UNBOXING GOTH: THE WORK OF SUBCULTURAL REPRODUCTION AND COMMODIFICATION

A Thesis By

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Abstract:
This thesis uses a mixed critical/qualitative approach to understand how goth subculture is constructed and commodified in goth nightclubs and on YouTube. The framework is guided by Bourdieu’s theories of cultural production and social capital, critiques of digital labor, and scholarship on subcultures. I investigate how the mainstreaming of a subculture through media and fashion is negotiated by self-identified participants in the subculture. In the critical-cultural section, I analyze clothing haul videos from three popular goth YouTubers (It’s Black Friday, Toxic Tears, and Angela Benedict). As cultural mediators, they perform subcultural capital for a wider audience that includes a mix of newcomers, old timers, and the simply curious. Each account presents a different model for translating among subcultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital. Although they all perform digital labor, they differentially prioritize and communicate typical aspects of goth identity. For the qualitative portion, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with active participants of the Southern California goth club scene. I uncovered how the participants negotiated their identity performance off- and on-line. Commodification and consumerism play a significant role in the way identity is created and maintained in online spaces, and less so offline. In the final chapter, I integrate critical and qualitative findings. Together, these findings illuminate contradictions between the work of digital labor that translates among different forms of capital and the work of subcultural reproduction, or performing, educating, and modeling tacit and implicit values. This thesis contributes to scholarship on subcultures, labor, and digital media.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. iv

Chapter
1. INTRODUCTION AND EXIGENCE ......................................................................................... 1

   Goth as a Subculture ..................................................................................................................... 5
   Early Goth Subculture .................................................................................................................. 7
   Stereotypes, the Internet, and the Contemporary Goth Subculture ............................................. 8
   Rationale ....................................................................................................................................... 11

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ......................................................................................................... 13

   Subculture Theory ....................................................................................................................... 13
   The Integration of Goth Music and Style into Mainstream Culture ........................................... 14
   Fields ........................................................................................................................................... 16
   Capital ......................................................................................................................................... 17
   Economic Capital ......................................................................................................................... 18
   Social Capital ............................................................................................................................... 18
   Cultural Capital ............................................................................................................................ 19
   Symbolic Capital .......................................................................................................................... 20
   Subcultural Capital ....................................................................................................................... 20
   Habitus ......................................................................................................................................... 21
   Digital Consumer Culture, Influencers, and Consumerism ....................................................... 23
   YouTube as a Hybrid Field of Cultural Production ................................................................ 27
   Identity Performance .................................................................................................................. 31
   Offline Goth Identity .................................................................................................................. 32
   Digital Goth Identity Performance .............................................................................................. 35
   Identity, Capital, and Habitus ....................................................................................................... 38
   Implications for This Study Capital ............................................................................................ 41

3. METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................................................... 44

   Research Traditions, Methods, and Artifacts .......................................................................... 44
   Cultural Studies ........................................................................................................................... 44
   Rationale for Case Studies ......................................................................................................... 45
   Qualitative Research .................................................................................................................. 46
   Participants ................................................................................................................................... 47
   Procedure ..................................................................................................................................... 48
   Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews .................................................................................. 49
   Informal Observations ................................................................................................................ 52
   Research Role as Self-Reflexive ................................................................................................. 56
   Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 57

4. CASE STUDY ON GOTH CLOTHING HAUL VIDEOS ............................................................ 59

   Selected Haul Videos, Comments, and Channels for Analysis .................................................. 59
   KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill .............................................................................................................. 61
   Goth Fashion and Subculture ..................................................................................................... 63
   Goth Clothing Haul Videos ....................................................................................................... 64
   Resistance to Consumerism in Goth .......................................................................................... 65
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, Capital, and Identity</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational Labor</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goth YouTube Cultural Mediators</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haul Videos and Social Capital</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of It's Black Friday's Video Titled &quot;KILLSTAR Haul + Try On&quot;</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Toxic Tear's Video Titled &quot;Widow Clothing Haul from Dolls Kill</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Angela Benedict's Video Titled &quot;90s Goth Thrift Haul</td>
<td>Vlog + Giveaway&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Findings from the Case Studies</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of the Findings</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Commodification</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Future Directions</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. GOTH GF MEME</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. VERBAL SCRIPT</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. IRB APPROVAL</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND EXIGENCE

In the late 2010s, a new type of manic pixie dream girl emerged on the Internet. Colloquially known as the “Goth Girlfriend” (Goth GF) and misogynistically referred to as the “Big Tiddy Goth Girlfriend,” this figure encapsulated many stereotypes about goth culture, femininity, and identity. The manic pixie dream girl is a trope first applied to female characters in modern cinema who are used as plot devices to make dull male protagonists more “colorful” and “adventurous” (Forij, 2021, p. 97). The manic pixie dream girl is a postfeminist construction, meaning that she exists in a world where feminism is simultaneously considered and repudiated (McRobbie, 2004). Manic pixie dream girls are often contextualized as quirky and different from other girls through their depiction as having freedom of mind and self-expression (Forij, 2021). However, the trope serves to undermine women’s sense of self, individuality, and “capacity for criticism and resistance” (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 116). In cinematic representations of the manic pixie dream girl, the character only exists within the male protagonist’s world. Male protagonists determine their attitudes towards these characters and often hypersexualize them, turning them into caricatures whose sole purpose is to glorify the role of the caretaker (Joyce, 2014, p. 1). Outside of cinema, the manic pixie dream girl trope has appeared in a number of formats, including Internet jokes such as the Goth GF meme referred to above.

The Goth GF meme began as a joke on the website 4chan and is centered around a sexually motivated desire to have a girlfriend that dresses in goth fashion (Dubno, 2018). The original memes featured a cartoon girl with pale skin, black hair, large breasts, red eyes, and gothic clothing (see Appendix A). Around the character are pieces of dialogue that indicate things the Goth GF might say to her romantic or sexual partner. In the quotes from Appendix A, it is implied that she is scary based on the question she asks her partner—“do I scare you?” The character is also presented as sexual in nature through statements like “I would have never known flesh could hold so many pleasures” and “it’s cute when you try to dominate me.” From these bits of dialogue, it is evident that she is reduced to a weird, possessive, and promiscuous entity whose role is to please her romantic or sexual
partner. The meme is rightly criticized for the voyeurism, objectification, and fetishization of women. Yet, it also may draw our attention to another issue: the stereotyping, commercialization, and mainstreaming of “goth,” a subculture formerly anything but mainstream.

The Goth GF meme no longer applies solely to cartoon characters like the figure seen in Appendix A, Gwen from *Total Drama Island*, or Sam from *Danny Phantom*. One instance of the Goth GF stereotype is evident in Canadian dance and electronic singer Grimes. At the 2018 MET Gala award show, Grimes attended the event with her partner, entrepreneur Elon Musk. Dressed in a floor-length gown with a flowy black mesh skirt, a T-shaped choker that resembled the Tesla logo, mesh gloves, combat boot heels, dark make-up, and black hair, she was instantly labeled as “Elon’s goth girlfriend.” From this example, we can see that clothing plays a role in the way that outsiders equate goth fashion with goth identity. In contemporary times, the heterogeneous goth subculture is often reduced to mere fashion or aesthetic choices. The notion of clothing granting status and identity for members has been prevalent since the early 2000s with the rise of Hot Topic and chain stores marketing goth clothing to mainstream audiences. In order to understand the impact of commercialization on the goth subculture, it is critical to understand the role that Hot Topic played in bringing goth into the mainstream.

Hot Topic became a household name in the 2000s because it was the only mass retail chain that carried clothing and accessories marketed specifically for music-based subcultures, including goth, emo, metal, and punk. Hot Topic reached immense success from its locations in malls around the United States, lack of strong competition, and adaptability to customer feedback. As a business, Hot Topic capitalized on targeting a previously hard-to-reach demographic of consumers and making goth commodities accessible in mainstream markets. From fishnets to Manic Panic hair dye, Hot Topic became the only widely available marketplace where goths and other alternative subcultures such as punk, metal, and emo could purchase commodities that targeted their interests and styles.

The retail chain would keep up with trends and consumer interests by soliciting their teenage customers to share their opinions through postcards mailed directly to the corporate office (Tkacik,
This relationship between consumers and businesses is a prevalent tactic used in marketing to drive consumption. Prior to the rise of direct-to-consumer marketing via the Internet, Hot Topic’s strategy of reaching its audience members was effective in launching it into a successful mainstream retail chain. The introduction of goth fashion into the mainstream created opportunities for non-goth consumers to acquire these commodities. Hot Topic’s presence pre-dates influencers and social media, but its impact on mainstream markets has changed the relationship between consumers and brands and has paved the way for present-day businesses to target goth consumers.

Although Hot Topic no longer appeals to goth consumers in today’s market as it did in the early 2000s, other businesses updated its marketing strategy for digital media. Brands such as Disturbia, Dolls Kill, KILLSTAR, Kreepsville 666, and Punk Rave are among some of the widely available online shops that carry select items marketed to goth and alternative consumers. Goth and alternative online stores have found a niche audience amongst members of the goth community and have found creative ways of getting people to consume their products beyond seeing advertisements for the items online. These establishments no longer need to mail people catalogs with their products; instead, they partner with individuals who have high follower counts to promote their commodities for them. Their target audience members are now accessible through social media and social media influencers. The partnership between brands and social media influencers has sparked conversations among members of the goth subculture about consumer culture and how it affects goth identity. Several studies by Goulding and Saren (2009, 2010); Edwards and Monet (2014); and Spracklen and Spracklen (2014, 2018) have discussed how the goth subculture has become impacted by commercialization and consumption.

Goulding and Saren (2009) describe goth as being entrenched in a “visual aesthetic materiality” (p. 28). Spooner (2006) elaborates on the idea of goth as being a visual culture by noting that the appeal of goth lies in its ability to balance different contradictions such as grotesqueness and beauty; true self-expression and theatricality; and cult following and mass appeal. Goth fashion is composed of many different styles and remains a “mix-and-match mélange of black and retro
garments fashioned from leather, buckles, velvet, silk, pvc, chains, or lace” (Goodlad & Bibby, 2007, p. 3). As a style, there are many elements within goth fashion that appeal to those outside of the goth subculture, including Victorian fashion, brocade patterns, and black eyeliner. Spracklen and Spracklen (2018) argue that consumption in postmodern society allows for people to select being alternative as a “fashion and identity choice” (p. 161). Pop goth is one way in which goth style and aesthetics are manifested in mainstream society. Fashion and identity choices give outsiders the ability “to put on the Goth/ic performance” (Edwards & Monnet, 2014, p. 1). Individuals that have the economic, social, and cultural capital can “dress up and be a goth … or perform the role of a goth for as long as one desires” (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018). Being able to put on a goth performance and not identify with the goth subculture has led to a lot of questions about the role of goth fashion within the goth subculture and outside of it.

Most goths understand goth identity to encompass personal as well as group characteristics. Individual goth identity involves personal beliefs, values, and norms that are unique to that member. Music is considered a significant part of the goth subculture that often inspires goth fashion. Brill (2007) notes that during a shift in the early 1990s and early 2000s, goths swapped traditional goth rock-inspired fashion for more futuristic styles such as cybergoth and industrial/martial looks. Cybergoth and industrial/martial looks were inspired by the increased popularity of electronic body music (EBM). Having an individual goth identity can entail that a goth holds different spiritual beliefs, musical preferences, and fashion or outward aesthetic preferences from other members. One goth might be Wiccan, like post-punk music, and prefer to wear traditional goth or trad goth clothing such as mesh tops, band shirts, and high platform boots. This can differ from another member of the subculture who considers themselves to be agnostic, enjoys darkwave music, and dresses in Victorian goth fashion while borrowing elements from steampunk fashion. Individual identity allows goths to express themselves within their own lives as they please and allows for the individuals to create a sense of themselves that they feel represents them. In other words, individual identity as a goth is tied to the self and making sense of one’s own perceptions and experiences (Hodkinson,
While goths are tied to individual identities, group identity is fundamental in emphasizing that goth is also a community with shared interests. Members of the goth community view themselves as part of a collective group that shares a strong interest in goth music. Goth music includes goth rock, darkwave, post-punk, and deathrock (a genre of music that is influenced by punk but has a darker and theatrical sound). Goth music is the pinnacle shared interest among members as the subculture is music-based (Goodland & Bibby 2007; Spooner 2006; Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018). Cohen (1985) described community as experienced by its members. The shared interest, love, and appreciation of goth music inspires goths to form local communities across the world. Goth music can be found at goth clubs and music festivals, including Wave-Gothik-Treffen, Whitby Goth Weekend, and M’Era Luna. Through clubbing, music festivals, and local events, goths sustain subcultural identity beyond observable traits such as dressing in all-black clothing. In order to understand how commodification changed goth from a music subculture into a “dark aesthetic,” it is important to understand what the early days of goth looked like as a subculture and how they compare to the contemporary goth subculture.

**Goth as a Subculture**

Subcultures are widely understood as social groupings that “proactively seek and produce experiences, activities, images, symbols and meanings to disrupt and subvert the values of the dominant commercial culture” (Ulusoy, 2016, p. 246). Scholars and goths often use the term “subculture” to refer to goths because it embodies aspects of the collective group’s culture, including music and fashion. The word “scene” is used alongside subculture; however, this term accounts for the goth subculture on a local level, whereas the term subculture “produces a strong sense of shared identity even while traversing geographical boundaries” (Goodlad & Bibby, 2007, p. 6). The term subculture also accounts for individual and group identities formed by insiders. Members of subcultures are free to form their own agency and make sense of their own identities beyond restrictions or rules (Muggleton, 2000; Thornton, 1995). Because subcultures are more fluid than fixed, there is room for the individual to take on “intersecting” and “transient identities” (Spracklen &
Spracklen, 2018, p. 11). One’s fashion choice can exemplify fluidity in identity. Some goths enjoy wearing Victorian-style clothing that can include coats, corsets, ball gowns, and lace gloves. Other goths might prefer to merge goth fashion with rivethead fashion. Rivethead fashion is associated with industrial music, a genre of music that merges rock and electronic music. Not all goths enjoy industrial music, but those who do might express it through their fashion. Some goths wear Victorian-inspired pieces such as corsets or tailcoats but pair them with suspenders, military belts, uniform dresses, combat boots, or bondage pants to create a combined goth and rivethead look.

While the term subculture accounts for the fluidity of group and individual identity, there has been opposition to the term. Scholars such as Bennett (1999) and Spracklen and Spracklen (2018) find other terminology better suited for these social groups. Bennett (1999) argues that the term “neo-tribe” is better suited to describe these types of social groups because it “allows for the shifting nature of youth’s musical and stylistic preferences” (p. 614). This term has been critiqued because it describes people who gather together for the purpose of time, place, and occasion (Hodkinson, 2002). For many goths, their identities are intertwined with their own lives and hold more significance than meeting at a certain nightclub or concert venue before dispersing. Spracklen and Spracklen (2018) have introduced a new approach to the term “alternativity” to describe goth as a freely chosen “expression of communicative rationality” that is a form of resistance and agency shaped by the culture industry and the rise of instrumentality (p. 31).

While alternativity considers contemporary lifestyles and affiliations that neo-tribes overlook, the term itself is often used broadly. Outside of goth and other subculture scholarship, the terms alternative and alternativity are often simultaneously used to describe fashion worn by members of subcultures and individuals who are not part of any subculture. Despite the use of other terms, subculture remains the choice term for describing goth by scholars and members because it offers a description of the group that is not as general as alternative, but more flexible than neo-tribes. Therefore, by using the term subculture, goth can be understood as a social group and community.
that accounts for the uniquely constructed identities of members and offers a basis for understanding how goth has changed over time.

**Early Goth Subculture**

Goth got its start from a movement caught between punk and grunge known as the post-punk movement. The post-punk movement originated in the late 1970s and was encompassed by an expansion of the rebellious spirit of the punk movement (Harriman & Bontje, 2014). Inspired by glam rock, the aesthetics of post-punk demonstrated the ability to “shock and differentiate itself from societal norms” through dress and make-up, merging “glitter, androgyny, excessiveness, and theatrics” (Harriman & Bontje, 2014, p. 14). Not only did post-punk introduce a visual and stylistic departure, but it moved from raw power-chord-driven music into melodic structures that utilized computers to achieve more experimental sound sequences (Harriman & Bontje, 2014). The unique blend of glamour and gloom helped spawn what would become the first wave of goth music. With many individuals regarding themselves as “new romantic,” the post-punk movement attracted individuals with its stylistically complex, dark, and romantic atmosphere. This movement is the very basis of what would eventually emerge as the goth movement in the 1980s.

The 1980s were considered politically and socially bleak as they consisted of little cultural creativity both within Europe and the United States (Jenkins, 2006). Much of the political atmosphere carved by conservative leaders like Reagan (United States), Thatcher (United Kingdom), and Mulroney (Canada) left a creative gap that the goth subculture would eventually help fill. Spracklen and Spracklen (2018) demonstrate that through goth’s emergence from the post-punk scene, it became a counterculture, or group of people that resist conservative politics. Sharing many characteristics with the punk subculture, the early 80s goth scene was considered a counterculture because of its radical politics.

As a counterculture, goth defined itself as “radical and transgressive,” operating by rejecting the mainstream (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018, p. 185). Many goths hold non-traditional political beliefs that deviate from mainstream culture. It is common to see goths in Western countries like the
United States and Western Europe post about politics online, encouraging people to take stances that challenge norms and values held by society on gender, sex, and sexuality. The political nature of goth can clash with religion and conservative values held by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Goth music and culture have been condemned by religious fundamentalists for their “sexual and political freedoms” (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018, p. 121). Many goth nightclubs are held in “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered spaces across the country” (Gunn, 2007, p. 45). In being perceived as deviant from heteronormative standards on identity, many goths celebrate the subculture’s inclusiveness. Though countercultural aspects of goth continue to exist, the contemporary subculture is no longer a counterculture.

**Stereotypes, the Internet, and the Contemporary Goth Subculture**

Having grown into being much more than a genre of music, members of the goth community, including myself, actively participate in attending events such as going to goth clubs and concerts and communicating with other members of the scene. Being a part of the community has provided many individuals with a sense of belonging and ways to express themselves in spaces that openly embrace deviance from societal norms and expectations. Goth nights clubs, concerts, and events have been foundational in granting spaces for members of the community to perform their identities since the late 1970s. The digital shift in the 1990s has opened new opportunities for goths to find information about the subculture while creating spaces for current members and newcomers to perform their identities. Not only can people perform their identities anytime and anywhere through various digital outlets, but how they perform their identities in digital spaces opens up new opportunities for commercialization. This shift from performing one’s goth identity only through in-person interactions and events has generated questions about the roles that the Internet plays in the contemporary goth subculture as well as the extent of those roles.

Drawing on subcultural theory, Hodkinson (2002) writes that the goth subculture’s initial conception and survival rested upon “external and internal networks of information and organization” (p. 29). Survival of the subculture can be attributed to the music and clubbing scenes. Even before
the Internet, many people still view the height of the subculture taking place in the 1980s and early 1990s. This is based on the wave of music being released and the various concerts, festivals, and club events that encouraged many people to participate, join, and form lasting networks.

The existing body of literature on goth has grown significantly since early work in the late 1990s and early 2000s by scholars such as Hannahann (1999) and Hodkinson (2002). There are notable studies on the subjects of goth music (Gunn, 1999; Hannahann, 1999; Hodkinson, 2002; Kruse, 2010; van Elferen & Weinstock, 2016), dancing (Jorgenson, 2012; Karampampas, 2017), fashion (Brill, 2007; Hodkinson, 2002; Martin, 2002), and identity (Hodkinson, 2002; Spracklen & Spracklen, 2014, 2018). Goth fashion and music are the typical stereotypes employed to signal “goth” in popular media.

