. I just don't like the wannabes who don't understand what going out to a club and being part of the scene is like. They are the ones who give us our bad name. [...] I have seen [Hot Topic] put out some crap that I would hope to the gods that no one in the scene ever tried to wear. Basically, I don't think they have a consultant when it comes to their clothing. They try to sell us what they think we want, when in reality,

more than one style of clothing goes over well with us. (Sutton 2)

No one will deny the recent surge in wannabe goths. DJ Joe Radio of San Francisco's Deathguild notices that "Deathguild is attracting many new people in the 18-21 age group, and many of them look like they got their outfits at Hot Topic" (Radio 2). But this fad may be fading away. DJ Shade of Alchemy believes that "Hot Topic will have less influence as time goes on and trends change" (Shade 4). He has noticed that goth clothing has appeared less and less on hangers as more and more of the new trends begin to take its place (Shade 4). The phenomenon of mainstreaming is not new, and as DJ Shade encouragingly points out, "Goth has survived popularity and it will again" (Shade 4).

If the mainstream is adopting the goth image, then following the assimilation thesis, the scene must adopt new symbols to survive. In fact, Hodkinson names fluidity of identity as the reason that such subcultures or neo-tribes exist. The fact that they are not anchored down by static forms of identity like race, sex, or ethnicity, allows them to change as a group (Hodkinson 20). Goth scenes across the globe today now incorporate music ranging from post-punk to industrial, and from metal to darkwave. Dress is just as varied. When did these other groups become goth? Darkwave, Synthpop, Metal, Industrial, New Wave, Techno, Celtic, Glam Rock, Electronic Body Music (EBM), New Beat, and Punk all contribute their distinct sounds to the goth scene, and all of them entered in at different periods of time. DJ Shade provided me with his chronology of distinct bands, their contribution of style, and the time period around when they began to influence the goth scene. I have combined and compared his list with DJ Joe Radio's:

<u>Year Entered the Scene</u>	<u>Type of Music</u>	<u>Dress Contributed</u>	<u>Example Band</u>
Since Inception	Post Punk	Fishnet, Slashed T's	The Banshees
Since Inception	Punk	*	Sex Pistols
Since Inception	Glam Rock	Glam Makeup	David Bowie

1975	New Wave	*	OMD
1980	Industrial	Spikes, Collars, Army	Einstürzende Neubauten
1982	EBM	*	Front 242
1982	Death Rock	*	Christian Death
1984	Celtic	Kilts, Celtic clothing	Dead Can Dance
1991	Techno	Raver Pants, Neon	LA Style
1992	New Beat	S&M/Fetish clothing	Lords of Acid
1993	Darkwave	*	Lycia
†1997-1999	Metal	T-shirt	Manson, Rammstein
1999	Synthpop	*	Wolfsheim
2000/2002	Electroclash	*	Ladytron

(Shade 2; Radio 1)

Among these, DJ Shade points to Metal and Techno as types of music which really emerged from outside the scene but have had a big influence on goths and others who come to goth clubs. "Manson", he points out, "is probably the most glaring example of someone who crossed into the [goth/industrial] scene. Many people still don't accept him as goth, but irregardless of that, his music is firmly entrenched" (Shade 3). Indeed, Manson and Rammstein appeared on the scene before Columbine occurred, and suddenly, they disappeared after the shootings. DJ Shade believes that if anything this incident caused dissociation between goths and Marilyn Manson (Shade 4). So why the surge of peripheral Manson and Rammstein fans? Perhaps this has more to do with the music genre itself. DJ shade thinks of metal as a vestigial. A lot of people in the late nineties listened to metal and then got into the goth scene, bringing their metal past with them (Shade 1). Another example of such a phenomenon was the techno craze. However, techno entered into the scene in the nineties more or less due to the influence of DJs. It was originally derided by goths nation-wide[‡], but now you see new goths "wearing baggy pants at the club these days where even 6 years ago that would be unthinkable" (Shade 3). Many DJs brought their techno backgrounds with them to the scene. This would be especially prominent from European goth DJs.

It is likely that the goth scene would have stayed its way if it were not for its common clashes with mass media and a confused public. Most quintessential of a stark misunderstanding of gothic culture occurred after the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado. Many news publications made claims that Harris and Klebold were goths, listened to Marilyn Manson, Rammstein, KMFDM, and worshipped Hitler. The media began pointing fingers at video games, to Hitler, and even to German music (Gunn 17). Joshua Gunn's article makes a detailed analysis of the media's reaction to the shootings and allegations. He states that the Knight-Rider/Tribune newspaper syndicate repeatedly alluded to violence in association to goths even before the mass televised Columbine incident. According to Gunn, they reported in Utah of mass panic over the community as a detective began to assert that because goths were associated with vampirism, they were part of the occult, which of course leads directly to Satanism and murder (Gunn 18).

