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*‘’The Commodification of The Goth and Gyaru Subcultures On Online Social Media Platforms”*

This final year project written thesis essay will be discussing two specific subcultures from opposite sides of the world, what the subculture is about, what their online community spaces are like via Tiktok and how these subcultures have joined the constantly growing line of trends that get a sudden spike of popularity on social media and after a short period of time get thrown away and disregarded by those who had hopped on the trend as being lame, ugly and cringe-worthy. In the brief period of time that these subcultures become trendy and popular to the mainstream, we will look at how many fast fashion brands jump on to the trend and how in the online spaces for these subcultures the new trend shopping participants attempt to police the communities on how to express themselves within the style ranges of the subculture.

For this thesis essay on subcultures and internet commodification, it is important to understand what subcultures are and why they exist. The concept of subcultures was first a theory developed by sociology scholars at the Chicago School in the 1920’s. They were exploring deviant behaviour and its existence and discussed deviance as a product of the societal problems within society. Later the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham added to subcultural theory by investigating the ways in which individuals joined groups that were actively participating in collective forms of deviance, referring to these acts as subculture. Though for the contemporary theorist, the concept has become controversial as some align it with a “post subculture” perspective that are suggesting that subculture no longer describes the collective activities. Many sociologists are continuing to study subcultures in an effort to understand why subcultures form, why those in subcultures participate in deviant group behavior and what subcultural activities can tell us about current society as a whole.

The Chicago School used the term subcultures to discuss and learn more about why certain groups of Chicago youth were more likely to engage in crime or any deviant behaviour. But it was the Birmingham School’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies[[1]](#footnote-0) (CCCS) that in the mid 60’s emerged with the goal of getting an explanation for the emergence of various youth subcultures like the ‘Teddy Boys’, ‘Mods’, ‘Skinheads' and the ‘Rockers’ from the post second world war Britain. It was Richard Hoggart that was leading the research group of sociologists for achieving this goal, they set out on researching the various aspects of Birmingham’s working class subcultural youth. The results from this research led the CCCS to report that subcultures were undeniably class based as majority of the subculturist in their research were young, white, lower-middle class men. Alongside this new found information, the researchers suggested that the binding force for these subculturalist was the collective desire of “acting out” as a method of resistance to the hegemonic mainstream cultural values. Feeling frustrated over the socio-economics to them achieving a better standard for living, the youth of the working class joined together by the virtues their resistance to and marginalisation from the class structures. The last thing the researchers claimed from this research study was that their spectacular styles and rituals is where the resistance manifested itself the most.

## The Goth Subculture.

The first of two subcultures that this essay will be focusing on is the Goth subculture. This section will be looking at the subculture’s history and how it is presented and perceived in the media today. The word goth is believed to be one that first referred to a Germanic tribe which moved to an area of southern Russian in the second century, they then evolved from scattered barbarian tribes to a massive kingdom which left its mark on Europe. In the Renaissance era, the term ‘Gothic’ became a descriptor term for any style of art and architecture that was considered to be too grave, depressing and or dark. Gothic is also known as a famous style of architecture with key features like large stained glass windows, pointed arches, rib vaults, flying buttresses and ornate decoration. Some of the most notable Gothic architecture examples are Cologne Cathedral, Notre Dame Paris and Westminster Abbey. Gothic literature came into being in the late 1700’s to early 1800’s, as authors of the time started to combine the genres of horror and romance and would occasionally blur the line of distinction between good and evil. Gothic novels featured terrifying experiences taking place in ancient castles, dungeons with flickering flames of lamps, bloodied hands and graveyards.

The Goth subculture began in the late 1970’s England as a socio-economic decline was occurring with a stagflation (economic stagnation and inflation), rising unemployment rates and stewing industrial tensions which were happening since the late 60’s.[[2]](#footnote-1) Alongside this was the commercial exploitation of the Punk subculture. Early goth heavily romanticised and intensified the parts of early punk which reveled in the crass and trashiness until the predilection for all things macabre and dreadful fashion and music had emerged its way from the Punk subculture and into the new realm of the Gothic subculture.