For example, after the Columbine massacre in 1999, there was an increase in negative narratives being spread about the goth subculture based on media stories falsely asserting that the two shooters were goths because they listened to Marilyn Manson. Manson is not regarded as a goth musician (Gunn, 1999); however, he was branded by mainstream media as a goth after the Columbine massacre. Mass media outlets would describe Manson as a figure embodying “gothic subversiveness” in his music and fashion and outward aesthetics and his large following at the time made him a “mass-market product” (Martin, 2002, p. 36). Mass media narratives of Manson as goth created a lens for outsiders to view the goth subculture that many find difficult to move away from. These narratives are now resurfacing within the digital contemporary goth subculture due to recent allegations and testimonies of survivors calling out the years of violent behavior and sexual abuse perpetrated by Marilyn Manson.

In addition to pushing Marilyn Manson as a goth figure, mass media in the 1990s and 2000s would stereotype goth as a hypersexualized subculture. While the goth subculture encouraged and continues to allow individuals to explore their sexuality, it also provides social spaces for people to practice their “real” and “desired” gendered selves free from “prejudice and ridicule” (Goulding & Saren, 2006, p. 213). Bondage Domination Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) found their way into the
goth subculture through their closely shared aesthetics with the cybergoth that include a “love for latex and vinyl, industrial music elements” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 284). Goth offers “social spaces where gender roles and models can be realized without constraints of traditional society” (Pushkin, 2017, p. 291). Participants can be themselves free from “prejudice and ridicule” (Goulding & Saren, 2006, p. 213).

While bisexuality, BDSM, and polyamory are common in the goth subculture, they are often constructed towards fulfilling the “male fantasy” instead of providing “female sexual autonomy” (Nally, 2018, p. 23). A common way this occurs is through the various Goth GF memes that have circulated around the Internet. These memes rely on various tropes about promiscuity, unusual personality traits, and otherness through humor as a cloak to posit perceptions about goth girls and women. While the meme has been used within the goth community on various social media platforms to obtain subcultural capital amongst community members (particularly in goth meme circles), the meme also circulates outside the subculture. There are several Reddit forums dedicated as spaces for people to post photos of women using the label of Goth GF to describe the women in the photos as goth. More often than not, the people in these photos have little to no connection to the goth subculture, and the label is often used for the sole purpose of attracting views. In addition to these Reddit forums, the different variations of the Goth GF meme also turn one’s attention to goth fashion. Several meme variations feature women with dark hair, minimal or heavy dark make-up, semi-dark clothing, and chokers. Outsiders often consider dark hair, make-up, and clothing as goth fashion. These generic standards and expectations of what goth is, according to outsiders, share a connection to images they are presented with online.

As of late, overconsumption has posed a challenge in the contemporary goth subculture. The overconsumption of goth fashion can lead to narcissism (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2014). It also causes people to assume they cannot participate in the subculture if they do not look like the people they see representing goth online (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018). Because the online goth communities are mainly passive consumers who partake in online interaction with the group of their
choosing, they have the potential to become “primary reference groups” for individuals seeking to learn about them (Strubel & Pookulangara, 2013). Some of these reference groups are individuals that have amassed large followings on social media. Social networking platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr are primary networks where people can find information about the goth subculture. Social media often presents fashion-oriented photos or videos of mainly white women dressed head to toe in black (e.g., Toxic Tears, Emily Boo, and Avelina De Moray). Often these photos and videos include hashtags such as #goth, #gothgirl, #gothic, or #alternative. Individuals like Toxic Tears, Emily Boo, and Avelina De Moray are a few notable examples of individuals that have amassed thousands of followers on both YouTube and Instagram. They often perform their identities in the form of commodities.

For many contemporary subcultures, such as the goth subculture, the attribution of goth as a fashion and the fluidity of changing styles have prompted discussion about authenticity, identity, and more. While fashion allows goths to express who they are, and creativity through different styles of goth fashion is encouraged, the contemporary goth scene faces a dilemma in the commodification of goth fashion. This commodification intentionally and unintentionally reduces goth to one single aspect of the entire subculture. For many individuals within the subculture, including myself, the subculture holds more substance than aesthetics and fashion alone. Often when the subject of our identities, music, and forms of self-expression receive attention, it is the opinions and voices of those speaking for us that hold limited knowledge (if any) about us and our subculture. This may not seem a grandiose issue compared to some of the previous misunderstandings presented, however it merits further study because of the impact it poses for current members of the community, those seeking to become members, and lessons it holds for subcultures, resistance, and the maintenance and formation of identity.

Rationale

Without a doubt, digital media has provided goths avenues to perform their subculture and identities while fostering communal ties and friendships with other individuals. However, digital media
has also accelerated stereotyping, commercialization, and popularization. Despite the body of literature on goth involving consumerism, there is a lack of research on the subject of commodification in the contemporary goth subculture. This study will contribute to the current body of literature on goth by focusing on both online and offline contexts. In addition to expanding the existing literature on the goth subculture in online and offline contexts, this study will also expand on the identity performance and subculture scholarship.

This study seeks to highlight the relationship between the goth subculture in online and offline contexts. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and research questions. The literature review consists of Bourdieu’s theories of cultural production and social capital, critiques of digital labor, identity performance, and subculture scholarship. Chapter 3 will outline the mixed critical/qualitative approach used to understand how commodification impacts the goth subculture on YouTube and goth nightclubs. This chapter will describe the clothing haul videos selected for the cases studies and provide information about the participants for the semi-structured interviews. After providing the framework and methodological approach to the study, Chapter 4 will offer an analysis for one clothing haul video each from the following popular goth YouTubers: It’s Black Friday, Toxic Tears, and Angela Benedict. Chapter 5 will offer findings that emerged from ten semi-structured interviews. The chapter will outline the lived experiences of the participants and discuss how their participation within the Southern California goth nightclub scene influences how they perform their identities as goths. In Chapter 6, I will integrate the findings from Chapters 4 and 5. The discussion will detail specific connections from the findings in the case studies and the interviews and how they contribute to the current body of literature.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the years, we have witnessed and participated in a massive digital shift that has influenced the ways we communicate and how we establish our identities and network with other individuals. Social media sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, have allowed users to create online communities or “Internet-based groups and collectives” (Wilson & Peterson, 2002, p. 449). Members of music-based subcultures such as punks and goths utilize the Internet to express themselves, find content that appeals to them, such as music, events, and virtual communities, and communicate and connect with other subculture members. For goths, the Internet has created spaces for self-expression and a sense of community that allowed the subculture to flourish. In recent years, the role of online goth influencers have begun to stir debate about consumption in goth spaces. Consumption entails objects that enhance subcultural status, including music and clothing (Hodkinson 2002; Spooner, 2006). For the purpose of this study, consumption will focus specifically on the consumption of clothing and haul videos. This chapter uses parts of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production and field theory as a framework for outlining the role of social and subcultural capital in the cultural production of online goth communities and how these forms of capital contribute to gatekeeping and consumerism.

Subculture Theory

Early scholars studying subcultures (Hall & Jefferson, 1975; Hebdige, 1979; Thornton, 1995) explored why these groups formed and their relationship to mainstream society. They argued that popular forms of culture, including music, literature, and art, are connected to the dominant ideology. That is, popular culture reflects and reinforces socioeconomic injustices and inequalities. Subcultures challenge the correspondence between dominant ideology and popular culture: they “proactively seek and produce experiences, activities, images, symbols and meanings to disrupt and subvert the values of the dominant commercial culture” (Ulusoy, 2016, p. 246). Subcultures disrupt the semantic orders of music, literature, art, and fashion/style.
The public visibility of alternative styling signals affiliation and helps subcultures gain traction. For example, the make-up, iconography, and music of influential goth and deathrock bands, such as Christian Death and Shadow Project, are influential in creating spaces for members of the goth and death rock subcultures to express themselves in ways that stand out from conventional standards. One member of these bands, Rozz Williams, would often wear heavy make-up, tease his hair, and wear rosaries, crosses, and even a crown of thorns—symbols of his lapsed Christian upbringing. Williams was also gay and moved away from standard men’s clothing styles, subverting heteronormative standards for men. To this day, Williams is still heralded by fans of the goth and deathrock subcultures as an influential figure that expressed gender fluidity through androgynous looks.

When first conceptualized as a sociological category, subcultures were linked to class, gender, or ethnicity, but postmodern subcultural identities are no longer centered around these relations (Maffesoli, 1996; Muggleton, 2005; Redhead, 1997). Subcultures are described as groups of people that are represented in some fashion as non-normative and sometimes marginal through their shared interests and practices (Gelder, 2005). All subcultures have their own behaviors, values, beliefs, consumption patterns, and lifestyle choices that are divergent from the dominant culture (Cutler, 2006). Today, subculture theory is described as an intermediate theory that theorizes that subcultures exist between grand narratives and the everyday lived experiences of those that seek to understand them (Merton & Merton, 1968). Subcultures form through resistance to dominant society. Their growth grants them the power to temporarily subvert societal norms until—that is—their music and style become commodified.

The Integration of Goth Music and Style into Mainstream Culture

For Hebdige (1979), subcultures represent an interference in the “orderly sequence of real events and phenomena to their representations in the media” (p. 92). While subcultures begin as groups that challenge the symbolic order of the normal, they are often met with responses such as “dread and fascination, outrage and amusement” from outsiders (p. 93) before they are appropriated
by the dominant culture. One clear example of this is punk music becoming appropriated by dominant culture in the 1990s. The 1970s and 1980s shock factor of punk became diluted after gaining mass appeal through the likes of bands such as Green Day, Blink-182, and Sum 41. Similarly, in the contemporary goth subculture, both the music and alternative styling have become present in various facets of mainstream media, often reducing the complexity of the goth subculture to a homogeneous stereotype.

A classic example of a mainstream movie character portrayed as a goth is Nancy Downs from the 1996 film *The Craft*. Her character is often described as goth despite having no direct connection to the goth subculture itself. Rather, audiences infer that she is a goth character through her dark clothing, make-up, and fascination with witchcraft. This trope of the witchy goth girl continues into other characters, including Kendra Hilferty of the film *Beastly* (2011) and Nico Minoru of Marvel’s *The Runaways* (2017-2019). This trope is one of many examples in which goth is reduced to its aesthetics to appeal to mass audiences. Rather than displaying goth as a complex, primarily music-based subculture, popular goth characters are often given sad backstories that provide a one-dimensional reason for their style. Through tragic backstories involving death, misunderstanding, and bullying, the goth subculture becomes a trope for internalized personal trauma expressed as an aesthetic rather than a reaction to hegemonic Puritanism, positivity, and heteronormativity. Similar to aesthetics, the goth genre within music has also been co-opted by mainstream tastes.

Bands like Nightwish and Evanescence garnered the goth label for years due to their dark aesthetics and lyrical content. Both groups have their music featured in film soundtracks and are described as goth because of themes interwoven in their music regarding sadness, death, life, and pain. More contemporary artists such as Billie Eilish and Pale Waves receive the goth label based on their appearance and the dark undertones in their music. While it might seem that only non-goth artists have their music marketed as goth, popular goth artists such as Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The Cure have also had their music utilized in mass media. Recently, The Weeknd’s 2021 Super Bowl Half-Time show performance of “House of Balloons” presented mainstream
audiences with instrumental and vocal samples from the song “Happy House” by Siouxsie and the Banshees. We can theorize tensions between sub/mainstream goth culture as an example of two fields—one dominant, the other marginal—overlapping incompletely.

**Fields**

Conceptually, a “field” refers to abstract socio-cultural norms. Within Bourdieu’s (1996) analysis of artistic and literary production, he describes fields as “relatively autonomous” universes (p. 141). Fields are not one entity, but rather, they are formed relationally (Albright et al., 2018). Subcultures as a field interfere with mainstream fields. Conversely, when subcultures start becoming commodified, the disruption of a subculture’s subversive potential and its subsequent encoding within the mainstream threatens the *raison d’etre* of the subculture. Online fields allow individuals to create and consume digital content. They are held together by mutual interest and power relations among agents (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). Some examples of autonomous universes online can include Facebook groups, YouTube comment sections, and even Reddit threads which all function as their own social spaces where members can connect with other like-minded individuals and find things that interest them.

Each field contains specific rules as well as varying degrees of autonomy that are not only specific to that individual field but are simultaneously influenced by other competing fields. Noteworthy examples include virtual goth night events that have become substitutes for goth nightclubs upon the start of the global Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. These virtual events are primarily found on platforms such as Twitch and Facebook. Members can congregate to simultaneously listen to music, dance in the comfort of their own homes, and socialize using the chat features available. Each virtual goth night event is influenced by other events and many DJs collaborate with one another creating communities and networks within the field of Twitch. Content is generated based on the music people are interested in hearing. Power relations among agents is demonstrated through the number of viewers attending the streams, as well as the partnerships clubs may have with other DJs and artists and bands.
Because the contemporary goth subculture changed significantly over the years it is important to understand how capital is embodied within the subculture and how it determines an individual member's position within the field. Bourdieu (1991) writes that the contours of a lifestyle can be realized through people's consumption as well as their refusal to be pegged down into a specific social space. However, while people may try to free themselves of these boundaries, once people occupy a particular role, it can be difficult to detach themselves from that role (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu’s theory of field and capital grants us a point of reference for understanding how commodification has impacted the goth subculture and people’s interpretations of what a goth identity is. For example, someone who identifies with the goth subculture but does not like music by Billie Eilish or Evanescence may find it hard to distance themselves from these pop artforms and may even find their identity challenged by their emergence. Bourdieu’s theory of field and expansion of the notion of capital helps explain how commodification changes the formation and performance of identity within the goth subculture.

**Capital**

Traditional Marxism and post-Marxism have provided grounds for critically thinking about the ways capitalism operates, but they have been critiqued for not neatly addressing the growth of technology and “non-class based social identities” (Postone, 2008, p. 8). Bourdieu’s work on capital extends Marx’s work by expanding beyond economic to explore the symbolic realm of culture. Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of capital criticizes the Marxist focus on monetary exchange. Bourdieu divides capital into four types: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Economic capital refers to wealth. Social capital refers to one’s relationships and connections. Cultural capital refers to knowledge and taste. Symbolic capital refers to awards, distinctions, and other forms of recognition. Subcultures also have their form of capital that is referred to as subcultural capital. Subcultural capital consists of one’s knowledge about the subculture and their commitment or identification with the subculture. This form of capital can also include one’s styles and ownership of objects that are
relevant to the subculture, such as music, clothing, and make-up. Each of these forms of capital apply to this study because they reveal how goth identity is reproduced on YouTube and in goth nightclubs.

These different forms of capital intersect to produce identity and regulate behaviors without explicit rules. Although we consider ourselves to be “free agents,” meaning we are not held by any commitments in how we live our lives, we often base our everyday decisions on the character, behavior, and even the attitudes of those around us. Bourdieu’s (1984) work proposes that people coming from different social positions differ from each other based on their economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Different forms of capital help determine a person’s power position in the particular fields they are a part of, and people internalize these rules to self-regulate. The composition of different forms of capital generates a person’s position within a field. (Roughly, a person’s position within a field or their mode of operation is referred to as “habitus,” explored later). To contextualize the pervasiveness of consumption and commodification within the contemporary Goth subculture, it is vital to understand the individual roles of economic, social, cultural, symbolic, and subcultural capital.

**Economic Capital**

The economic form of capital presented by Bourdieu (1986) refers to material possessions that are “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (p. 242). Bourdieu’s description of economic capital encompasses all sorts of material resources that can be used to get someone what they want in life or in a better state of survival. Some of these material resources can include financial resources, which Pinxten and Lievens (2014) note can be used to help individuals “acquire or maintain better health” (p. 1097). One prominent example of economic capital involves real estate and the purchase of multiple properties. Over time they increase in value and generate a profit of money in which the sum increases, and the value of the property increases. Alongside economic capital is another form of capital known as social capital.

**Social Capital**

Bourdieu’s (1986) account describes social capital as a network-based resource. In Pinxten and Lievens (2014)’s research, they researchers note that by being network-based, social capital “is
Bourdieu (1986) states that social capital is “linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 247). However, despite vital information on socialization and networks, there is a standout criticism. One of the criticisms of social capital theory is that Bourdieu did not provide a way in which it could be measured as noted by Pinxten and Lievens (2014). In the works of Ziersch (2005), Carpiano (2006), and Song (2011), the researchers argue that there is a need to pay closer attention to operationalizing the network-based approaches connected to social capital. Group memberships such as being connected to other athletes within a sport that one plays, or subcultural memberships such as being part of a local goth community are two examples of how social capital is gained. The third form of capital that Bourdieu presents is cultural capital.

**Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is described by Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002) as a form of value that is associated with things such as culturally authorized tastes, people’s consumption patterns, and even skills and accomplishments. One of the most common examples of cultural capital includes educational qualifications through the types of degrees and years of experience that one has. Bourdieu (1993) argues that cultural capital can only exist in certain situations or contexts. He goes on to say that cultural capital cannot substitute economic or social capital. Swanson (2009) found in their research that cultural capital can relate directly to the distribution of power in fields.

Khawaja and Mowafi (2006) describe cultural capital as having comparable qualities to the other forms of capital. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes cultural capital as an institutionalized state that mostly refers to educational fulfillment. Cultural capital that is objectified “concerns the possessions of cultural goods” (Pinxten & Lieven, 2014, p. 1099). In regard to the embodied or incorporated state of cultural capital, Pinxten and Lievens (2014) describe it as referring to “people’s values, skills, knowledge and tastes” (p. 1099). Education or institutionalized cultural capital become a form of cultural capital key to linking people’s social position with their behavior aspects (Abel, 2008).
Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is defined by Bourdieu (1989) as a form of capital granted to those that have accrued a sufficient amount of recognition. His interpretation of symbolic capital is rooted in recognizing cultural positions, habitus, tastes, and hierarchy within a field by all actors (Honneth et al., 1986). This form of capital is especially notable for understanding how status plays a role in online consumption. Online influencers often rely on symbolic capital to obtain followers and recognition from others within a field. Symbolic capital can be converted into other forms of capital, including economic capital, where influencers can profit from their partnerships with companies and brands. Influencers that are partnered with fashion companies earn symbolic capital from the content they generate, which develops their current reputation and allows them to convert their symbolic capital into social capital creating relationships and networks with other influential figures (Pedroni, 2015).

Subcultural Capital

Cultural capital operates within subcultures as subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). Subcultural capital consists of the knowledge one has in a specific scene, their possession of relevant tangible objects, their stylistic appearance, their commitment to the scene, and how long they identified with the scene (Force, 2009; Thornton, 1995). Subcultural capital allows individuals to construct their identities in ways that morph with the subculture’s overarching internal values. Thornton (1995) writes that subcultural capital is a mark of distinction that comes through the forms of objectification (such as clothes or one’s music collection) or embodiment (such as one’s demeanor or knowledge about the subculture). With subcultural capital, members can construct authenticity and can transform their own place and status within a group.