Sadly, even as some media began to realize their error in connecting goths with violence and school shootings, they still had a relatively weak understanding of goth culture, and by writing about it, they often mislabeled things even in their altruistic intentions. George Plasketes, In his article "Things to Do in Littleton When You're Dead", argues that society as a whole is to blame for the shootings and argues that the media only made things worse by televising it as it did. Under the heading "The Unusual Suspects: It Had to Be You...", Plasketes examines how the media became infatuated with Klebold and Harris's obsession with Hitler, violent video games, and the *goth* band KMFDM (Plasketes 15). The problem with this statement is its definition of KMFDM as a goth band. Few among the educated would even recognize this flaw. KMFDM is considered by many to be industrial music, whereas even the band's main collaborator, Sasha Konietzko, considers it

nothing like the industrial music genre at all

(http://www.medienkonverter.de/redirectindex.php4?Interview_Nr=10&ir=). KMFDM is admittedly played at goth clubs, but not because goths listen to it, but because the industrial fans who frequent goth clubs do.

Is the media's sorry state a result of pure naivety, or does there exist factions in the media that wish to crusade America against unorthodox behavior, behavior exemplified in goth and metal subculture? Noam Chomsky provides resounding conspiracy theory and evidence for wartime in his book *Media Control*, describing the public relations industry in its efforts to control thought, and how both the political left and right either promote or turn a blind eye, as they benefit from turning attention away from issues that count (i.e. healthcare and poverty) (Chomsky 42). The bulk of his argument is summed up in the following statement:

In fact [the public relations industry] have a conception of what democracy ought to be. It ought to be a system in which the specialized class is trained to work in the service of the masters, the people who own the society. The rest of the population ought to be deprived of any form of organization, because organization just causes trouble. They ought to be sitting alone in front of the TV and having drilled into their heads the message, which says, the only value in life is to have more commodities or live like that rich middle class family you're watching and to have nice values like harmony and Americanism. [...] you may think in your own head that there's got to be something more in life than this, but since you're watching the tube alone you assume, I must be crazy, because that's all that's going on over there. And since there is no organization permitted..that's absolutely crucial--you never have a way of finding out whether you are crazy, and you just assume it, because it's the natural thing to assume. (Chomsky 27)

Several aspects of Chomsky's book point to parallels between media control for wartime and political purposes, and those seen in the media's overblown show at Columbine.

Among his points, he states that history must be falsified, because in doing so you make the average American feel attacked and threatened, thus putting one on the defensive

(Chomsky 35). As shown in Gunn's article, the media vastly began to change history once Columbine occurred. Case in point, Gunn cites *The Chicago Sun-Times* in using "the Columbine story to explain an attempted stabbing that occurred two years ago: 'Both [high schoolers charged with attempted murder] considered themselves Goths--members of the dark subculture with which last week's Columbine High School killers...are said to be linked'"(Gunn 17).

As part of this succession of points, Chomsky shows that it is common place for the spotlight to shift to a threat that was pre-existing, from which attention had already shifted. He uses the war on terrorism as an example. Although President Bush declared the war on terror in 2001, Reagan had declared the war on terror already in 1985. Bush and the media were able to recall images of American hostages in Iran from 1985 to instill even more fervor in the *new* war (Chomsky 71). Gunn's article shows that the media had for a long time unreasonably associated goths with killings, even before Columbine (Gunn 18). By selecting Columbine as the lead story, they were able to bring back the multiplicity of local stories about the occult, which sparked mass panic to further feed the media frenzy. One might ask, why would the media not have given Columbine so much attention? What choice did they have in selecting the story? It was after all a huge deal, not easily ignored. One can simply point to the fact that gang and school shootings have been going on in Los Angeles schools for quite some time, granted not in the same fashion (i.e. trench-coat mafia), but nevertheless failed to reach the top headlines.

The war on terror is loosely defined, and it has translated itself from hunting down Osama bin Laden to taking out Saddam Hussein. How is this any different than the media's loose and inaccurate representation of goth culture? They wore trench coats, surely they

were goth. They listened to industrial music, now that is goth too, not to mention Marilyn Manson. They were racist and worshipped Hitler, that is all goth! Why combine so many unrelated things together under a negative banner unless the intention was to create some omnipotent representation of evil? Perhaps America needed something to fear in order to shift focus away from the important issues. It is no secret that Marilyn Manson's music is found to be offensive by many American audiences, political audiences among them. Is it then surprising that music was targeted as the reason for violence in America's youth? In Purcell's book, *Death Metal Music*, she states that "due to the apparent surge of dramatic murders in American schools, the topic of violence in the media has exploded on the Senate floor. [...] Music has been targeted as a cause for crime and social demoralization" (Purcell 80). Furthermore, the executive and legislative branches both held strong interests in censorship of music:

Former Vice-President Al Gore and Senator Joseph Lieberman went so far as to threaten the entertainment industry (as of October 2000) that it would face legislation should the Democrats win the White House. [...] Al Gore is following in the footsteps of his wife who, as the founder of the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC), advocated limiting access to music with violent lyrical content. The PMRC is the source of the parental advisory stickers that currently adorn so many rock and rap CDs (though rarely country or pop music CDs with similar themes). (Purcell 80)

Clearly, this could all be coincidence, but if Chomsky is right, something is awry.