For Goth music the bands Bauhaus who formed in 1978 and Siouxsie and the Banshees who formed in 1976. The impact these two bands had on Goth Siouxsie Sioux creating the goth sound and fashion by using black clothing, hair and dark makeup on the eyes, cheekbones and lips and used “sinister jangling guitars and wailing sombre lyrics.” Bauhaus’s impact was notably through the release of their August of 1979 song “Bela Lugosi’s Dead”. Now with a notable type of sound in music and look in fashion, the formation of the rest of the subculture came falling into place.

The Goth community on Tiktok is one that has a constant debate on the inherent political beliefs in the subculture from its ties to the Punk subculture, this topic ties in with how many believe the subculture to just be purely based around the music genre. While the genre does play a big and important role as Goth music shows was one of the main physical locations for the subculture participants. Descending from Punk means that its core tenet of D.I.Y remains to be the same case in the Goth subculture. This means that many seek old unassuming clothes and take pride in altering it to make it more Goth which means that they will try to avoid fast fashion sites. In my experience as someone who interacts with Goth subculture content on the regular I have found that the community is one that welcomes in anyone willing to join the subculture, giving out helpful tips and advice to the “BabyBats” as the familiarise themselves with the subculture

## The Gyaru Subculture.

The second subculture that this essay will be looking at is the Japanese Gyaru. The term and subculture are relatively new and do not have as big of a history as the word Goth or Gothic. The subculture and its substyle Kogal started to come into existence in the early 1990’s Japan when a large number of girls who attended rich private schools[[3]](#footnote-2) were walking around with dyed brown hair, school uniform skirts worn to be shorter, tanned skin and using bags from European luxury brands. This first wave mostly consisted of the girls from the upper class who were able to afford expensive clothing and were not as affected by the financial crisis after the Japanese Asset Price Bubble from 1986 to 1991 where the stock market and real estate prices were greatly inflated.[[4]](#footnote-3) The subculture like many others has its own subcategories with Kogal, Ganguro and Banba as some examples.

The Kogal subcategory is mainly used to refer to students who consistently wear their uniform with various changes after school hours. The first peak for Kogyaru was in the mid 90’s with the extensive media coverage from being linked to more sexualised versions of uniforms with a deviance from the national character of morality. Kogyaru also got associated with prostitution because of the provocative shūkanshis, a weekly magazine publication heavily exploiting the image of high school girls as new sexual objects for the pleasure of older men. This led to the creation of the stereotype that girls in the Kogal subculture were also participating in teenage prostitution. This stereotype is false as Kogyaru do not make up the majority of those in teen prostitution and it was this misconception and its accompanying harassment that led to the first transformation in the Gyaru subculture of Kogal to Ganguro as a defence mechanism to shut and keep men out of their circles and instead gain recognition and favour from their fellow Gyaru peers.

Ganguro also came from the decrease in the original wealthy Kogyaru and more lower class girls joining in on the Gyaru subculture. In the late 90’s the subculture had a shift to a “cheaper” stylistic choices and direction. The main style features for a Ganguro girl was dark fake tans, grey to orange tones of blonde hair or vivid colours like bright pink or green.[[5]](#footnote-4) They adopted types of speech that were considered rude and vulgar for young women to say.

Today Ganguro and Kogal are the most well known and recognisable subcategories of the Gyaru subculture. Gyaru is a subculture in which the majority of participants are women and is centred around women but there is a small subcategory called Gyaru-o which is for men who are interested in participating in the subculture. The root theme and belief in the gyaru subculture is resistance. Resisting against the strict beauty standards placed on Japanese women, strict school rules and more commonly today against foreign influence. The main place to see authentic Gyarus is in Japanese neighbourhoods. The subculture like some other Japanese subcultures, for example Lolita and Harajuku have the strongest presence in the area of Shibuya, Tokyo, this is thanks to the 10 story shopping centre called Shibuya 109 which hosts many cafes and clothing stores for Gyaru fashion. It is in this hub that many Gyarus come together to hang out, go shopping and interact with others who share their interests, in the shops are often senior Gyarus working as the clerk[[6]](#footnote-5) who have been in the subculture for a long time so they are able to help newcomers, which further aids in building and strengthening the community.