Subcultural capital essentially lays out what is not part of a subculture and what is disliked by a subculture. Through subcultural capital, one can hold a status in the “eyes of the relevant beholder” (Thornton, 1995, p. 11). Those that are influential within subcultures can create hierarchical systems to exclude people and even differentiate those that adhere to a subculture’s ideals from those that hold enough influence to display a sense of individuality. Jensen (2006) writes that subcultural capital
can be accumulated through things that are appreciated by that particular type of subculture. Members of music-based subcultures like punk and goth often purchase music as a form of building subcultural capital.

Thornton (1995) argues that subcultural capital is not as class bound as cultural capital. Therefore, subcultural capital can be achieved by anyone within a subculture. This is evident on Instagram where people who may not be recognized for particular accomplishments can obtain capital through comments, content creation, and interaction with members of the subculture that have large followings, such as participating or monitoring YouTube live streams for goth YouTubers. A degree of elitism lurks alongside the rhetoric of egalitarianism and inclusiveness. This degree of elitism reaffirms binary oppositions such as alternative and straight, radical and conformist, and mainstream and subculture (Brill, 2007). Within youth subcultures, subcultural capital is a form of currency that “correlates with and legitimizes unequal statuses” (Thornton, 1995, p. 104). Thus, members of the goth subculture with more subcultural capital will often have access to things that those with little subcultural capital do not have access to. A primary example of this is the ability for goth YouTubers with large followings to obtain free clothes and jewelry from companies such as KILLSTAR that would likely not be afforded to them if they had a smaller following. This suggests that, initially, counterhegemonic fields such as goth become mainstream as the subculture begins to trade more economic than cultural capital.

Habitus

Bourdieu (1994) defines habitus as a property of social agents that comprises a “structured and structuring structure” (p. 170), meaning that members of a field socially construct their expectations and norms of how to think and act within a field. These social agents can constitute individuals, groups, or institutions. The habitus is formed and structured by “one’s past and present circumstances” that can include “family upbringing and educational experiences” (Grenfell, 2008, p. 51). As one obtains various knowledge, skills, habits, and experiences from the physical and social spaces they occupy, their habitus “shapes their present and future practices” (p. 51). The habitus is
systematically ordered. Bourdieu (1989) notes that it is composed of a series of dispositions that shape one’s appreciations, practices, and perceptions. The habitus “reveals itself only with reference to a situation” (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015, p. 57). Therefore, only when there is a relationship to a specific situation can the habitus produce something. While the habitus can appear to be very murky and unclear at times, it intends to “transcend” the various “deep-seated dichotomies” that structure the ways in which people think about the social world (Maton, 2008, p. 49).

Habitus does not act alone but instead works alongside field: the relations that result from one’s disposition or habitus and the position of the field they are a part of all occur with a specific social arena or field. For goths, social media platforms offer them different fields they can be part of. When entering these fields, members carry with them habitus through the form of cultural capital. Habitus expresses itself in various facets of life, such as “aesthetic preferences, cultural practices and choices related to health behaviour” (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014, p. 1097). Within a particular field such as Instagram, subcultural capital can be gained through the clothing one wears and the amount of followers they have. Outside of the field of Instagram, individuals in the field of a local goth nightclub may find subcultural capital being gained through the people one knows, the way one dances, or how long a person has been active within the local scene. Habitus describes how individuals act within a field, which is always relational.

Bourdieu and Chartier (2015) note that the habitus reveals itself when there is a situation where it can produce something. Bourdieu asserts that culture can be viewed as a map and through this analogy, he determines that outsiders have to find their way around an unfamiliar landscape by using a model of all possible routes for navigation. The stakeholders of any one field hold a similar habitus with the perceived rules of the game (Hillis et al., 2013). They are able to navigate the field because they know the different interplay between the “acting, skill sets, and taken-for-granted everyday cultural temperaments, dispositions, embodied tastes, styles, skills, and value” (Hillis et al., 2013, p. 37). The habitus is animated by the logic of things, and it is explicable with regard to “social-cultural conditions and contexts” that it derives from and “functions as an extension” of these “socio-
cultural frameworks and contexts” (Schirato & Roberts, 2019, p. 137). Members of any one field are able to maintain a situated identification because the concept of habitus accounts for the complexity of human interactions throughout day-to-day life (Hillis et al., 2013, p. 49). By understanding that habitus serves to guide how we behave in a social environment, we can then understand the different expectations that digital and in-person goth fields have as well as their relation. Whereas habitus is generally something emergently and horizontally created and regulated by participants within a field, the influence of digital culture and advanced consumer capitalism on goth subculture suggests a hierarchical “pre” construction of habitus mediated through digital influencers.

**Digital Consumer Culture, Influencers, and Consumerism**

Acquiring commodities such as clothing, jewelry, and make-up has become widespread in virtual goth spaces like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Individuals will frequently post about clothing or things they have obtained. Brands often seek out individuals that have amassed a high number of followers and engagement online. In exchange for the brand’s free merchandise, the influencer or YouTuber has to advertise themselves wearing the product and mention the brand in their social media post or their YouTube video where it receives immediate engagement from followers. For many newcomers to the goth subculture, seeing commodities often form their impressions about goth. Many will assume owning specific items like clothing from KILLSTAR satisfies the requirement of being goth. As discussed in the previous chapter, individuals can communicate their goth identity through fashion. The issue with commodities is not that they only encourage people to consume clothing to consider themselves goth but also establish pop goth or temporary identities. These short-lived identities reduce lived experiences, community, and political substance and last long enough to rise and fall in popularity within mainstream culture. Individuals seeking a sense of shared experience and group identity can experience the impact of temporary identities like pop goth within their self-identity, which can derail their findings of a meaningful community. The phenomenon of a pop goth is part of digital consumer culture where the consumption
behaviors of individuals stem directly or indirectly from their interactions with digital technologies such as the Internet and social media (Dey et al., 2020; Edwards & Monnet, 2014).

In the postmodern world, consumerism is driven largely by the expansion of the Internet, technology, and cultural labor. The growth of these industries has allowed for a new commercial reality, one in which the “emergence of global markets for standardized consumer products on a previously unimagined scale of magnitude” (Levitt, 1983, p. 92). This growth has allowed digital consumer culture to operate in realms of culture where it once had no access to, including the media and cultural and digital industries (Fuchs, 2016). The media, cultural and digital industries have experienced a rise in professionalization and industrialization (Jorge et al., 2018). Through these changes, audiences and content creators such as YouTubers, bloggers, and Instagrammers engage themselves in the process of commodification (Jorge et al., 2018).

The rise of digital influencers, or cultural mediators, has created an industry that capitalizes on the globalization of markets and freelance labor. Cultural mediators are contextualized as ordinary users on social media and blogs that have “accumulated a large following through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles” (Abidin, 2016, p. 86). Through their following and online presence, they often monetize their following by embedding advertorials into their content. Digital influencers take on the personality characteristics of a “microcelebrity” in which they behave and communicate as though they have a public persona (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Senft, 2013). These individuals use “strategic intimacy to appeal to followers and regard their audience as fans” (Marwick, 2015, p. 333). Today, influencers are one of the many sought-after forms of advertising to keep up with changing audience demographics.

Influencers have amassed enough cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital that gives them power within social spaces to impact their audience’s consumption behavior. Brands and organizations often seek out highly dependable, credible, and reliable vloggers on YouTube to promote products (Raun, 2018). Because brands operate in a field of mass production, higher sales and levels of economic capital are necessary to obtain revenue. Reputable influencers can advertise
for these brands, which are vital for finding a large number of consumers. Influencers use social media to promote standardized products on a large scale. The products influencers feature in their content respond to pre-existing demands (Raun, 2018). The production of products on a large scale employs marketing techniques to reach targeted audiences and encourage consumption. Individuals seeking out goth YouTube videos or goth social media influencers’ posts will often look for recommendations that meet their pre-existing wants. When an individual receives a product recommendation online, the product is usually a standard piece. A product deemed standard implies that the product is mass-produced to meet the consumers’ demand for the product. Additionally, the consumers attribute value to the product by purchasing it. Make-up such as black eyeliner and black lipstick are two examples of products that meet these requirements.

Cultural mediators often influence the demand for these products. Individuals emulate the consumption patterns of those that have higher status in a field. Those that have a higher status within a particular field drive the consumption patterns of others within that space. Influencers’ audiences seek out the products recommended to them by influencers. They will acquire them in the hopes that by owning these clothing, they will acquire cultural and subcultural capital and solidify their belongingness to the goth subculture. Goth YouTubers like Toxic Tears, Angela Benedict, and It’s Black Friday have attained such high status that they strongly influence their audience’s consumption patterns. Goth YouTubers perform their identity through products they promote and reinforce goth identity and become reference groups for the goth community.

People consume products to fit with others or to stand out (Simmel, 1904). Consuming products to fit in with others is where the notion of seeking to establish identity comes into play. Goth YouTubers often showcase their identity through the products they promote to an audience seemingly composed of individuals that already belong within the community. Notions of things like “status, lifestyles, and standards of living” are generated by “social thinking;” and through the consumption of products, specific groups of individuals begin to adopt these patterns to fit in with the groups they
identify with (Wilk, 2002, p. 7). The role of goth YouTube and goth YouTubers is to reinforce goth identity and to be reference groups for people within the goth community to identify with.

Through the presentation of products through vlogs, goth YouTubers essentially encourage emulation through their association with brands and styles that match the visual aesthetics of the goth subculture. The large quantities of videos featuring clothing hauls and product unboxings found on YouTube can inform and consequently limit people’s understandings of what the goth subculture is about. For outsiders, clothing-based content can internally inform their own experiences and understandings of what goth is. In some cases, individuals might see goth as a culture of consumption based on the content available on YouTube. It’s Black Friday, Toxic Tears, and Angela Benedict are a few examples of goth YouTubers who have moved beyond individual creativity into a “two-sided system of production and consumption” (Goulding & Saren, 2007, p. 236). Placing commodities on a pedestal has changed the way that people view the goth subculture. Outsiders might view products they see in goth YouTube videos as indicators of goth identity and membership in the goth subculture. Consumerism in a capitalist society has affected the degree to which one constructs their identity through the commodities they purchase. Within the goth subculture, the gradual shift from music to fashion has begun to impact the ways in which individuals construct and perform their identities online and offline. Fashion’s ever-increasing presence in goth spaces sparks questions of “how goth one is” and what an authentic goth identity is.

Kellner (1978) notes that fashion, advertising, and media work together to create consumer needs. Female vloggers are often recruited to promote products because they are able to solicit followers to consume by using “confessional and intimate discourses” within their video content that reflect their personal “tastes, thoughts, feelings, and experiences” (Jorge et al., 2018, p. 80). By putting their audience in close proximity with their “private self” (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016), their personal narratives become a tool used to establish a more intimate relationship between content producers, advertisers, and consumers (van Dijck, 2009). The intimate and personal narratives used by influencers make them appear approachable, trustworthy, and reputable, thus establishing them
as reference groups because their audiences perceive them as equal and authentic (Jorge et al., 2018). Followers perceive cultural mediators to have the best intentions when seeking recommendations and are motivated to consume.

As consumer culture grows in tandem with the expansion of capitalism, commodities and consumption are also changing people’s values, needs, and behaviors (Marcuse, 1964). Individuals are motivated to acquire the commodities that cultural mediators consume from what they see on social media. Not only does consumption make people appear to be one-dimensional, but what they see in their commodities is what they become. They “find their soul” in their commodities (Marcuse, 1964, p. 9). Commodities become an extension of one’s identity because people use them to define themselves (Belk, 1988). Influencers make commodities appear to be easily attainable when they frequently post content contain new clothing. However, audience members quickly learn that the clothing and items they see in digital content online is not as easily obtainable as they appear. Audience members that do not have the economic capital to purchase the clothing they want find that this struggle fuels their need to obtain the economic resources to buy the clothing they see. Because many industries cannot give workers higher wages without creating other issues, the consumers’ needs for capital become intensified (Kellner, 1978). For individuals that find satisfaction in their commodities, their needs are defined by the products they find value in, and commodities can make them feel equipped to construct their own identities.

**YouTube as a Hybrid Field of Cultural Production**

YouTube is a popular platform where goths congregate to find content that suits their interests. Through the rise in popularity of videos featuring products, including clothing haul videos, goths are no longer an exception to targeted consumption. Long gone are the days where goths used the Internet to primarily share information about the subculture (Hodkinson, 2002; Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018). Today, large quantities of content are available online for goths, including advertisements for products they might want to purchase. The popularity of marketed content has also appeared in vlogs created by goth YouTubers, where clothing haul and unboxing videos are among the more
widespread formats available. Haul videos amass many views and have contextualized the field of goth YouTube as a field that primarily focuses on material goods over other forms of videos. The rise in popularity of clothing haul videos demonstrates how YouTube acts as a field for cultural production and reveals how goth YouTubers influence their followers.

In the realm of social media, user-generated content (UGC) is described as content made by an ordinary user rather than a corporation (Burgess & Green, 2009). The content often comes in the form of a blog, post, picture, or video (Booth & Matic, 2011). User-generated content and digital labor can be described as fields of cultural production. As a field of cultural production, reputable members of these fields can use their symbolic capital to create digital content that shapes the existing field’s practices, values, and understandings. The symbolic capital held by cultural mediators can be “converted into economic, political, or social capital” (Hillis et al., 2013, p. 48). The actors within that field and actors operating in intersecting fields can convert media capital into other forms of capital. Under this framework, the field of cultural production reproduces a hierarchy of power within each field and is determined by how close a field is to the economic division of power (Benson, 1999). Content producers are often in competition with each other for viewers and will take up new products driving consumption within that field (Benson, 1999).

Alongside being able to account for the different forms of capital that it produces, the field of cultural production allows for the dissemination of information and opinions to occur. Information can influence the public’s understanding of the field of cultural production itself (Bourdieu, 1983; Couldry, 2003; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). YouTube is one example of a field where outsiders might go to learn about the goth subculture. The opinions of cultural mediators on YouTube with more engagement (including viewership, subscribers, and commentary) can be viewed as credible for outsiders who see goth YouTubers as reference groups that have insider knowledge into the subculture based on their popularity. Essentially, individuals with high followings become the “brand’s storytellers and the new brand ambassadors,” creating UGC to attract the particular targeted audience’s attention (Booth & Matic, 2011, p. 185).
As revealed by Booth and Matic (2011), social media allows for individuals who were once seen as “nobodies” to become “somebodies.” Individuals who amass large quantities of capital can occupy spaces that hold strong engagement with audience members. When these individuals team up with brands and companies to advertise products in their video content, the audience members are already engaged with the content and now occupy the role of targeted consumers of the products they are advertising to. Individuals obtain not only a significant number of audience members but their status change from nobody to somebody gives them the power to influence their audience members. Viewers are motivated through product reviews and carefully crafted personal accounts to consume what the YouTuber recommends. Although not every YouTube user comments on the videos they watch, they can still demonstrate how they feel about the video content or comments they come across. The video and comments have a thumbs-up and thumbs-down button that viewers can use. Content creators on YouTube can use a heart reaction indicating they love comments left by viewers along with the thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons. Together, these features give producers of UGC the ability to control and facilitate interaction on their platform.

A large part of the success popular YouTube channels have comes from the interactions on the platform where creators with large followings can connect with their audience members through the comment section. Online audiences are regarded as “selective, self-directed producers as well as consumers” of information (Livingstone, 2003, p. 27). Alongside the entertainment factor, social interaction on YouTube through the form of “commenting” and also through “seeking and providing information” are two ways in which audiences consume information (Khan, 2017, p. 236). Users who choose to view a video and read the text or comments for that video are directly engaging in media consumption (Khan, 2017, p. 238). YouTube comment sections are a distinguishing feature from other forms of social media sites because the community it fosters is “less cohesive and not centered on the individual profile page” (Murthy & Sharma, 2019, p. 194). It is important to recognize the role of the comment section because it provides an understanding of how goth clothing haul videos on YouTube operate as a hybrid field of cultural production.
Bourdieu (1993) argues that fields of cultural production contain distinguishable domains of practice that are characterized by logic, conventions, and rules. Fields are structured by the distributing of “material, symbolic, and social capital” (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019, p. 5). Fields are also shaped by the actions of individuals or agents who internalize the rules of the game in order to stake their positions within the field and assign values to objects. YouTube is considered a hybrid field because it merges “autonomy and commercialism, individuality and collectivism, and hegemony and subversion” (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019, p. 4). The use of participatory culture and the nature of YouTube’s layout develop a hybrid field where participatory culture is depicted as the way people use media production to serve collective and individual interests (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Participatory media platforms like YouTube are conflated with democratization and empowerment because they tend to have more accessibility and less supervision than traditional outlets (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019). As previously mentioned, this is because of the platform’s ability to blend elements of autonomy, commercialism, individuality, collectivism, hegemony, and subversion together (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019). Field theory postulates that a field of cultural production influences position-taking because practitioners can produce and/or assign value to a particular work. For goth YouTubers, their work producing clothing haul videos is a marker of their status and identity that also showcases their habitus or disposition. Third party advertisers obtain access to sites where users generate this type of content and “while no product is sold to the users, the users themselves are sold as a commodity to advertisers” (Fuchs, 2010, p. 191). Social media users are therefore exploitable productive workers (p. 192).

UGC plays a critical role because it gives the consumers the ability to express themselves and interact with others virtually (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Goth YouTubers interact with their audiences through their videos while occasionally responding to their comments or reacting to them. Levina and Arriaga (2014)’s research found that UGC within digital spaces such as Facebook, Wikipedia, and YouTube, allows users to co-create and consume content. These platforms are rooted in creating social dynamics that appeal to audience members, and, through communication, users can amass
capital. Social capital on social media allows for class goods to be used as an element for exclusion (Julien, 2015). Because social capital is network-based (Bourdieu, 1986), it can be obtained through relationships and networks (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Many commentators seek validation from goth YouTubers on videos, and those that obtain a response or reaction accrue social capital.

In digital fields, social capital can act “as class goods that are used as another element in providing exclusion and conserving resources” (Julien, 2015, p. 357). When a follower receives a comment response or a like reaction from a goth YouTuber, they are able to obtain social capital from being recognized by a figure that holds a significant status in the field. Social capital informs identity by signaling belongingness within a particular field, and the more social capital a person has can result in greater commitment and interaction (Ellison et al., 2007). Lack of social capital can create division among people and often leads to the creation of outgroups where members that hold strong ties within a group can exclude outsiders’ access to that group (Portes, 1998). This can make participation in particular groups harder to achieve because participation in specific groups requires a certain degree of conformity (Portes, 1998). Because of this, individual freedom can be restricted to the confines of group norms, and not complying with these norms undermines group cohesion. The more capital one acquires, the more one feels that they are an insider and that feeling of belongingness can translate to how they perform their identity as a goth.

**Identity Performance**

It is important that identity and identity performance are included in this study because they offer a clear direction for understanding the ways in which goth identity is expressed in offline and online fields. Identity performance is described as the “purposeful expression or suppression of behaviours” that are relevant to the norms associated with a salient social identity (Klein et al., 2007, p. 29). Identity performance formed around Goffman's (1959) research on the presentation of self. Goffman (1959) found that individuals present themselves differently based on stages. These stages of identity can change over time. People can negotiate their identity based on experiences as well as through similarity and difference (Lawler, 2008). Gender can often come into play, and, within identity,
people have the ability to use identity performance to express gender. In Butler's (1990) work on performativity, identity and subjectivity are described as an ongoing process. As a process, a person’s identity is constructed through acts such as their words, behavior, and even through their dress. Bourdieu’s work on habitus and field connect to identity performance in online and offline goth fields.