But if this was not part of a plan to eliminate goth music and drag attention to the issue of censorship and violence, perhaps negative feelings about the president could account for the hype. Chomsky shows that both the political left and right tend to support the efforts of media to distract or guide public thought, because they have no intention of doing anything about the real issues at hand (Chomsky 42). As a matter of fact, this may just have been the case with Columbine. Plasketes makes mention of the fact that

Columbine replaced the bombing of Kosovo and the reminiscence of the impeachment hearings in the news hierarchy (Plasketes 3). Although we should not confuse Plasketes argument. He means to say that the American public craved something dirtier, and the press was obliged to give it to them. I, on the other hand, assert that perhaps this was a move to change the topic of discussion from domestic and international politics to that of national mourning and tragedy, thus lifting the barrage of criticism off the president's back.

Chomsky talks about using simplistic and meaningless questions that nobody can say no to, like "do you support our troops?" Unless you are an anarchist, you would have to answer yes to that question, but in doing so, you give support to a pro-war movement even if you are vehemently opposed to sending American men and women to some foreign land to fight a battle you do not believe is worth dieing for (Chomsky 26). After the Columbine incident, students were asked to talk about their feelings regarding the shootings, later to find students expelled or put under investigation if they expressed sympathy with Harris for having been bullied. In an article title "Report from Hell High", a high school girl recalls being asked to turn in any friends "who were moody, emotional, [or] angry at the way they were treated in school. [she notes,] that's everybody I know!" (Katz 2). Such meaningless questions only give power to those who use them, and nobody can say no, because they are not designed that way.

Luckily Chomsky notes the increase in dissident culture to counter these obstructions of society. They are embodied by interaction among people, creating groups, forming democracy. On a sarcastic note, Chomsky states, "That's the danger of democracy: If organizations can develop, if people are no longer just glued to the tube, you may have all these funny thoughts arising in their heads, like sickly inhibitions against the use of

military force" (Chomsky 41). How ironic that such a striking parallel can be found in the Columbine tragedy. In Jon Katz's article "Report from Hell High", he shows how internet forums like the one on Slashdot, an open-source news website for geeks and nerds, turned into a focal point for communicating the flagrant violations of rights going on in high schools across America. The techno-savvy crowd of high school kids were able to counter the massive accumulation of garbage being spewed forth from "journalists, educators, and therapists telling the world about the state of American kids" (Katz 2). Now they were having their say, and they were heard. National Public Radio, university lectures, Congressional Committees, as well as numerous magazines, newspapers, and periodicals quoted the high school students' posts on Slashdot message boards (Katz 2). Adolescents typically have the least say when it comes to matters like this. The professionals monopolize the information handed out to American families, because they are the ones interviewed in the media, however, with the injection of comments from students themselves, many of which were becoming victims of false treatment as a result of the shootings, the picture began to balance, and the media menace disintegrated over the matter. That is not to say that the damage had not already been done. The debacle of mass media hype and American paranoia left many students scarred as a result, and the goth community will remain forever changed because of it.

It is quite unfair that a fun loving group of dance club goers get hit with the burden of being the biggest threat to America. Yet through all this goths have remained strong and resistant to outside pressures. Even though commercialization and media stunts like Columbine have caused a surge in wannabe goths, it has left little impact on the original goth scene. Metal styles have joined in, but amid the multiplicity of musical and dress

genres, one more barely gets noticed, and soon, as with its pop culture counterpart, fades out completely. This is what makes the goth subculture so resilient; it stands up to tough tests from the misinformed media and public, but it retains original aspects of its identity and continues on. Even commercialization of the goth image will have to give in, as pop culture moves on to other fad like fringe fashion styles. Goth culture was probably the easiest target for Columbine, but at the same time, it proved the most difficult to change. Its ability to adapt led many to briefly dissociate themselves from their commonalities with Harris and Klebold. Interest groups would still like to ban this music, but at the moment (2004), it is not at the forefront of controversial issues. We have moved on to war and reelection, everything else fades into the background, until something else arises. But I take comfort knowing that the goth scene holds its own. I think, that, if any, is what makes it formidable to those who attempt to take it on. Whether in the limelight or marketed to teenyboppers,

"Goth has survived popularity before and it will again."

- DJ Shade

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