The community for the Gyaru subculture on tiktok for English speakers in my experience is rather small with one main creator who talks about well known Gyaru clothing brands, translating current topics among Japanese Gyaru. Since Gyaru is a fashion based subculture and is not as political as subcultures like Goth, there is no major discourse over political values. One issue that this subculture community suffers from is the entitlement that comes from people believing that their right to dressing in the style of a certain subculture as self expression is their human right and placing their rights as a first world citizen over the rights of the third world citizen who is making the clothing that they claim to be their right at super low prices. A reason why the online Gyaru community small is because the whole subculture revolves around life in Japan and as a Japanese women in that patriarchal society and it is hard for a girl who has lived in the United States her whole life to rebel against Japanese beauty and societal standards when they have never applied to her.

## What Are Aesthetics in the Social Media World?

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of art, beauty and taste with the creation and appreciation of beauty.[[7]](#footnote-6) Aesthetics as a culture that we know today first started on the website ‘Tumblr’ it was a way for the younger generation to express themselves, form identities and communities. At the time they were mainly based on your lifestyle, beliefs and who you were. During the peak of short form content platforms like TikTok. A shift in how aesthetic culture was approached was seen as it started to be more rooted in visual appeal through the more common access to various goods and services shown by careful curation. The easier access meant that the lifestyle associated with various aesthetics wasn’t needed anymore. The obsession that social media has with aesthetics is at the very first glance it is appealing and fun. After that first glance and the thoughts of “that is cool, I would like to have that aesthetic.” You as the individual will get pushed towards consumerism and materialism as you get shown decorational or clothing, accessory or makeup items that you apparently need to own to be and fit into that aesthetic. After some time that first aesthetic loses its novelty and a new aesthetic comes around and pulls you into the same trap, which after a while and a few aesthetic trend cycles it just leaves you the consumer stuck in a loop of materialism and with a pile of clothes, jewelry, makeup and decor that you don't like anymore. All of this attributes to the growing amount of items that end up firstly in charity shops and then landfills if they don't sell which attributes to the 17 million tons of clothing waste that gets thrown out.[[8]](#footnote-7)

## How the Trends of Goth and Gyaru Affect the Communities On Social Media?

The trends of the Goth and Gyaru fashion aesthetics brought in flocks of people had little to no regard or care about the history, the beliefs and important features of the subculture that just wanted to parade around in the subculture’s style for the views and interactions it gave their account that they could monetise. This meant that the trend followers would disregard information that was told to them like the political beliefs that came from the Punk subculture over to the Goth subculture and the persistence of those who believe that Goth is purely a music based subculture.

The subcultures becoming sudden trends meant that many fast fashion brands were rushing to produce more clothes in the style of the subculture for their usual concerningly low prices and oversaturating the market for that style. This fast fashion also goes against the tenet that Goth subculture got from its parent subculture of Punk which is D.I.Y, an example of this is a bag that was selling on the brand Dollskills website of an anarchy canvas bag with the patches, badges and safety pins already pre placed onto the which nullifies the D.I.Y part of punk and makes it void of personality.

People participate in dressing up in the subculture styles but don't do it in the most known way for the style are subjected to criticism from those jumping onto the trend bandwagon, a prominent example of this is someone doing their version of ‘Traditional Goth’ makeup and skipping the white foundation or replacing it with their matching foundation shade are met with variations of “That’s not real traditional goth makeup”. Another element of this is someone doing their Goth makeup with parts that are unique to them and getting many comments asking “What style is this?” or “What type of Goth is this?”

An effect that occurs after that specific trend runs its short course in our current insanely fast trend cycle is that those who joined in on the trend may after a while post about how they joined in on the trend and laugh about how stupid, ugly and or cringe they looked at that time, which can whether they intend it or not promote the idea of bullying people in the subculture for how they go about expressing themselves.

This final year project essay explored the history of subcultures as a commonplace term in society, the history and online communities of both the Gyaru and Goth subcultures. Along with the concept of aesthetics on social media today and what some effects of these two subcultures trending and becoming popular had on the regular participants of that subculture and their online spaces.

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