Identity in traditional society is “relatively fixed and stable” and constructed around various identifiers such as “work, gender, ethnicity, religion, and age” (Wheaton, 2000, p. 255). Outside of traditional society and spaces identity can be affected not only by the situation one is in, but also the performances one engages in (Cover, 2012). Kellner (1992) points out that identity has the capacity to be mobile as well as “personal, self-reflexive, and subject to exchange and innovation” (p. 141). Descriptions of postmodern society portray identity as “fragmented, depthless, image–based” that manages to challenge “collective identity and space” yet lacks authentic experiences (Wheaton, 2000, p. 255). Performativity is identity that is produced through “culturally given identity categories or norms” and can be found in interactions that take place online and offline (Cover, 2012, p. 181). Performative identity can occur through different contemporary cultural norms, frameworks, and structures and is shaped by activities and performances that allow individuals to construct identity and their selfhood (Cover, 2012).

**Offline Goth Identity**

Social identity performance offers individuals a “purposeful expression (or suppression) of behaviors relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity” (Klein et al., 2007, p. 30). Goth identity is often assumed to come from one's outward presentation through fashion and aesthetics. With the rise in popularity of goth fashion in mainstream culture, it is very easy for people to claim they hold a goth identity. Outside of social media, there are other ways of establishing identity and membership within the subculture. Music is a big indicator of identity alongside knowledge about the subculture and local scene (Skutlin, 2016, p. 2). Goth communities emerge in areas where events and establishments linked to the subculture take place. Community emerges
through events like goth nightclubs and concerts held in bars, clubs, concert venues, and restaurants (Skutlin, 2016). In these spaces, individuals form networks of friends and acquaintances with whom they can socialize about common interests such as goth music and fashion. Music and knowledge of the subculture and local scene offer individuals a way to distinguish themselves from subcultures such as Gothic Lolita (which uses Victorian-era fashion as a form of resistance to gender norms). Clubbing changed dance culture by providing a space through social events and a range of aesthetics for participants to experiment with and “perform multiple identities” (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2014, p. 603).

Not all goths can perform their identities in everyday settings or works spaces. Goth clubs offer individuals a space to gather to freely perform their identities with other individuals who seek to do the same. Nightclub events “exist within yet outside existing social structures, where alternative norms and values hold sway” and peoples’ “everyday identities become largely invisible in the eyes of others” (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010, p. 225). Thus, the goth nightclub space is integral to performing and maintaining a goth identity. Goth clubs offer individuals space where they can “meet, discuss and have the opportunity to perform their identity” (Karampampas, 2017, p. 210). Karampampas’ (2017) research also points to the role of goth clubs as a place and space for the local scenes’ participants to perform their goth identity. Relationships and connections to other members structure the field of the goth nightclub. Some members hold multiple roles within a club, such as disc-jockeys (DJs), musicians, music producers, bar tenders, artists, and attendees. Socializing allows people to legitimize their social positions and often confirm their legitimacy through their dance and fashion.

Compared to mainstream music and fashion, goth music and fashion are characteristically dark and transgressive. The music is lyrically introspective, with death and macabre subject matter being two common themes (Skutlin, 2016). Music is often what inspires individuals to develop their personal and group identities, and the emotions created by music create and maintain "various performative environments" that individuals interact in (Duffy, 2005, p. 678). The fashion often
emulates the music with people wearing primarily black clothing with dark make-up including black eyeliner and pale foundation. Individuals often contextualize goth fashion through the Victorian vampire look. The look incorporates identifiable clothing pieces such as black top hats, mourning suits, black velvet dresses, corsets, veils, and black gloves. This style is often tantamount with goth fashion; however, it is not the only goth fashion style. Many goths experiment with other forms of styles borrowed from cyberpunk, comics, films, videos games, and other subcultures, including rivethead, punk, and steampunk. Experimentation with sadism and masochism, fetishism, and body modification can also appear in the goth fashion. Some goths dye their hair in different colors, don piercings, and even have tattoos with motifs commonly associated with goth, including “skulls, bats, and demonic imagery” (Skutlin, 2016, p. 1).

Dress and bodily adornment are the most obvious expression of individuality and indicate who the legitimate actors are that “belong” within that scene and space (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2014, p. 608). Different clothing and how one dresses within the space signals anonymity as people often disguise how they appear, which expresses the performance of multiple identities. For some goths, identity can be performed through androgynous fashion at one event and showing up to another event performing their identity in a more feminine style. Wearing different clothing and sporting different looks indicates that attendees of clubs are visually performing their identity. Many goths attending nightclubs will wear elegant clothing such as gowns, corsets, boots, hats, and gloves to demonstrate their subcultural identities. For those that perform their identities through dancing, their clothing will be more for comfort while moving around on the dance floor to facilitate their visual identity performance.

Dancing gives goths the chance to make aesthetic statements by intertwining movement with "style and goth practices" (Karampampas, 2017, p. 210). Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, and Morgan (2014) note that the dance club space promote experimentation with the way that it sets up what is “acceptable and permissible” (p. 604)." The nightclub space can also create opportunities for people to resist, surpass and disrupt the norms of everyday life (Roberts, 2006). Dancing to the same music
in the same site shows that the members have a shared cultural knowledge of the music playing and appreciate the music of the subculture (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2014). One’s dancing allows them to signify their acceptance, belongingness, and commonality with other participants. The site of the dance club itself also offers members a place to visually express their identities.

Through clothing, goths observe how others present themselves through fashion and dance. Clothes can act as signs constructing “a meaning” and carrying “a message” (Hall, 1997, p. 37). Goths can use clothing as signifiers to represent not only their own self-perception and role performance but that of others. Attendees can make interpretations about others through the clothing they wear. Some examples of interpretations people make about others include their experience within the scene, their role attending the club, and even the type of music they listen to. Often, one’s clothing choices and combinations also convey a specific persona to others (Schechner, 2003). Clothing is also selected based on its appropriateness and appeal within certain occasions. For instance, one might choose to dress in comfortable clothing and minimal make-up if they want to dance. If that individual chooses to socialize at a nightclub, they might dress up in more elaborate clothing and wear more make-up. Identity performance in digital spaces also relies on self-presentation through fashion to establish cultural capital.

**Digital Goth Identity Performance**

Blurring the lines between online and offline existence, digital identities are rooted in coded computer systems that consist of “sensors, devices, platforms, and online networks” (Feher, 2019, p. 2). Users hold both a digital identity and an online self. A digital identity refers to a digital data body that the user and various digital systems build. The online self represents the individual or the “me” in social networks and their digital information holds properties of “self-reflection, self-expression, and self-control” (Feher, 2019, p. 2). Goths use the Internet to express themselves and connect with other members of the subculture. Impression management plays a big role in the ways goths personalize their profiles, in addition to how they interact socially (Belk, 2013). A person’s online self is interpreted similarly to that of a brand. How individuals present themselves and how they use digital spaces
shape how others view them (Belk, 2013). Both digital identity and online self tend to overlap, which indicates their ability to draw attention to individuals through social-cultural constructions online. Subcultural capital can be gained by the number of followers people have and their reputation online based on what content their profiles contain (vlogs, images, videos, memes, etc.).

Lingel’s (2017) book on digital countercultures includes a case study about a local punk community in New Brunswick, New Jersey that uses do-it-yourself (DIY) ethics to host shows in their homes run their music labels. The significance of DIY for individuals in these communities is that it offers them a way to maintain control over how cultural production takes place. The emphasis on DIY is tied loosely to Marxist critiques of capitalist systems of labor and consists of practices that are "playful" and allow room for "improvisation and experimentation" where individuals showcase their collective creativity and skills (Lingel, 2017, p. 75). Outside of this case study, DIY values arise in the goth subculture, with many individuals creating their own art through hand-made jewelry, self-produced music, and self-organized events. Because young people dominate the community, the New Brunswick punks use a "range of online platforms and mobile devices in their everyday lives" (p. 78). The use of online platforms is a reality that goths in the contemporary subculture face. The global pandemic of 2020 forced goths to stay home and away from clubbing spaces and concerts. Online fields such as Twitch and Facebook have become havens for goths to attend clubs worldwide from the comfort of their homes. Individuals that did not have access to clubs because of their age or geographic locations can now perform their identities online through clubbing and virtual groups. For goths, social media and online participation at virtual goth events allow community members to perform their identities and gain subcultural capital.

Whittaker’s (2007) article explores the emergence of goth Internet users, which they term Net.goth. Within the Net.goth world, fashion and music are huge topics of discussion among goth Internet users. Whittaker’s (2007) study found that online it appears that it does not matter how much one knows about the subculture. One is able to know much about what the subculture is like, but without the attending events they are simply referred to as lurkers or more specifically “tourists”
According to a study by Malbon (1998), this lack of attending clubs and shows demonstrates the performance of these individuals to be very surface level or what Whittaker (2007) notes is “sensational performance” (p. 39). The concluding finding notes that while cyberspace is useful for offering education and community, it “does not replace the material world, but supplements it” (Whittaker, 2007, p. 44).

Hodkinson’s (2002) research generates a similar conclusion to Whittaker’s (2007) research. Hodkinson (2002) found that goths were some of the earlier adopters of Internet and “keyword searches were an efficient way of guiding existing goth participants” to finding information about the subculture online (p. 177). In addition to keyword searches, hypertext links enhanced goth users’ “ability to navigate precisely between subcultural websites” although it prevented non-participants from accessing goth websites and content (p. 177). While this information was harder for people outside of the subculture to access, Hodkinson (2002) noted that “the vast majority of links to goth sites were located on other goth sites” and that meant that these sites collectively formed a “specialist and relatively autonomous sub-network” (p. 177).

In Spracklen and Spracklen’s (2018) research, the researchers expand on other authors who have studied goth to explore the contemporary goth subculture. They further note that by the 2010s, Internet use was growing worldwide, and transnational corporations established a dominating presence online. Companies like Amazon, Google, and Facebook worked closely together with telecommunications and computing industry to develop new hardware and software (p. 125). The Internet became a space for people such as goths to find a place where they felt like they belong and interact with others like them, especially for individuals who consider themselves alternative, but lived far away from events and clubs (Castells, 1996). Spracklen and Spracklen (2018) note that the utopia of the Internet was a space for Habermasian communicative rationality via its ability to preserve, nurture, and expand what is visible through the intertwining of capitalism and consumerism with capital and the field of goth.
Identity, Capital, and Habitus

For many who join digital goth fields, identity involves acceptance from other members in these fields. The "ostentation of status, income, and wealth" can play a role in conspicuous consumption as well as anything symbolically "related to the consumer’s identity" (Bronner & Hoog, 2019, p. 431). Thus, items that appear to goth aesthetic are often consumed by those that can afford to purchase them. The Internet has also expanded the different modes of sharing “previously intangible and fleeting experiences to others in real time” (Bronner & Hoog, 2019, p. 431). Communication can occur in different modes from Facebook updates to photos and videos. Once those photos and videos are available online people have access to them.

Part of what makes consumption more visible is that people have more opportunities to generate content about their purchases. People are happy to purchase things because the items they obtain allow them to “communicate something about themselves to other people” (Bronner & Hoog, 2019, p. 432). They receive an extrinsic motivation that allows them to signal others their status and cultural taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Their choice to purchase things is rooted in the idea of Veblen (1899), who described consumer choices as a combination of what the products offers a person individually and what that person can signal to their social environment.

Tying back to what Hillis et al. (2013) noted about power dynamics, digital social fields reinforce status through the types of content people consume. Often lower-status members seek recognition from high-status members and consume their content to obtain capital from those with a high-status within the field. Essentially, within specific fields, there are different sets of rules for obtaining status. For many online goth fields, leisure occurs through the consumption of physical and tangible objects and the increased ability to obtain knowledge from what they see and hear from others.

Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) describe social identity performance as the “purposeful expression (or suppression) of behaviors relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity” (p. 30). They argue that social identity performance can fulfill two functions. The
first function is identity consolidation which means that a person can affirm, conform, or strengthen their individual or group identity. The second function is the mobilization function that can persuade people to adopt “specific behaviors” (p. 28). These functions of social identity performance require that identity be practiced by the individual and recognized by others for it to remain sustained. Music and space are important to goth clubs because they allow individuals to “create a sense of connection to that place” (Duffy, 2005, p. 677). Within these spaces, individuals are free to develop their personal and group identities. The emotions created by music create and maintain “various performative environments” that individuals interact in (Duffy, 2005, p. 678). Individuals achieve a sense of community through socializing with other attendees while also being allowed to perform their identities in a space where a shared passion for the music connects individuals.

There are two types of social capital evident at goth nights clubs: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital applies to tight-knit local groups because it increases solidarity among members. Bridging social capital refers to the “social advantages that can offer from connections made across networks” (Grazian, 2009, p. 915). Clubbing functions to allow individuals and groups to bond with each other through the community fostered around dancing and socializing. Being within the goth nightclub space allows individuals to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, socialize with others that hold shared values and interests, and provides a space where people can unwind and be themselves. While bridging is less common at goth events, event promoters, DJs, and musicians use the nightclub space to meet other individuals involved in running the clubs. Cultural capital is often gained simply by being present at events and being recognized by other community members. Occasionally individuals with standout dance styles or fashion may garner cultural capital within the nightclub space. However, because goth nightclubs are community-oriented spaces, being part of one’s scene and subculture by attending the events, socializing, or dancing allows individuals to gain cultural capital. Therefore, considering how the different types of capital inform the goth habitus, it is important to understand that membership within a subculture entails that identity is discursive and subjective.
The identities of individuals are fragmented into multiple, distinct points (Jameson, 1991). Identity for goths comes from the connection between one’s self-identity, their group identity, and subcultural ideology (Grossberg, 1992; Sweet, 2005). Resulting from the intersection of self and group identities with subcultural identity is subcultural self. Subcultural self is described as a “self that emerges in a confluence of individual and collective subjectivities” (Sweet, 2005, p. 252). An individual’s subcultural self can also implicate other identities, which means that individuals hold their own agency where they can perform individual and collective identities discursively and non-discursively. This illustrates that one’s individual identity is different from that of another person. Sweet (2005) references an individual whose subcultural self encompasses a passion for the goth subculture alongside their love of computer information systems and biology. Neither interest hold greater or less weight than the other in terms of importance. Instead, these interests demonstrate that individuals have their own unique subjectivities that set them apart from others in the goth subculture.

Identity is subjective to the individual experience and performance within a field. When a newcomer enters a new field and become “caught up in it” they eventually become “bound to it” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 143). Because different fields have different dispositions, it is important to highlight the significance of offline and real-life goth fields to understand what the goth habitus is. For many digital goth subcultural fields, subcultural capital is linked to a person's body and manifests in the way they dress. The habitus enables us to describe the influences of the social world and the agency of the individuals regarding what they wear (Entwistle, 2000, p. 37). The body is both a cultural product of the social world and physically and phenomenologically the individual creation (Gimlin, 2007; Goffman, 1971). How one dresses and presents themselves online can signal belongingness with a certain group. Dress and presentation can also differentiate between individuals with more subcultural capital and those with less subcultural capital. As cultural mediators, goth YouTubers can influence people to identify with the commodities they consume, such as the clothing they wear on their bodies or present in their user-generated content.
Habitus “distinguish a subculture from the who as well as from the constitutive parts of this whole” (Fauquet-Alekhine, 2016, p. 11). With that said, authenticity of identity and the type of identity performance in virtual and real-life spaces differ. Online, responding to others’ content and dictating one’s own personal interests within a social field allows individuals to generate their own content (Hermida, 2010). That content can give the individual subcultural capital among other members of the same field. How an individual performs their identity signifies their connection to that field. Individuals that amass a lot of subcultural capital become cultural mediators for those new agents that enter the field to reference. Goth YouTubers with many subscribers and comment interaction have enough subcultural capital and recognition from other members of the subculture which enables them to become reference points offering knowledge about the goth subculture for newcomers to the field. Goth YouTubers perform their identities through the way that they dress and the clothing they consume. On the contrary, identity performance for goths in clubs unfolds through social interactions, dancing, and music. While these acts might connect with consumption, the focus is not strictly on the accumulation of goods.

**Implications for This Study**

The question of how digital content for goths has changed is evident in the way that Internet use among goths has changed. As evidenced by Hodkinson (2002) and Spracklen and Spracklen (2018), the early use of the Internet by goths was primarily for networking. Hodkinson (2002) notes that online networking among members of the goth subculture occurred to get people interested in the music to join. In the mid-2010s, goths began to gain popularity on YouTube through the UGC content they put out. One example of a goth YouTuber who has gained notoriety for their UGC is Toxic Tears. Toxic Tears began her YouTube career around 2010 filming short vlogs before gaining popularity with the release of a video titled “What NOT to say to Goth Girls | Toxic Tears” released in 2014. After her first viral video release, she also began incorporating haul and unboxing videos in her YouTube content, leading to a noticeable change in the UGC she has put out.
Like Toxic Tears, other goth YouTubers including It’s Black Friday and Angela Benedict have garnered the attention of members of online goth subcultures. Each has amassed enough social and subcultural capital to continue gaining subscribers on YouTube and simultaneously have become reference groups for people seeking information about the goth subculture and goth fashion. Their popularity on YouTube has granted them social capital through their interactions and informal mentoring of followers through social media, vlogs, and live streams. They respond to their followers’ comments and share personal experiences and thoughts. In addition to the social capital that they hold from interactions with followers they also have subcultural capital amassed from other video content involving their experiences within the goth subculture.

In addition to social capital, subcultures like the goth subculture hold a specific form of capital known as subcultural capital that members actively seek to obtain. Thornton (1995) deems subcultural capital as distinct from capital because it lays out what is not part of that subculture and what is disliked by a subculture. According to Jensen (2006), the relationship between a subculture and its surroundings is subcultural capital. Subcultural capital for goths is anything that members of the subculture appreciate. Simultaneously, this relationship situates subcultures in terms of “class, gender, ethnicity and race” (p. 257). Thornton (1995) makes the argument that reactions of moral panics by upper- and middle-class individuals towards subcultures have died down. Adding on to this, she believes that subcultural capital is not as class bound as cultural capital.

Therefore, subcultural capital can be attained by anyone within a subculture. People can obtain subcultural capital through comments, content creation, and interactions with members with higher statuses and large followings on YouTube. In some cases, individuals’ interactions with goth YouTubers during live streams have also granted people subcultural capital. Many goth content creators will use hashtags such as #goth or #alternative to promote their content to their intended audiences. When seeking out the goth subculture on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, a large quantity of the content is generated by females posting similar UGC involving goth fashion and beauty. While many of these individuals will post UGC pertaining to goth fashion and
beauty, only a small portion of these individuals generate the most social and subculture capital for their content.

Karampampas (2019) states social media allows viewers to feel connected to people they interact with online. Online interactions can create a “sense of intimacy” because viewers find similarities with the goth YouTubers they watch and form the impression that the goth YouTubers are approachable and people they can seek advice from (p. 999). Goth YouTubers' approachability can stem from the social and subcultural capital they possess. Having these forms of capital can pave the way for brands to capitalize on using influential or popular content creators like goth YouTubers to sell products to their audiences. Goth YouTubers are often given free clothing and items from these brands in exchange for “fulfilling the interests of the culture industries and the media feeds them,” (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018, p. 170). With more fashion based UGC targeting goths on the Internet, this has paved way for the wider accessibility of goth fashion in the mainstream (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2018). Given that brands and companies are constantly at competition with one another, that competitiveness can get translated into online goth communities through gatekeeping. In terms of thinking about commodification, capital, and how goth identity is constructed, performed, and maintained in physical and digital spaces I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: How do goths perform their identities online and in-person?

RQ2: How is the goth subculture being transformed by commodification?

RQ3: How does conversion among different forms of capital correspond to an apparent commodification of goth subculture and what does that mean for its marginality and resistive potential?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

For this study I used critical theory, cultural studies, and qualitative research methods to make sense of the construction and performance of goth identity and habitus in virtual and real-life contexts. The purpose of the case studies and interviews is to understand how goth identities are performed, how the subculture is being transformed by commodification, and the role of capital in correspondence to commodification, marginality, and resistance. This study used parts of critical qualitative inquiry to align with the intentions of the research. In this chapter, the following is presented: (1) the research traditions, methods, and artifacts; (2) cultural studies; (3) rationale for the case studies, (4) qualitative research; (5) participants; (6) procedure; (7) semi-structured qualitative interviews; (8) informal observations; (9) researcher role and lastly, (10) data analysis.

Research Traditions, Methods, and Artifacts

The research uses cultural studies and qualitative lenses to understand how subcultures function as well as how identity is constructed, affirmed, and maintained in virtual and offline contexts. I chose to use a case study of three videos and ten semi-structured interviews as my tools for analysis. The case study features an in-depth analysis of three goth clothing haul videos featuring three prominent goth YouTubers. For the semi-structured interviews, I interviewed ten active members of the Southern California goth scene. While I primarily selected the case study and semi-structured interviews because they offered a way to investigate the research questions posed, they also offer a basis for understanding how power creates hierarchies and status differences within the goth subculture. This chapter further outlines the rationale for the methods and artifacts chosen.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies holds an important role in this study because it uses critical theory to explain the role of power relations within social groups, how they operate in meaning-making, and how power relations get used in the world. Cultural studies allowed me to draw from different research areas to make sense of the artifacts and interviews I have selected for analysis. The research areas include
subcultural theory, goth studies, identity performance, and Bourdieu’s theory of field, capital, and habitus. The use of cultural studies and critical theory allows researchers to engage with the concrete in ways that allow for rearticulation and reinterpretation (Slack, 1996). Cultural studies guide part of this research because it examines how culture is used and transformed by social groups including subcultures (Miller, 2001). Cultural studies offer a foundation for understanding how goth YouTubers and Southern California goth scene members articulate, interpret, and perform their own identities. Cultural studies also explains the role of power in making sense of one’s identity.

Power in cultural studies offers a basis for understanding how individual identities within subcultures are shaped. Bourdieu (1985) described social groups as part of a highly complex and multi-dimensional space, which can pave the way for hierarchies to emerge. Power often comes in the form of capital for members of subcultures. By recognizing that power is tied to capital, we can begin to recognize how it can lead to the formation of hierarchies and status differences. For offline spaces, social and cultural capital function to indicate belongingness and generate a sense of community. The opposite occurs in virtual spaces where power is granted to people who have obtained cultural, social, and sometimes economic capital to achieve recognizability and status. In a post-industrial world where consumers are encouraged to be individuals, power through capital suggests classification and difference (Thornton, 1995). Status difference demonstrates that there is an existing dichotomy between identity and capital. Case studies thus become useful tools to demonstrate how this dichotomy pans out in the field of goth YouTube.

Rationale for Case Studies

Case studies are “in-depth contextual analyses of one or a few instances of a naturalistic phenomenon,” such as a person, event, location, or decision (Tracy, 2020). Because case studies allow researchers to draw on multiple qualitative traditions (Stake, 2010), they granted me as a researcher the flexibility to types of networks and interactions present in the field of goth YouTube. Case studies permit researchers to carry out a “contextualized comparison” (George & Bennett, 2005). In a contextualized comparison I searched for analytically equivalent phenomena while
accounting for the different terms and contexts present (George & Bennett, 2005). Stake (2000) also points out that the case study is not a methodological choice, but rather a choice of what needs to be studied. Case studies represent a method of learning about a complex subject through description and contextual analysis (Yin, 1989).

I achieved thick description for these case studies by providing a detailed analysis about the people, processes, and activities in the videos (Bochner, 2000). Being detailed with the analysis helps to understand the explicitly articulated meanings present within the video. Thick description helped make the strange seem more familiar and allowed me to draw direct connections between the content and my research. Thick description also allowed me to elaborate on the tacit knowledge or the implicit and unarticulated meanings presented below the surface (Tracy, 2020). Tacit knowledge from the contextual analysis allows me to highlight the issues that are harder to grasp (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Reaching tacit knowledge required that I dig below the surface to uncover what is not stated explicitly and seek out the implicit details of how goth YouTubers express goth identity and the role of capital in shaping and affirming goth identity.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research methods are vital for this study because they borrow and interweave viewpoints and multiple perspectives (Tracy, 2020). For this study I used semi-structured interviews to obtain the personal accounts and experiences of my participants. I developed semi-structured interviews to allow participants to share their own stories. Allowing participants to share their stories offered “a means of understanding experience as lived and told” (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007, p. 459). Narratives can help researchers carefully capture the world of participants through “careful transcription” and analysis of the interviews and other “field materials” (Denzin, 1997, p. 4). This approach allows participants’ complex accounts and experiences to provide an opportunity for understanding how people “create a reality that they, in turn, act upon” (Tracy, 2020, p. 69). It is also important to note that narrative within the semi-structured interviews lets the researcher to ask questions that elicit stories and position themselves in a way that allows the stories the participants
share to be analyzed effectively (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). By having the liberty to tell their
stories, semi-structured interviews let the interview participants collaborate with the researcher in the
study, thus allowing for greater understanding of Southern California's goth scene.

**Participants**

I interviewed 10 (n = 10) active members of various Southern California goth nightclubs for this
study. I used convenience, purposeful, and snowball sampling to find participants. Convenience and
purposeful sampling methods were implemented at a limited capacity and socially distanced goth
nightclub event in Southern California where a local DJ and close friend introduced me to several
participants. At this event, I spoke with some of the participants about the study using a verbal script
to describe the study (see Appendix B for verbal script). Snowball sampling also occurred when one
of the goth club attendees I spoke with referred me to another individual who later joined the study.
One participant also shared a message on a closed Facebook group about the study that resulted in
two other participants taking part in the study. I also reached out to all my participants virtually (see
Appendix C for the virtual script) to set up interviews and make sure they could take part in the study.

The interviewees that were part of this study fit the parameters of the study’s goals. The goals
were to find individuals that consider themselves to be goth (self-identified) and actively attend
Southern California goth nightclubs. By this I mean that they attend goth nightclubs as often as they
can. All of the interviewees meet the goals of this project and are currently active members of the
Southern California goth club scene. Many of them also partake in creative self-expression through
their fashion and aesthetics when they go clubbing. Participants’ ages ranged from 21-64 years of
age. 50% of the participants identified as Caucasian. 30% of the participants identified as African
American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic. The remaining 20% of participants identified as Multi-
Racial. Of the ten participants interviewed, four identified as female (N = 4) and six identified as male
(N = 6).

Before the pandemic, the candidates attended various events around Southern California, and
some even contribute to the goth scene as DJs or musicians. These candidates were ideal for the
interviews because they each hold different roles in the scene, with some even holding multiple roles. By using convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants, I was able to find a sample that is not only diverse—attesting to the rich racial and ethnic backgrounds that members of the Southern California goth scene hold, but also knowledgeable and willing to share the years of experience they have with clubbing and being part of the goth subculture. Each individual approached goth nightclubbing and aesthetics in different ways. Some may choose to dress up to socialize or drink or smoke, while others attend the club to dance. For these reasons, interviewing these participants provided a lot of insight in goth identity performance at goth nightclubs based on the roles of the participants and their own observations.

**Procedure**

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on October 9, 2020 (see Appendix D for IRB approval). All interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. I also used pseudonyms to replace any information in the interviews that could jeopardize the confidentiality of other individuals, places, or events. I stored all confidential information from the informed consent and demographic questionnaire forms and audio recordings for these interviews in a password-protected computer. Participants received a consent form and a demographic questionnaire prior to the start of the interview. After they have signed the forms, I interviewed them virtually or by phone call.

Because of the statewide restrictions during the pandemic, I mainly used purposeful and convenience sampling to find participants. I started by asking people I knew and eventually received a referral for another participant through snowball sampling. Keeping in mind the guidelines set by the CDC and IRB during the pandemic, I reached out to my participants virtually and scheduled one-on-one interviews over Zoom, Skype, and phone call. In each of the interviews, I made sure that participants were comfortable sharing their own experiences and had them talk about their own observations of identity performance at goth clubs. Their accounts touched on several notable topics, including music, dancing, and fashion. The participants were required to complete a research study
consent form (see Appendix E) and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) before participating in the interviews.

**Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews**

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews for the qualitative portion of the study. Each interview took around 40-60 minutes to complete. Seven interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom, two were over phone call, and one was via Skype. If the participant felt comfortable enough with the collaborative and interactive interview stance, they would share personal experiences or even discuss their opinions and thoughts on what they have observed and experienced attending goth night club events. Participants responded to questions involving various topics about their personal experiences including joining and partaking in the scene, goth fashion/aesthetics, identity, and goth nightclubbing. The questions I asked my interviewees primarily focused on addressing RQ1 and RQ3, with a few questions focusing on RQ2.

Under the RQ1 category, I varied my questions to inquire about online and offline identity performance. Offline questions included asking participants questions such as “what makes fashion and outward aesthetics personal to you?” and “how does clubbing allow you to express your identity as a goth?” Not all of the interviewees described themselves as very active online, though most of them described themselves as somewhat active in some online goth communities. I asked the participants a couple of questions about online goth communities and the potential for people to foster a goth identity online. This question fell under RQ1 and RQ3, where participants discussed how online and offline identity performance differ and pondered how online goth communities can offer resistive potential. RQ2 opened up a discussion about outsiders and how they perceived the goth subculture. The accounts participants shared about outsiders occurred when I asked open-ended questions about the subculture and how outsiders might view the subculture. The questions I asked were “might goth fashion be something that the subculture is known for the most by those who aren’t part of the subculture?” as well as “some outsiders view goth as a fashion, mindset, or lifestyle; what do you make of this?” From these questions, the interviewees were able to reflect on their own
knowledge, observations, and experiences which helped generate strong findings for the research questions posed.

Each interview opened with a question asking participants about how they were introduced to the goth scene (refer to Appendix G for the complete list of semi-structured interview questions and the potential follow-up questions I included). I also asked questions such as “What type of things interested you or piqued your curiosity about goth and/or the goth subculture?” and “Was goth fashion or outward aesthetics something that immediately got you interested in goth?” After asking them about their interests, I asked some questions about goth fashion and outward aesthetics. Questions I asked the participants included “How would you describe your personal style in terms of aesthetics and fashion?” and “What are some aesthetics that you have seen at goth nights and events in Southern California?” Any follow–up questions I asked would depend on their response to the previous question.

The interviews also granted me the opportunity to inquire about online goth communities and to ask participants if they themselves participate in online communities. I followed up by asking them if they think online communities have the potential to create lasting communities and foster goth identity. By asking them these types of questions I was able to inquire not only about their own experiences with the goth nightclub scene to address RQ1, but I also learned about their own thoughts regarding online goth communities that would offer some strong findings that support RQ2 and RQ3.

As a researcher I implemented the deliberate naïveté stance to drop “any presuppositions and judgment while maintaining openness to new and unexpected findings” (Tracy, 2020, p. 160). This is critical because it gave the interviewees a space where they could feel comfortable sharing their personal thoughts, feelings, and overall experiences in the subculture. Additionally, the interview was a mix of ethnographic and narrative interview types. A flexible interview structure allowed for easier ability to establish rapport and ensured that participants were comfortable sharing information about their personal experiences. I used one-on-one interviews to draw connections between myself as the
researcher, the interviewees, and the narratives they shared in the interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to “listen,” “reflect,” and “adapt” to the nature of the interview (Tracy, 2020, p. 158). While most of the prepared questions were answered by the participants, the ability to ask follow-up questions allowed the interviewees to express what they believe is "most interesting and important" and foster a meaningful conversation (p. 158).

Regarding identity, participants would be asked to describe what they interpreted goth identity to consist of. In addition to this, the interviewees were asked about their thoughts on Paul Hodkinson’s (2002) markers of goth identity. The questions would then shift towards the various activities exhibited at the goth club—particularly focusing on the dancing and socializing that take place. Participants were comfortable enough to talk about themselves and other people they have seen at various goth nightclubs. The questions about what the participants observed at goth clubs and what they do at goth nightclubs connect to the research questions because they paved a way for participants to describe how identity is performed at goth nightclubs through dancing and socializing.

Semi-structured were the best fit for this study as they offered the benefits of capturing detailed accounts about the field of goth nightclubs in Southern California. One of the biggest benefits that this interview offered was time flexibility. Semi-structured interviews can be completed between “30 minutes to several hours,” which granted me enough time to ask not only the set questions that I had, but also emerging questions that came up during the interviews. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Providing the interviewees enough time to respond to the questions was vital because personal experiences and stories require time to be accounted for in detail. Using the semi-structure interview format allowed participants to think about their responses and dive deeper into their respective accounts and understandings of Southern California goth nightclubs.

The personal accounts and experiences that participants shared allowed for more “emic, emergent understandings to blossom” meaning that findings come directly from the field (Tracy, 2020, p. 158). The knowledge the interviewees shared grants firsthand accounts and understanding regarding how members of the Southern California goth scene make sense of goth nightclubs and
identity. The perspectives and sense-making that the insiders took part in during the interviews grants outsiders an opportunity to learn about the goth subculture. Outsiders can learn from the accounts shared by participants in the Southern California goth scene to generate empathy and sensitivity when learning about goth identity. As the interviewer, I not only learned what participants considered to be important regarding the goth subculture, but the responses led to meaningful discussions about the role of community and how people make sense of identity within the context of goth nightclubbing.

**Informal Observations**

For this study, I conducted informal observations at four socially distanced and limited capacity goth night events at a Southern California club before conducting the interviews. These events were limited to a small number of attendees. They required that all attendees social distance, wear masks, and stand six feet apart according to the COVID guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state of California. From these events, I collected four pages of informal notes from a total of two hours and twelve minutes of informal observations. I then typed up these informal notes into formal field notes that were six pages in length. At these events, I observed the dancing and socializing that took place and took part in dancing and socializing with other attendees. These activities are significant in helping to contextualize what goth nightclubbing is like in Southern California.

The goth nightclub events I went to in Southern California were held in different venue locations. Both venues are inside reasonably large buildings, one of which was a two-story building. The first venue hosted their events outside. The setup included a section of pavement the event coordinators transformed into a dance floor. Several feet away from the dance floor would be a table with the DJ equipment and several speakers spread out nearby the dance floor area. Outdoors the lighting was dim and mainly consisted of the distant streetlights and lights on the side of the building. The other venue space held their events indoors. There was minimal lighting in this space, most of which came from the black lights hanging from the ceiling. The dance floor covered half of the room,
and nearby it was a sound booth where the DJ was playing music. The ambiance of the dark dance club spaces fit with the music playing – much of it being a series of darkwave, goth rock, ethereal wave, new wave, synthpop, industrial, and electronic body music (EBM). The music and event settings played a factor in influencing the socialization at these events.

At one of the events, there was a smoking patio available with spaced out chairs for people who wanted to sit down and talk. Some 80s music was being played by a DJ, and there was not a lot of dancing happening, though there were a few people outside slightly swaying to the music. Much of the conversations that I took part in at all of these events entailed discussions about the impact that COVID was having on goth nightclubs. While many of these conversations were amongst my immediate friend group, I had the chance to speak with a DJ that was attended one of these events about the difficulties of switching from in-person to online goth nightclub events. From these conversations, a lot of attendees talked about their decision to attend these limited in-person events, and a common reason was they missed seeing their friends. It was clear that despite many of these attendees coming from different places within the state, they found goth clubs to be a community for them. Community through socializing and being around other people was a big factor for these individuals. Dancing also played a role in motivating people to attend these small and scattered gatherings.

While inside, I did much of my observations of the dancing from the dance floor itself. I observed that any socializing that took place was minimal and often by individuals who would take breaks dancing in between songs. One of the attendees I spoke with pointed out shadow dancing to me. Shadow dancing is a performative style of dancing that is similar to artists using themselves as the art piece. Shadow dancers essentially use themselves and their movement as a form of visual performance art. I observed several examples of shadow dancing at these events. One individual used their floor-length face veil as part of their dance routine. One individual used their floor-length face veil as part of their dance routine. This individual was moving slowly when the music tempo decreased and when the music beats slowed down even more, they crouched down on the floor, and
they moved the veil with their arms to give off an impression that the veil was getting up off the floor. The style of dancing would change depending on the type of music that was playing.

When the DJ was playing goth music, people were more liberal with their body movements. Each person on the dance floor kept themselves at a distance and would use their bodies to include different arm movements, spinning, twirling, and even different styles of swaying. As the music changed from darkwave to industrial and synthpop music, people’s graceful movements adjusted to the music, and people began industrial dancing. Industrial dancing included greater fluidity and use of arm movements, head-bopping, and stomping. Some dancers incorporated other forms of movement that showcased the creativity and autonomy one has on the dance floor at these events. One attendee that stood out to me as I watched the dance floor was using her wide-brimmed hat as part of her routine. She glided across the dance floor, moving her hat around with her as she spun around in circles. Her heavy black gown trailed behind her, making her appear like a dark spirit floating around on the dance floor. In some cases, I observed other forms of dancing that are not necessarily goth on the dance floors. One individual brought rave lights and used them in their arm movements during the industrial songs. Two individuals repeatedly swayed back and forth for both goth and industrial music. Some dancers would include graceful, high kicks in their dancing, and others that would consist of randomized movements such as holding their drinks while dancing or stretching their arms wide and twirling around in lazy circles on the dance floor. There were also different styles of goth fashion that I observed at these events.

At the first event I attended, I observed that people wore more casual clothing. The DJ hosting the event wore heavy black clothing, including a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and boots. In addition to the all-black attire, they wore a metallic silver face mask which stood out as a stark contrast to their clothing. One of the attendees I spoke with at the event wore a tank top and shorts and had her hair up in a messy bun which gave me the impression that she was there to dance, which she later confirmed in our brief conversation. I observed that a lot of the fashion worn at that event was casual, including customized face masks, Tripp pants (a form of boot cut pants with strap, zippers, and
sometimes chains attached to them), skirts, fishnet stockings, tank tops, boots, and jeans. All-black was a common theme with many attendees’ fashion and eye make-up. I observed that the individuals attending were wearing black eyeliner and dark eye shadow shades. While black was the color of choice for the event, some individuals wore other colors, including white, grey, and red. At the in-door events, the fashion styles were varied. Many people wore casual and comfortable clothing. However, more people showed up wearing more make-up and dressed in goth and rivethead fashion styles.

Fashion on and off the dance floor mixed goth and rivethead style of fashion including band shirts, tank tops, jeans, corsets, skirts, loose-fitting dresses, stockings, gloves, hats, and veils. Make-up was dramatic for members on and off the dance floor, although off the dance floor, people tended to wear more make-up. Victorian goth fashion was present at the in-door goth events, and a few individuals showed up wearing things like heavy black dresses, corsets, coats, high neck blouses, and silver jewelry. The woman I saw wearing a heavy black, Victorian-style gown while using her wide brim hat to dance was the only individual wearing this style that I observed dancing. The other individuals that wore Victorian fashion were on the opposite side of the dance floor socializing. We can draw a connection between the fashion worn at goth clubs, socializing, dancing, and music from these observations.

From these informal observations, fashion appeared to demonstrate whether one was attending goth clubs to socialize, dance, or do both. Those that were wearing comfortable, casual clothing tended to go back and forth between dancing and socializing. Those wearing Victorian fashion or other forms of heavier clothing tended to gravitate towards socializing; the exception was the individual dancing with her hat. Not only do these informal observations serve to as supplements for some of the findings that emerged from the interviews, but they also add context in understanding what it is like attending a goth night event. Informal observations allowed me as the researcher to actively immerse myself in the context I am studying. Being present at a Southern California goth nightclub granted me the chance to observe the types of dancing, socializing, music, and fashion
worn by attendees that helped provide some more context to the phenomena and findings from the interviews.

**Researcher Role as Self-Reflexive**

As an active member of the Southern California goth scene, I was able to gain access to my participants through the various connections I had established with some members in the Southern California goth nightclub scene well before the study. My interest in studying the goth subculture began while attending local clubs and learning more about how people used fashion and outward aesthetics at goth nightclubs to make sense of their own identities. Because I am a participant in the scene, I acknowledge that some bias comes from my own experiences and opinions in the study. However, throughout the study, I was self-reflexive as I approached and conducted this study keeping in mind that my own “background, values, and beliefs” can influence the way that I “approach and conduct research” (Tracy, 2020, p. 3). To avoid this, I set aside my own beliefs and values regarding my own experiences. I approached each interview with an open mindset to allocate space for my participants to share their experiences. I also took care in how I phrased the questions. Many of the questions were open-ended so that the participants could share their perspectives.

It was crucial to acknowledge and be aware of my own subjectivity in this study because, as the researcher, I served as a “research instrument – absorbing sifting through, and interpreting the world through observation, participation, and interviewing” (Tracy, 2020, p. 3). Being self-reflexive means that as the researcher, I was mindful of my own experiences and viewpoints and understood that they could potentially drive the interviews to illicit bias responses. Because my perspectives can get in the way of the interviewees sharing their own experiences, I sought to make “the familiar strange and the strange familiar strange” through the questions I asked (Tracy, 2020, p. 299). During the interviews, I asked questions that would offer the interviewees a chance to explain what goth nightclubbing is like in their own words.

I actively adopted a theory of knowledge that my guiding assumptions need to be reconsidered in terms of their value and consequence throughout the study (Carter & Little, 2007; Tracy, 2020).
What I mean by this is that I considered how my own responses can affect the interviews. My responses can shape the way the interviews go and if I spend time sharing my own experiences that could take up interview time and lead to participants mirroring my perspectives in their responses. This could ultimately deter the interview from its goal of obtaining different perspectives and make it too conversational. If the interview is too conversational, it could make explaining phenomena within the goth nightclub scene difficult. Through self-reflexivity, I can take a step back from putting forth my own interpretations and allow participants to "signal agreement, suggest changes, disagree about the interpretation, supplement information, or clarify obscure points" (Pessoa et al., 2019, p. 3). Therefore, by making the familiar strange through the types of questions I asked, participants can pause and consider or even reconsider their understandings of goth nightclubbing and describe them from an angle that outsiders can also understand. For outsiders, making the strange familiar helps them to understand what it is like attending a goth nightclub.

**Data Analysis**

The data immersion segment of this study consisted of comparing and contrasting the informal observations I made at several socially distanced and limited capacity Southern California goth events with the interview data. From these events, I gathered enough information to analyze and connect to my findings from the interviews. All of the interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed both by hand and using the phone app Otter.ai. After the interviews were transcribed, the data was coded. Coding “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). Coding is also described as an "active process of identifying data" belonging to or representing a particular type of phenomenon (Tracy, 2020, p. 213). For this study, the data from the findings were organized by primary-cycle and secondary-cycle codes.

Primary codes began with an examination of the data and assigning key words or phrases that captured the essence of the data (Tracy, 2020). Secondary-cycle coding goes beyond these types of codes by allowing researchers to “organize, synthesize, and categorize them into interpretive
concepts" (Tracy, 2020, p. 225). The ongoing coding established a strong set of findings that address the research questions and provide insight into emerging findings that future research can explore. The coding process took place in an open word document where I analyzed the transcripts and organized the codes using a “constant comparative method” that Tracy (2020) mentions to create and modify codes or definitions (p. 220). I was able to find codes that many participants referred to and appeared within each interview. All of the participants were able to observe the different types of music, dancing, and fashion that they witnessed clubbing, and how they performed their own identities within goth nightclub spaces through these elements.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY OF GOTH YOUTUBE CLOTHING HAUL VIDEOS

Goth YouTube fashion vlogs demonstrate just how far the partnership between YouTube and retail advertising has come and how they made their way into various online goth fields. As pointed out in previous studies by Spracklen and Spracklen (2014) and Goulding and Saren (2007), the goth subculture is being commodified and one of the ways in which it is commodified is through retail. Hebdige (1979) observes that as subcultures generate new looks and sounds, corporations co-opt the new trends by making them commercially available for individuals outside of the subculture and feeding them back into the subculture that they have robbed. In addition to continuing an ever-present cycle of consumption through content creation, the field of goth YouTube has amassed a variety of cultural mediators, many of which generate content about fashion and beauty. This chapter seeks to explore how shifting consumer demographics shape the way that advertisers infiltrate various online social fields to generate a drive for consumption among their targeted audiences. Alongside understanding the relationship between consumers and advertisers, this chapter explores the ways goth YouTubers commodify goth identity and influence the consumption patterns of their audience members.

Selected Haul Videos, Comments, and Channels for Analysis

Based on the concept of the self as the research instrument (Rew et al., 1993), I chose to review three goth clothing haul videos on YouTube and the channels of the content creators. The following artifacts were primarily selected because they aligned with my theoretical framework and research because they sparked a genuine interest in uncovering the different ways goth identity is performed. I selected three videos that showcased the goth identity performance of three well-known goth YouTubers. One haul video was selected for analysis from the following goth YouTube channels: It’s Black Friday (IBF), Toxic Tears (TT), and Angela Benedict (AB). While the videos follow a similar format being clothing haul videos, they differ from one another and offer concrete evidence about how goth identity gets reproduced through commodities. Additionally, they each provide key
differences that demonstrate how the creators approach the concept of haul videos and how they articulate digital labor, production, consumption, and goth identity.

The videos chosen are approximately ten to fifteen minutes in length and have a different production style, clothing try-ons, and approach to reviewing the clothing. The IBF and TT videos were selected because they feature KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill, two of the most well-known alternative fashion brands. The AB video was selected because it offered a completely different approach to standard haul videos by featuring a clothing haul that is completely thrifted. These content creators were selected because they have a large following on YouTube and other social media platforms. A social media influencer is said to be an “independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 1). Because IBF, TT, and AB are active in their YouTube presence, they have achieved this social media influencer status.

Each of them have a large number of followers and high engagement rates on their channels (Carter, 2016). They are influential because of their expertise in the specific field they are a part of (Langner et al., 2013). IBF, TT, and AB have a large quantity of video content involving fashion. Both IBF and TT have even described their channels as beauty and fashion-based, while AB wrote that she is an accidental fashion designer in her channel description. These YouTubers have a large follower count and gain a lot of comments on their video demonstrating that they have subcultural and symbolic capital regarding their video content and status online. Because influencers are viewed as opinion leaders and hold a role as cultural mediators (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), they can also affect the consumption decisions of others (Feick & Price, 1987). As cultural mediators, goth YouTubers are often referenced by their audience members as credible sources for their knowledge, experiences, and expertise. As such, they are implicated in the relationship between user-generated content, labor, and identity performance.
KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill

The content for two of the clothing haul videos analyzed features products from notable brands – KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill. These brands are often seen in goth clothing haul videos because they market to people interested in alternative clothing. Dolls Kill considers itself an online boutique that caters to “the misfits and miss legits” and primarily targets an audience seeking punk rock, goth, glam, and festival fashion. KILLSTAR remains a primarily goth and alternative brand and even uses the slogan “In Goth We Trust” to target goths directly. Dolls Kill’s goth lines come from various companies such as Widow, Punk Rave (another prominent goth and alternative brand), and Alchemy England (a prominent goth jewelry company). KILLSTAR, on the other hand, primarily sells its own brand of clothing while occasionally partnering with other companies and businesses such as Kate’s Clothing and Tragic Beauty.¹

Both brands feature various clothing styles and accessories marketed for goths from tops, pants, dresses, fishnets, high platform boots, gloves, and more. However, KILLSTAR caters to both men and women, while Dolls Kill primarily targets women. KILLSTAR will openly market itself as a clothing brand for individuals who are interested in a darker lifestyle. In addition to the clothes and accessories they sell, they also have lifestyle items like candles, towels, blankets, and more. Dolls Kill on the other hand often markets alternative pieces of clothing, accessories, and make-up for different styles that are not always geared towards goths only. Because they sell a variety of clothing and accessories catered to goths, they receive a ton of business from consumers that seek out these products and are able to price them in a way that makes them expensive. KILLSTAR tends to market its clothing as containing “emotional power and raw energy into every thread” (KILLSTAR, n.d.). It is important to also note that both of these retailers have been around since the early 2010s, with KILLSTAR being founded in 2010 and Dolls Kill being founded in 2011. Having had time to cultivate

¹ Up until 2020 KILLSTAR would ship some of their merchandise to Dolls Kill, but their partnership ended during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests that were taking place that year. Dolls Kill co-owner shared a pro-police image on Instagram that sparked outcries and demands for Dolls Kill affiliates to sever ties with the company (Smith-Engelhardt, 2020). While the company no longer ships to Dolls Kill, some older KILLSTAR clothing can be found on Dolls Kill.
their brands and develop an online reputation, they are noteworthy not only for that reason, but also because they have adapted new forms of marketing to shifting consumer demographics. Following the backlash that the company received, Dolls Kill’s website features a public pledge to purchase products valued up to one million dollars from black-owned businesses. In the past, they would use their own hashtags to attract support and customers, including #beadoll, #dollsofinstagram, and #dollskillclothing, but have long departed from using hashtags. KILLSTAR will often use hashtags including #wearekillstar and #killstarco on their posts to attract consumers. While both of these brands have resorted to different methods of attracting consumers, the key marketing tool they use is their connection to influencers, or digital cultural mediators.

Data presented by Wielki (2020) notes that digital media consumption is on the rise, with a notable increase the daily usage going from 5 hours and 37 minutes in 2012 to 6 hours and 45 minutes per person in 2018. The primary demographic of Internet users comes from Generation Z whose ages range from 16 to 24 years old. Not only do they spend the most amount of time online (with an average of 7 hours and 44 minutes for a typical day (Wielki, 2020), they are a complex audience group that accounts for roughly 40% of all consumers (Tudoran, 2019). Traditional forms of advertising do not appeal to this demographic which has changed the way that advertisers seek to get their attention. A recent study from Mirsha et al. (2018) noted that a lot of marketing communication finds difficulty in obtaining Generation Z’s attention, and findings from Fromm and Read (2018) note that they willingly follow people they trust in the media they consume. Because the market has changed so much with a different generation contributing to a little less than half of the markets, brands and organizations have begun to look for a different approach to attract consumers (Bonchek & Bapat, 2018). One of these tools is the “haul video” genre which I analyze here.

When the market began to shift to host more Generation Z consumers, large-scale changes in marketing and advertising needed to take place if the newer consumers were to be accounted for. This led to YouTube becoming a site that hosted content promoting fashion and beauty that eventually found its way into the field of goth YouTube. It is easy to find goth clothing haul videos that
promote mass-produced clothing and haul videos that feature thrift store finds or clothing purchased from small businesses. There are even haul videos about ethical and sustainable retailers that cater to various alternative communities. The new generation of marketing accounts for the changing markets, consumer demographics, and patterns of content consumption of consumers. While industries catering to Goths have created much more accessibility for people to partake in goth style, they also granted institutions the ability to stop the subculture from detaching itself from the normalized forms of modern society. As noted by Hebdige (1979), the creating of new styles is bound by the process of “production, publicity, and packaging” (p. 95). The goth subculture’s subversive power and creations are thus dulled from the subculture and repurposed through mass-produced products and are then advertised directly to those that seek these products. One example of how this occurs is through the way that goth fashion is reappropriated by consumer culture in the form of goth clothing haul videos.

**Goth Fashion and Subculture**

Historically goth fashion has held a lot of significance within the early goth subculture as it allowed members to creatively distinguish themselves from the mainstream. Hodkinson (2002) cites that through the “ownership and use of consumer goods, goths claimed their subcultural capital” (p. 132). Goths were able to differentiate themselves from one another as well as other groupings because of distinct features that were part of their clothing. Goth fashion evolved from punk and shared a similar DIY/thrifting aesthetic. Over the course of several decades, the increased presence of goth in the mainstream media and popular culture has seen goth aesthetics disperse in more mainstream social fields. For example, Hot-Topic offered mass-produced clothing where the DIY/thrifting goth aesthetic was easy to come by. With the transition to digital retail, goth clothing became even easier to access.

**Goth Clothing Haul Videos**

Within the field of goth YouTube clothing haul videos have amassed an incredible amount of popularity. Haul videos typically feature women reviewing recent purchases of clothing, accessories,
and make-up purchases and sometimes they simply show the items (Jeffries, 2011). This video format is typically used by beauty and fashion YouTubers and often include the price of the items, brand name, and the shop where they purchased the product from (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). What makes these videos stand out is that they have transformed the relationship between consumers and brands by bringing in cultural mediators to facilitate the advertising for them.

YouTubers are often paid or receive public relations (PR) samples from the brands they work with (Gerhards, 2017). In exchange for their collaboration, the video produced by the YouTuber’s video will usually be produced in their usual fashion and style, but the production or distribution of that video is “controlled by the brand” (Gerhards, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, some haul videos feature products that were sent to them for free by brands that hope to be featured by YouTube creators in the videos or other social media platforms (Gerhards, 2017). Haul videos have turned people in micro-celebrities and those that hold that status are able to promote their own products as merchandise or collaborate with firms and brands (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018).

The widespread growth of these video styles have eventually found their way in the field of goth YouTube. Companies like KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill are often featured in haul videos from content creators with small and large followings. These brands have become synonymous with goth fashion and with their widespread reach through their haul videos along with social media posts and social media influencers that frequently promote their content. Both KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill feature aesthetics that goths will wear, such as leather and lace, large platformed shoes, studs and spikes, and symbols including pentagrams and amulets, sigils, and symbols part of paganism and Wicca to create occultic or witchy themes in their clothing. What makes KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill haul videos stand out from other haul videos is how much digital content is out there that features them. It is easy to come by haul videos featuring thrift stores, smaller goth and alternative brands, online shops like Shein and Wish that cater to all kinds of clothing styles, and more prolific goth brands such as Punk Rave and Lip Service. However, they do not match the widespread influence among goths that KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill achieved through YouTube goth clothing haul videos.
YouTube holds an influential role in helping to spread these brands’ influence because of the mentions and clothing try-on videos that they are featured in from notable goth and alternative YouTubers such as It’s Black Friday, Toxic Tears, and Angela Benedict. In particular, KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill's influence has become widespread and generated tensions within the goth subculture, mostly causing debate over goth clothing as a necessary component to goth identity as well pricing and quality. The prominent appearance of these brands in clothing haul videos provide strong examples of the commercialization of goth culture. By partnering with two of the most influential goth YouTubers, KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill have been able to gain a lot of success through their strategic partnership with these cultural mediators. However, even with this partnership with influential goth community members, there is still much division and resistance towards consumerism within the goth subculture.

**Resistance to Consumerism in Goth**

The consumerism aspect of KILLSTAR is particularly noteworthy because it has sparked an onslaught of disdain for the company by members of the goth community across the globe. There is even a hashtag that describes not only disdain for the company, but the frustration felt by members. The hashtag #gothisnotkillstar was started in 2016 by Aytakk, a writer for The Belfry Network (a site for goth bloggers, podcasters, and digital content creators). In his 2019 article, Aytakk writes that KILLSTAR is one of many brands that encourages consumption because it is the “biggest and most effective of the social media influencer sponsors right now (para. 32).” The purpose of the hashtag is to explain that KILLSTAR “does not represent all of goth (para. 27)” because while many people might like it, it does not mean that people have to own KILLSTAR to be goth. He adds that this hashtag responds to KILLSTAR’s hashtag of #wearekillstar because while individuals can be KILLSTAR, “as a whole the goth subculture is not.” He asserts that the goth subculture and goths are more than brands, a market, clothing hauls, and outfits. In his opinion, consumerism and a superficial emphasis on fashion and style are degrading.
Aytakk is not alone in his disdain for consumerism. Caligo Bastet, a popular goth YouTuber, left the community because of overemphasis on consumerism. In a vlog from 2020, he gives an update about his personal life and why he has not been active as much online. In his video, Bastet focuses mainly on his current interests and updates his followers on his life before discussing his loss of interest in goth because of consumerism. He states that he feels like “there’s a lot of people trying to be famous and be more and it’s become a really, really commercial scene” (14:24-14:38). He expresses that he is a minimalist and adds that he does not want to be part of mindless consumerism. Bastet notes that he is aware of the effects that consumerism affects the planet and tells his audience that brands only care about selling clothing. He cites the lack of unethical production as further reasoning for not wanting to continue working with brands. In the past, he made a few sponsored videos where he got a lot of clothes, but he seldom used the products that he got. He tells his audience that the products sent to him were used to create a video showing his audience what he received. Much like other clothing haul videos, brands and companies hope that an influencer showing their audience the products they received will entice them to purchase clothes and other items from them. In a sense, the clothing he received was like props, serving a singular purpose of fulfilling the requirement he had agreed to in order to get the clothes for free.

What is significant from this is that Bastet performed his goth identity through clothing consumption in past videos. He details that the clothing he received made him consume more because they were free, but he almost never wore them outside of the videos. Bastet's account reveals that goth identity performance through commodities differs between cultural mediators and audience members. Cultural mediators might not wear clothing items outside of their YouTube videos or social media posts, as evidenced by Bastet. Audience members, however, will pay for the clothing out of pocket and wear them. Individuals watching goth clothing haul videos might associate status and belongingness in the goth subculture with the clothes goth YouTubers showcase. Audience members might also purchase the clothing they see in goth clothing haul videos to obtain a sense of status and belongingness for themselves. This further demonstrates that through cultural mediators,
brands are able to keep the cycle of consumption going. Other goth YouTubers such as Rose Nocturnalia have begun to question the ethical consequences that result from performing goth identity through clothing in clothing haul videos.

The division over clothing haul videos has provided response videos investigating whether goth is over-commercialized. In a 2020 video by goth and gothic Lolita YouTuber Rose Nocturnalia, the subject of consumerism in goth is discussed. Nocturnalia describes goth as a once “small and very niche market that was made up of alternative people selling things to other alternative people” (01:10-01:16). This has drastically changed when big players largely outsourced DIY clothing and small artists and seamstresses. She also mentions that companies like KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill are sellers of fast fashion and lack transparency in informing consumers about how they manufacture their clothes. She cites that the quality of fast fashion is not only poor, but it often gets produced through exploited labor and ends up in landfills. Additionally, she notes that the clothing is even more expensive for people outside of the United States and includes herself into this reasoning by informing her audience that she lives in Canada. She states that these types of companies give “huge PR boxes to goth influencers so that they’ll promote the products for them” and often the boxes contain “more product than they can afford on their own” (08:00-08:15). Because of the influence that goth YouTubers have, she points out that many newcomers to the scene often feel excluded and unable to join because they cannot afford or wear certain types of goth clothing. This exclusion reveals that the digital labor that goth YouTubers engage serves a much different purpose for them than it does for their viewers.

**Aspirational Labor**

Haul videos roughly align with Duffy’s (2016) concept of “aspirational labor,” described as “a highly gendered, forward-looking and entrepreneurial enactment of creativity” (Duffy, 2016, p. 3). What sets aspirational labor apart from other forms of labor is that it embodies the “do what you love” ideology. This ideology accounts for creative activities are engaged in for the hope of, if not the guarantee of, obtaining social and economic capital. Additionally, aspirational labor poses...
“problematic constructions of gender and intersectionalities with class” (Duffy, 2016, p. 3). These problematic constructions ensure that individuals immerse themselves in the consumption of highly feminized branded goods. Much like Campbell’s (2011) concept of the “labor of devotion,” aspirational labor tends to perpetuate the stereotype that men consume individually, whereas women consume socially.

**Authenticity, Capital, and Identity**

For content creators such as fashion bloggers, performing authenticity online entails three things: providing audiences with a truthful and tangible sense of self-expression, having a connection with audience members and responding to their comments, and lastly, having open and honest engagement with commodity goods and brands (Marwick, 2013). Goth YouTubers rely on similar qualities to connect with their audience members. Because the platform of YouTube empowers ordinary users to interact freely with advertisers and professional content creators, the reach between brands and their target audiences are nearly seamless and much more efficient than traditional forms of advertising (Hou, 2019, p. 538). The industrialization of communication on YouTube strategically connects advertisers and brands to their consumers. Through professional content creators, advertisers and brands can reach their target audience, and in the process, content creators become influencers.

One of the most notable marketing trends that became widespread is influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a strategy used by brands and advertisers. They will partner with well-followed online users to lure and influence consumers’ attitudes and decision-making in favor of brands or ideas (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Influencers are regarded as respected individuals within their communities and have many loyal and committed followers and supporters (Kartajaya et al., 2018). These individuals create specific user-generated content that builds their reputation online and allows them to be seen as experts in their communities. One primary example of a popular alternative YouTube influencer is Emily Boo (EB). The content she produces not only caters to building her reputation as a knowledgeable person within the general alternative community, but it also grants her
status among her followers who look up to her for decision-making and attitudes towards brands and clothing.

In part one of EB’s 2020 video on alternative and sustainable brands, several comments affirm that people look up to EB for recommendations. One user with the name That Hellen commented that they purchased an item of clothing from the brand Mary Wyatt London “because of [EB’s] recommendation. Another user called Sadisfied noted that EB’s channel is “an excellent resource” for people “who want to start buying alternative clothing but are not sure where to start.” The comment by Sadisfied and another comment left by addison c. stating “as a newbie to the alternative community, i really appreciate the resources” demonstrate that content involving alternative fashion content is sought out by EB’s audience members. Other comments directly thank Emily for the shared knowledge. One comment left by ReyBeltane reads “I am so grateful that you’ve done all this amazing research for us.”

In addition to the supportive comments that highlight the content and the knowledge EB shares in her video, several comments left by the brands she mentioned in her video suggest that EB is a link that connects brands to consumers. One comment by VrolokClothing tells EB that they will be contacting her to give her a gift for her mentioning of their company in her video. The most liked comment on the video by Neon Underground Apparel features a short thank you to EB before telling the audience members about an upcoming sale. “We are launching part of our Eco Collections on Black Friday and are expanding our clothing sustainability for the future. <3.” They even inform EB’s audience that their t-shirts and hoodies will be 30% off that day. This comment shows that consumption is the goal of the apparel company because they are launching their sale on Black Friday. Additionally, EB pinned this comment, making it the top comment for that video. Altogether, these comments demonstrate her role as a cultural mediator by influencing her audience’s consumption habits.

Followers actively seek out EB’s videos for recommendations that then turn into actual purchases. The cycle of watching YouTube videos and purchasing products shown in those videos is
a newer type of marketing that seeks to appeal to the changing demographics of consumers. Because Generation Z finds itself avoiding advertising, YouTube marketing communication now targets this demographic to “positively influence young consumer attitudes and purchase decisions” (Duffett, 2020, p. 1). YouTube’s shift from entertainment and information video content into a marketing communication platform has paved the way for “promotions, advertising, product placement, and testimonials” to become part of the experience (Duffett, 2020, p. 3). In turn, micro-celebrities emerge from social media and social networking platforms. Micro-celebrities construct an image of the self that attracts other users, including a fan base of people that consume that user’s content.

Many YouTube cultural mediators do not employ the characteristics or qualities traditional celebrities have, such as perfection, glamour, or extraordinariness. Instead, they attract users through their ordinary and intimate performances (Gamson, 2011; Turner, 2014). Their performances contribute to the idea that people will emulate those they want to fit in with and thus reveals that people seek to obtain validation for their identities by imitating cultural mediators: in this case, the goth YouTubers they identify with and watch. EB is one example of a YouTuber that has fostered an intricate relationship between consumption and identity. Through communication centered around product promotion, cultural mediators like EB can create a sense of identity through storytelling in their videos. As pointed out by Banet-Weiser (2012), brands can position individuals as a central character in the brand’s narrative. Through their consumption of products, experiences with the brand, and the products themselves, cultural mediators create a narrative of authenticity where their experiences go beyond the tangible product itself.

Narratives of authenticity work at multiple levels. First, they are a performance in which the influencer ignores that they may be getting paid to promote a product. As such, this suggests a second level of these narratives: that the influencers’ relationship to the product exists beyond the confines of the video. The influencer is authentic regarding product and audience. Authenticity and
the relatability of content creators are two qualities that help attract and retain large amounts of followers on YouTube.

Performing these narratives requires a fair amount of identity work on the part of the creator and, later, the audience. Identity becomes an important factor for viewers of haul videos in the sense that they seek to emulate the identity that goth YouTubers have. Goth YouTubers are able to amass large quantities of capital through their aspirational labor and large following. This, in turn, allows goth YouTubers to receive products from the brands affiliated with them. These products are often said to affirm their identities as goths because of the way the YouTubers communicate about them and show themselves wearing them. Audience members, then, view these products as necessary in order to construct their own sense of goth identity. As previously mentioned, “how goth one is” and what an authentic goth identity looks like online are two questions that arise among consumers that seek to construct their own sense of goth identity modeled after the goth YouTubers they emulate. Authenticity through one’s identification with products becomes a challenge to overcome for audience members.

Goth YouTubers, through aspirational labor, create a space for themselves among traditional “industries and professions, while downplaying their currently existing social and economic capital” (Duffy, 2016, p. 9). Goth YouTubers downplay the role of economic capital in their narratives of authenticity. Bourdieu argued that different forms of capital intersect to produce identity and regulate behavior without explicit rules. One implicit rule (or myth) in capitalism is the self-made entrepreneur. Thus, to make themselves likable, aspirational laborers tend to downplay one form of capital (economic and/or social) to turn it into another (social and/or economic).

The most popular content creators are not only likable, but they have a steady stream of income that allows them to pay for the equipment for producing and editing their content. This is something that is often given little attention to, and instead, cultural mediators capitalize on the themes of relatability, realness, and ordinariness. These elements play an important role in assessing how social capital is achieved through haul videos.
Haul Videos and Social Capital

Haul videos have grown in popularity with their ability to conveniently provide YouTubers with material to film in addition to generating advertising for companies. The formula of haul videos gives YouTubers the ability to reach out to “a few thousand consumers” worldwide (Jeffries, 2011, p. 64). Haul videos often generate comments promoting the narcissistic and superficial interaction between producers and consumers of haul video content. Compliments on these videos often note the beauty of content producer, their ability to enhance or customize their beauty through clothing or cosmetics, their possession of desired items, and two immediately noticeable and personable qualities “cuteness and sweetness” (p. 64).

While most haul videos showcase products for the sole purpose of a mutual and transactional relationship between the companies and the YouTubers, they often allow two things to occur. First, as YouTubers vlog their evaluation of a product their review indicates the desirability of that product. The desirability of the product is projected through their communication about the product – either they like the product or they do not, and they indicate why that is the case (Harnish & Bridges, 2016). These reviews of a product demonstrate a form of cultural capital—they generate an opinion that can then be modeled or disputed by their audience. In turn, this cultural capital intersects with social capital (their followers) and economic capital (their wealth). Drawing back to the example of EB’s video of alternative sustainable brands, some individuals would comment about how much they liked the product they purchased after watching EB’s review of the brand that carried that product. In looking into goth YouTube, we can see consumption starts to play a huge role in creating subcultural capital online through fashion as noted in the goth clothing haul videos analyzed.

Goth YouTube Cultural Mediators

Freyja NicLeòid (IBF), Kaya Lili (Toxic Tears or TT), and Angela Benedict (AB) have gained notoriety within the field of goth YouTube because of the large number of subscribers they have accumulated. Their recognizability has also given them notable status online. Each of these individuals were selected for this analysis because they present themselves as goth and include
fashion in the descriptions of their YouTube channels. Audience members that have subscribed to their content can expect to see videos produced surrounding goth clothing. Within this analysis, two videos are examined that capture not only the ways in which these YouTubers review the products in their videos, but also how they contribute to the commercialization of the goth subculture. The videos for IBF and TT promote two contemporary fast fashion companies that market goth and alternative fashion – KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill. Both companies market their clothes for people interested in goth and alternative fashion, and many of their customers are part of music-based subcultures such as goth, emo, and metal. Angela Benedict’s video features a thrifting haul that demonstrates a consumer shift into opting for clothing that does not come from fast-fashion conglomerates.

**Analysis of It’s Black Friday’s Video Titled “KILLSTAR Haul + Try On”**

Upon first examining IBF’s channel, one can tell that she has surpassed half a million YouTube subscribers and has reached well over 85 million views since 2013. As one of the more prominent figures in the field of goth YouTube, IBF has gained a reputation for the variety of content she features on her channel featuring vlogs, DIYs, make-up, fashion transformations, and more. Her channel includes links to her social media and personal website and her community tabs features notifications for livestreams, video announcements and more. Although her channel is not as active as other goth YouTubers’ channels, IBF appears to try to post at least one video each month.

The video selected for this analysis is the first of her KILLSTAR haul videos published in 2016. IBF starts off her video by talking in front of the camera that is set up close to her. In the background viewers can see that she is sitting on a black couch that is placed in front of bright red walls. From her placement up close to the camera, viewers’ attention is drawn to her. Upon first seeing IBF in the video, you might immediately sense that she is goth based on how she looks. IBF presents herself wearing a more traditional style of goth make-up, including drawn on eyebrows, pale white foundation, black lipstick, black eyeliner, and dark eyeshadow. Her black hair is teased up high into a chaotic and fluffy updo, and she is wearing an elegant black dress with mesh sleeves. Viewers can hear faint traces of music from the goth rock bands Paralyzed Age and Merciful Nuns in the video.
background. However, if the names of the artists and songs were not listed in the video description, they seem almost unrecognizable tucked into the background of her video.

She brings up KILLSTAR right away and holds up a KILLSTAR business card close to the camera. The card features the KILLSTAR logo and the caption “World Wide Witches.” She then shares that she considers KILLSTAR to be “one of the best quality alternative clothing brands” (00:10-00:15) and indicates that she is a supporter of the brand by emphasizing that she owns “quite a few things from KILLSTAR” in her wardrobe (00:45-00:48). She continues by adding that one of the purposes of her channel is to recommend her viewers “good stuff” (00:17-00:19). While citing that the brand is a personal favorite of hers, she addresses the popularity of the clothing brand by stating “I’d be pretty surprised if you haven’t heard of KILLSTAR by now; they are hugely popular” (00:37-00:42). In doing so, she indicates to her audience that the brand is recognized and that if they have never heard of the brand, they are behind on what is currently something that other Goths are already aware exists. Not knowing about KILLSTAR indicates that some viewers lack what IBF considers a significant piece of cultural capital. Continuing with her spiel about the company’s products, she notes that she possesses other KILLSTAR products and has purchased jewelry from them.

She states that “I like to show you guys and tell you guys about the stuff that I believe is good” (08:01-08:05). Continuing, she adds, “I would never recommend to you anything that I don’t like” (08:05-08:08). While she does acknowledge that the clothing is expensive, she thinks that the price that one pays for the stuff is fair because the quality of the clothing is “really good” (04:23-04:26). She even adds, “I've never been disappointed with anything I've got from there” (04:28-04:33) highlighting a previous statement she made about owning KILLSTAR products. She then turns our attention to the brand’s mailing list and tells us that she is on their mailing list which is how she receives notifications for sales (04:31-04:46). She then turns our attention to the brand’s mailing list and tells us that she is on their mailing list, where she receives notifications for when they have sales (04:31-04:46). The subtle reference to the mailing list is a strategic connection she makes to the brand and herself to symbolize that she is committed to the brand. In addition to discussing the mailing list, IBF also
showcases what type of brand KILLSTAR markets itself as when she shows her audience a crystal necklace that she received with her haul. This necklace comes in a velvet pouch that features the KILLSTAR logo and the words “Occult Luxury,” which alludes to the brand’s marketing of their clothing. Both the “World Wide Witches” and “Occult Luxury” demonstrate that the brand is a form of cultural capital that consumers should seek to obtain since it’s something others around the world possess. However, KILLSTAR is also a form of cultural capital that is hard to obtain economically.

Not only does IBF draw attention to the popularity that KILLSTAR has amassed, but she does so by advertising their brand in the format of a vlog. Recall that aspirational labor is an entrepreneurial enactment of creativity (Duffy, 2016). By presenting her video in the style of a vlog, IBF is able to manipulate the overt advertising to appear as though it is creative content. In addition to advertising in the video, she is able to construct a reality that she is getting to do what she loves – creating content about whatever she wants. Behind the notion of her having creative freedom, viewers struggle to see that she is using her social and cultural capital to get her audience to consume. IBF also targets her audience through the use of highly feminized products. The clothing and accessories in the video represent goth to her viewers. By advertising the brand and products to her audience members, IBF is the cultural mediator linking KILLSTAR to their targeted consumers. IBF communicates that consumption is standard practice for goths, and she maintains that as a subscriber to their mailing list, she is always on the lookout for a KILLSTAR sale. Her ability to talk about these expensive products as though they are easy to obtain demonstrates that she has the economic capital to afford them, which is significant because many of her audience members do not have the financial means to get clothing from this brand.

The comments section on the video also demonstrates the reality of the different worlds that IBF and her viewers come from. Janine Lewis’s comment states, “I want almost everything on their website, unfortunately most of it is a bit too pricey for me, so I have to save up.” Irma-C bolded the font in their comment and wrote, “goes to the website checks out what they have hears my wallet screaming in agony.” These comments highlight that IBF’s audience members are aspirational
consumers, meaning they are scouting the Internet to obtain products from brands that can help them to achieve the status they seek. For many, KILLSTAR is a luxury they wish to afford. Those new to the subculture view owning KILLSTAR clothing as a gateway to obtaining subcultural and social status. The comments are full of people expressing their desires to have the economic resources to buy KILLSTAR clothing. The comments also include comments seeking subcultural and status as indicated by a comment by Caitlin Mckinzie stating, “man i wanna be goth so bad.” This comment, in particular, suggests that some newcomers feel that they cannot be goth unless they have these products. As the aspirational laborer, IBF performs the social role of goth purchases through the aspirational consumption of so-called “luxury products” to present herself as “a member of an elite status” (Duffy, 2016, p. 6). Members that want to obtain the role of a goth as performed by IBF realize they need to have the economic, subcultural, and social status that she has.

Although the packaging markets KILLSTAR as a luxury brand, she tells her audience that their clothing is what she calls “casual” and “easy things” (03:28-03:31) that one could wear without the hassle of spending time dressing up and still look nice. IBF emphasizes that the clothes are ideal for everyday wear by telling her audience that she is wearing one of the dresses she received from the company and mentions that she will likely wear it at a dance party the next day. By making the products seem like staple pieces for any wardrobe, she illustrates that the clothes are significant pieces of cultural capital that she possesses. Cultural capital is thus the mutual recognition that KILLSTAR is desirable. Economic capital is owning KILLSTAR. And social capital is recognition from others. Commentators on IBF’s video have demonstrated that KILLSTAR is a quintessential brand. One follower by the username Rex G commented that he plans on buying the necklace IBF showed in her video for his wife. Rex G also received a reply from IBF, which gave him social capital from the recognition. While buying things from KILLSTAR seems like an easy way to obtain subcultural capital, many commentators find that the clothing is expensive. The need for economic capital to afford this clothing has some commentators feeling discouraged that they cannot afford to buy any of the items
they saw in the video. IBF’s presentation of the clothing has indicated to her audience that the clothing is video are necessary for gaining subcultural capital.

Janine Lewis’s comment emphasized how she must save up money to be able to afford the clothing that IBF has received complementary as indicated from her video description that reads that the items were “kindly provided by KILLSTAR, however this video was not sponsored.” The clothing IBF receives highlights how she has the luxury of receiving the clothing complimentary from the company, whereas her audience does not have that option. Having an esteemed status as a goth YouTuber, IBF, and other popular goth YouTubers can market clothing to individuals that cannot afford them. As evidenced from the comments, many viewers feel that they have to purchase commodities to fit into the goth subculture. As stated by Hodkinson (2002), “organic communities’ then are replaced by proto-communities, which involve shared consumer interests or tastes” (p. 22). Proto-communities do not prioritize community, but instead emphasize consumption of clothing and other commodities. The next chapter will discuss the aspect of goth communities.

On top of showing the clothing pieces from sitting down on her couch, IBF also has portions of the video dedicated to showing off the clothing. She models the clothing in the hallway of her home while overdubbing commentary over the video clips of her twirling around. Her commentary is somewhat stereotypical and can be misconstrued to make goth appear as though it is about occultism or witchcraft. IBF remarks that the dress she is wearing makes her feel ready to conduct a ritual. She goes on to make hand gestures by moving her arms to mimic performing a ritual. Later on, while talking about another dress, she mentions that it feels like something you would put on when you are ready to “go join your black-clad hooded cronies in some underground ritualistic sacrifice” (03:56-04:01). There is a point in her video where she adds onto this by describing KILLSTAR as “one of the better-known brands for occult-themed fashion” (06:03-06:06). While she says this, she holds onto a purse with a pentagram on it and adds that the brand uses a lot of occultic imagery in their products. IBF also mentions that she finds this enjoyable since she describes herself as an
occultist. After sharing with her audience that she is thrilled to see clothing with occultic imagery, she holds up a coat and tells her audience that this is the final item she received.

The coat itself is a limited-edition item, and through her description of it, one can infer that the coat confers a significant amount of subcultural capital. Because the piece is not returning to KILLSTAR’s site, she verbally encourages her audience members to go out of their way to acquire it. “If you want this, you have to be fast because it’s not coming back” (06:28-06:31). IBF declares this item to be the one she looked forward to sharing the most with her audience. She capitalizes on the exclusiveness of the product to generate a need among her audience for the product. She describes the coat as being made of “luxury faux suede” (07:12-07:14) and adds that it contains embroidered moons and pentagrams on it. Including luxury in her description highlights that the limited-edition KILLSTAR coat is the most luxurious item from the batch of products she received. The goth subculture has predominantly focused on DIY and handmade clothing constructed by members of the community. Using uniqueness as her selling point for this coat, IBF not only suggests to her audience that the coat is a rare form of subcultural capital, but she also reduces goth identity to that of consuming KILLSTAR products. Thus, by tying herself to the brand and wearing KILLSTAR clothing, IBF performs her goth identity through commodities.

After reviewing these products, IBF ends her video by suggesting that her audience join the mailing list for KILLSTAR. She cites the brand’s release of new items as a reason for her follower to join the mailing list. Encouraging her audience to sign up for the mailing list is a subtle nod to promoting consumption by motivating her followers to look for KILLSTAR products they can afford. Tying herself to the brand by soliciting her viewers to sign up for the brand’s mailing list is a clear example of how IBF performs her identity as a goth. She maintains that the mailing list keeps her updated on the newest stock to continue acquiring clothing to maintain her goth identity. Alongside her economic capital and social status online, her subcultural capital comes from her ability to know what is popular within the goth subculture. In the next haul video by Toxic Tears, there are some
noteworthy differences in how IBF and TT perform their goth identities and the differences between KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill clothing.

**Analysis of Toxic Tear’s “Widow Clothing Haul from Dolls Kill | Toxic Tears”**

Like IBF, Toxic Tears’ channel features videos that range from goth fashion, beauty, and lifestyle. Having been on YouTube since 2010, TT has amassed over 29 million views. In the haul video selected from TT’s channel, TT presents items from the Dolls Kill line, Widow clothing. While some of the haul videos she made in the past contain products from KILLSTAR, she has put a couple of videos featuring Doll Kills. Serval comments on this video state that the Widow line shares a connection with a respected goth brand. One of the comments by a user called Neiti Mau states that Widow is the "sister company of Lip Service." Lip Service is a reputable goth brand that has gained attention from goths all over the world. Because the brand has garnered a significant reputation, consumers aware of the connection to Lip Service might hold pre-existing expectations regarding the quality and notoriety of this line based on what they already know. Although Dolls Kill caters to various fashion aesthetics and interest, the Widow line targets goth consumers and the products viewed in the video demonstrate that.

The video begins with TT sitting close to the camera and on the left part of the screen. Behind her are black and white pillows with the words “Spooky,” “Rest in Peace,” and “Toxic Tears.” The coffin-shaped “Rest in Peace” pillow is placed next to a pillow with her username embedded within moth wings. While IBF’s walls are a rich, red color, TT’s wallpaper contains light pastel pink stripes with alternating teeth patterns on them. TT is also dressed in black and donning an elegant make-up look for the video but is not showcasing any items she received from Dolls Kill just yet. Compared to the KILLSTAR clothing IBF featured in her video, the Widow line appears to have simplistic and slightly plain designs. IBF’s clothing haul included a necklace and purse as complementary accessories with the clothes she received. In contrast, TT only received a coffin-shaped make-up bag alongside the clothes Dolls Kill sent her.
Some of the items in IBF’s video included pentagrams and moons that helped elevate the pieces so that they did not look quite as plain. The products in TT’s video appear to be casual, everyday wear as well. There are a couple of statement pieces from the lot, specifically the Rest in Beauty make-up bag the size of her head (which she said she is unsure if it came from the Widow line), a dress with lace trim around the neckline, and bell-bottom lace thigh highs. TT provides video footage of herself wearing the clothes she got and held each item close to the tripod, so her viewers get an up-close visual of the clothes and the fabric. The quality of the clothing featured in the video appears conventional and comparable to other fast-fashion clothing lines. The clothing items in IBF’s video were packaged nicely and did not appear wrinkled like the items that TT received. These noticeable details suggest the quality of the clothing might not be fair for the price one is paying for them. TT tells her audience that the “clothes were sent to me by the brand, so I don’t remember the price” (10:00-10:03). She also does not include the names of the items or the link to the items in her video description, which might indicate that she did not like the content enough to recommend the items in the description of her video.

The Widow line’s overall nature falls under the contemporary goth fashion style, but their production showcases that they look more like clothes that one would wear every day. Some items have lace in their design, but the lace does not make them stand out from other pieces in the haul. The first clothing item that TT reviewed is a wrap-around dress with a plunging v-neckline. As she tries on the dress, the fabric is noticeably wrinkled in some areas. As mentioned previously, the designs of the Widow clothing are noticeably different compared to KILLSTAR clothing. Followers might interpret Dolls Kill as a fast-fashion company due to the low-quality production of some of the items TT reviews in this video. Fast fashion companies are part of a “streamlined system involving rapid design, production, distribution, and marketing” (Cohen, 2011, p. 172). Since fast fashion clothing does not last long, consumers have to buy more clothing to replace what they had, generating more consumption. The consumption also comes at a higher cost than most fast fashion companies. The Widow clothes TT features are priced within the same range as the KILLSTAR
clothing in IBF’s video, making them expensive for average consumers. TT states that “you will need to take some extra care to get the wrinkles out, but overall, it’s really cute, and it’s pretty comfortable as well” (3:23-3:27).

TT’s style of reviewing clothes includes a detailed explanation and try-ons to show her audience how the clothes look. Unlike IBF, who filmed inside her home in a hallway with white walls, TT films outside in her back yard in natural lighting so her audience can see the actual shade of the clothing worn. With a plain white background and indoor lighting, there is a possibility that the lighting can affect how the clothing appears. Throughout the rest of the video, TT makes some candid remarks about the quality of clothing. Right after she reviewed the wrap-around dress, she pulls up another dress that looks like “a French maid’s dress without being too costumey” (04:09-04:11). It is a black dress with crème colored lace trim around the neckline and back. While TT expresses that she likes the dress, she does notify her audience that the dress appears to be “sewn a little bit strange around the tummy area” (4:27-4:28) because it will bunch up whenever she puts it on. She even remarked that she thought the dress was a maternity dress at first, suggesting that the piece's construction differs from the design advertised on the website.

“A lot of this fabric is definitely very wrinkly” (4:22-4:25), she says and tells her audience to be aware of this if they decide to purchase from this line. She even does a short try-on of the dress, and her audience can see that the dress is very wrinkly in that spot that she described. By offering another piece of constructive criticism about another item, TT is giving her opinions on the clothes providing a stark contrast to IBF’s haul video. IBF’s haul video focused solely on selling the good qualities of the clothes, whereas TT's does not try to sell her audience on the clothing. Instead, she reviews the clothes as they are while including clear descriptions of their flaws. Through her reviews, TT converts cultural capital into social capital, allowing her to appear honest and trustworthy to her audience members. TT showcases both the front and back sides of the clothing she received. She stands in place with minimal movement to show her audience how the clothing sits on her. IBF included some grandiose gestures and movement in her clothing try-ons. She twirled around and
walked down her hallway, which made it harder to determine the way the clothes sit on her. In one instance, IBF’s cat makes a brief appearance in the background and gazes up at her during her try-on, which can also distract viewers from examining the clothing.

From this analysis, audience members can see that the clothing differs significantly from that of KILLSTAR. KILLSTAR’s clothes on IBF appeared to fit better, whereas Dolls Kill clothing looked ill-fitting on TT. While TT is rightfully critical about the clothing, she still upholds her role as an aspirational laborer in the video by socially downplaying the issues with the clothing and encouraging her audience members to overlook the problems by suggesting the ways she plans to fix them. The DIY suggestions she makes in her video serve as the creative aspect for her video, while she maintains aspirational labor through her try-ons and descriptions of the clothing. Like the clothing IBF received, the clothing TT reviews are also highly gendered.

TT moves on to review a form-fitting lace dress. She openly tells her audience, “I do love the dress, and I definitely think I’ll get a lot of wear out of it if I can manage to remove the bit I don’t like underneath” (6:33-6:39). As she models the dress, her audience can even see the tightness of the undershell or underlay on her torso, and it makes the dress appear ill-fitting. The remaining pieces she reviews, a pair of lace trim shorts and a lace camisole top with a crisscross backside, are also disappointments because of the very thin and see-through fabric. TT tells her audience that some of the featured pieces in the haul were not what she expected and adds, “some of these I don’t know if I will try on” (10:32-10:34). One commentator Hitomi Redbird asked if the thin fabric meant they were nightwear, but TT responded with:

They don’t seem to be marketed that [way] specifically, especially not the dress. Even if they were nightwear though, I would not be happy with the material. [It’s] very thin and like … not stiff? But not the nice soft satin my other nightwear is made of.

At the end of her video, she reflects on the overall quality of the clothes she got and notes that she will look into getting more stuff from them in the future and that the sizing for the piece fits her well based on the measuring board the company provides. However, she brings up the disclaimer that the satin clothing just was not what she liked. Her followers can interpret her review as genuine
based on how TT uses her cultural capital to review the clothing while also using her symbolic and social capital to highlight the credibility she has from her status. Her excitement for the huge make-up bag is one example of how she gushed and raved about one of the items she received, demonstrating that she liked some items. However, she does not shy away from talking about how she would modify or try to use the other pieces she received. TT does not resort to giving a sales pitch during the review, but instead, she uses her tastes to discuss how she would use the clothes to suit her tastes. By demonstrating that she can offer some reasoning for why she does not love all of the pieces, she can convert her cultural capital into social capital. In one of the comments, she responds to a commentator’s question asking if the lace camisole or shorts she reviewed at the end of her video could be worn as nightwear. TT does not shy away from telling her followers that the fabric of the satin pieces is “not soft or comfortable” and states would not be suitable for sleepwear. She even further adds that she reviewed the clothes as they are marketed online, and “even as PJs/Underwear, I would still consider the fabric to be poor quality.”

The polarization from some of the comments highlights that audience members watching this haul have different tastes in the clothing. TT responds to one comment asking if the see-through items could serve as nightwear by saying that the issue is not “how the items are or aren’t supposed to be worn” but rather that the “fabric isn’t nice.” In her comment, TT acknowledges the disagreements about how the clothing can be worn and unites her audience on the grounds of the fabric not matching the advertising. This honesty highlights the shared value of seeking quality goth clothing from Dolls Kill. It achieves the purpose of offering constructive criticism that openly communicates the interests and concerns of consumers. TT can foster an appropriate response to her audience regarding their interest and their concerns without alienating them. That allows her to use her social capital to suggest that poor fabric quality is not what they should seek in their commodities. To an extent, her communication regarding the fabric might indicate to her audience that the clothing quality holds a lot of cultural importance, influencing how they approach clothing from Dolls Kill as they seek out their cultural capital.
TT’s performance of goth identity within this video appears more genuine than IBF’s. IBF’s performance feels somewhat forced and as though she is doing what she can to persuade her audience to buy the clothes she is showcasing in her video. TT performs her goth identity through some of her DIY suggestions and potential fixes for the clothing. While she insists that she likes the clothing she received, the ideas for modifying the pieces demonstrate that she has obtained cultural capital from her experiences to alter the items to suit her tastes. Having this form of cultural capital shows that she is gained knowledge from her experiences. By making the modifications needed for her clothing, she can create some resistance against consumerism by rejecting some of the pieces that Dolls Kill gave her.

TT’s thoughts and ideas on potential modifications for some pieces highlight some of the valuable characteristics that goths embrace, such as creativity and experimentation. While these characteristics are some inherent features for goth identity, they are not directly emphasized in her video to convert her cultural capital into subcultural capital. Her commentary about the quality of the fabric and the construction of the clothing pieces generate some resistive potential to consumerism that her audience members can interpret as a pushback against inadequate quality clothing for expensive items, but it gets lost in her justification to continue purchasing from Dolls Kill and the Widow line in the future. In the third haul video by Angela Benedict, IBF’s and TT’s performance of goth identity contrast significantly from AB’s.

Analysis of Angela Benedict’s “90s Goth Thrift Haul | Vlog + Giveaway

As the smallest of the three channels, Angela Benedict has still gained a lot of notoriety from her videos. Having amassed over 75,300 followers and receiving over 5 million views, she has successfully garnered a large following of devoted audience members. She even has a store tab on her YouTube channel where her audience members can purchase clothes guided by her opinions and photos. Much like IBF’s and TT’s channels, AB primarily makes vlogs on her life that often reflect on her youth as a goth in the 90s. Her experiences in the 90s goth scene allow her to become a reference point as a cultural mediator for that goth era because she has amassed subcultural and
symbolic capital through her experiences in the 90s. Much of her fashion-based content features DIYs, thrifting, and outfit look book videos that feature goth outfits ideas for those on budget. AB’s video is different from the haul videos of IBF and TT.

AB’s video features a thrift haul that is primarily filmed in a vlog style, whereas IBF and TT use a few vlog-style elements when they try on the clothing they received. AB frames her video in a vlog style where she takes her audience with her to the thrift store and shows her audience the different clothes as she goes through the racks and talks to her audience about what she remembers from 90s goth fashion with some of the items she finds. AB’s video format allows her to convert cultural capital into social capital. She is not pulling clothes out of a box from her couch or chair. She ventures out of her home with her husband to take her audience on a shopping trip. AB’s video recreates a one-on-one conversation with her audience through her video. Her approach to commodification is different from that of IBF and TT because she encourages her audience to look out for things that look goth instead of telling them to go to a website for a brand like KILLSTAR or Dolls Kill to purchase clothing. She also uses her own experiences to inform her audience about the styles of goth fashion worn in the 90s.

AB’s commentary on 90s goth fashion confirms that she has social and subcultural capital to describe her experiences. Those who do not know enough about the goth subculture might refer to her experiences as primary references for understanding what the subculture was like then. At the beginning of the video, AB and her husband drive to the thrift store in the snow. AB begins her video by telling her audience that she and her husband need to replace some old furniture and mentions that she decided to turn her video into a haul video. A cover of “Goodbye Horses” by the synthpop group Psyche is playing in the background. AB is dressed in winter apparel with a black coat and boots and is wearing light make-up. Her toned-down look appears more casual than IBF and TT’s make-up.

Upon arriving at the thrift store, audience members can hear the song “Material Girl” by Madonna playing over the store speakers. The song unintentionally serves as a subtle reminder that
the video is about consuming materialistic commodities. AB begins looking through the clothing racks for a bit and then moves around to the furniture section before finding a bustier top. She tells her audience how bustier tops were very common and sought after in the 90s goth scene. She notes that “they were DIYed in different ways” (3:01-3:03) and references several examples such as attaching a crucifix to the top or even pairing it with a long skirt or petticoat. AB adds that bustier tops were sought out as a “good cheap alternative to corsets” (3:14-3:16) because the pricing for corsets is costly. Part of AB’s review seems to educate her audience about 90s inspired fashion as she experienced it and remembers it. The detailing of her experiences in the 90s showcases the subcultural capital AB has from lived experiences in a decade her audience members might not have experienced. It also holds a factor of nostalgia that helps create a sort of character for the clothing she finds in the store.

The next piece she showcases is a crushed red velvet baby doll dress with a square neckline. She remarks that the dress price, which was $12.99, is pretty steep for the thrift store, but it is worth holding onto, so she adds it to her cart. The rest of the video continues with her sorting through different clothing items, including dresses, shoes, and skirts. She notes that the things she found all have different colors that do not match with the color scheme for half-off that day. In addition to taking her audience on more of a tour, she provides some fun commentary to entertain her audience. She comes across a sparkly purse that she grabs and runs over to a pair of sparkly shoes that she considers a perfect pair to match with the purse she found. “We have to unite them. We’re going to unite them and make them friends” (07:24-07:21). AB running over to unite these two items adds a bit of humor into the video, making the video entertaining and feel like a tour rather than a stage. AB capitalizes on this setup to create an exciting and fun experience that allows her to connect with followers. One user named Denise Adam commented, “Lmao only Angela could make two articles of clothing reunite and seem so caring about it. I love you Angela lol.” This comment demonstrates that AB’s conversion of her cultural capital into social capital fosters a sense of connection with her audience members.
Later in the video, she takes her audience to the nightwear section and comments about how people transformed vintage nighties into goth clothing. She brings up her memories from the 90s and states that she and people she knew would go to the thrift stores and look for "nighties from the 50s, 60s, 70s" (07:57-07:59). “With the right accessories and put together, you never knew the difference” (08:00-08:03). After finishing up the rest of her filming, she reviews each of the clothes she finds and presents some stuff that she did not showcase earlier on in the video. In this part of the video, AB is dressed up in a black dress with cut-out shoulders, has styled her hair in teased ponytails, is wearing light blue contacts and jewelry, and is sporting a different make-up look. Behind her is a plain wall with bat-shaped wall décor on it. Comparable to IBF, AB’s choice of background to model and showcase the clothes signifies that she wants her audience to see her clothing in full detail. Filming indoors also allows her to showcase the clothing from the lens of a camera, making the shade of black appear darker or lighter than it might be.

The first item she shows her audience, part of the giveaway, is a black crushed velvet blazer with a lace backside and tailcoat end hanging from the back. She holds up the blazer so that the plain white background can showcase the item’s detailing. The next item that she shows her audience is a name-brand dress from the alternative company Kreepsville 666. While the dress does not appeal to her taste, she mentions that the brand's name caught her attention which influenced her decision to buy the dress. Not only did she buy it, thinking one of her audience members might like the dress, but she adds that it looks brand new and like it has never been worn. Kreepsville 666 has gained widespread appeal for its horror-themed clothing that caters to goths and fans of horror, punk, and psychobilly (a music genre that fuses punk and elements of country and rock). The brand itself has cultural capital that stems from the audience it markets its products. AB mentioned in her video, some of her audience members might like the dress and added it to the giveaway for that reason. In a comment by a user named Litafaerie, the user mentions that the Kreepsville 666 dress caught their attention. They wrote: “I’d rock that dress … I’d rock it so hard.” AB responds to this comment acknowledging that the item appeals to one of her audience members and asks if they would want to
enter in the giveaway. The response AB gives showcases that the user receives social capital from
the reply. The comment from AB’s follower also reveals the desirability and appeal for the dress
demonstrate that the dress is a desired piece of cultural capital that AB’s audience member seeks to
obtain.

AB discloses that the blazer and Kreepsville 666 dress were $6.99 each, which is encouraging
to audience members who want to find alternative and goth clothing that is not expensive. Yessica
Castañeda wrote that they “feel very inspired” after seeing the video. Another user found her reaction
to the pricing for one dress to be humorous and relatable. Natalee Steele wrote “if that[‘s] not me” in
response to AB being unsure about a dress and then immediately saying yes after seeing the price
tag. However, while shifting through more comments, another user, Blake Wilby, wrote that they wish
they could go thrifting but that they cannot afford it, so their only form of clothing is “things I bought
five years ago.” While trying to highlight more affordable goth-style clothing, many users remarked
that they would not find such clothing at thrift stores near them. Even though AB was able to find nice
clothing, not everyone has the means to travel to suburban areas and purchase this type of clothing if
they cannot pay for it or find it.

IBF’s and TT’s videos deliberately intended to show their audience members the clothing that
specific brands offer goths. AB’s video differs from theirs because she does not go into the haul video
to showcase any particular brands. She seeks to find some comparable clothing pieces to what she
saw in the 90s goth scene she was a part of so that her audience members can get an idea of her
interests. Another difference is that AB offers to give away the clothing she purchased at the end of
her video. By offering her audience a giveaway, she encourages consumption. However, instead of
encouraging her audience to buy any clothing, the giveaway grants followers a chance to obtain a
garment that is hand-selected by the cultural mediator. While IBF and TT mention they chose what
items they reviewed in their video, AB filming herself shopping adds a personal touch to the video.
She capitalizes on the social capital she establishes in her video while elevating the subcultural
capital she has from her experiences in the 90s goth scene. Additionally, she can portray herself as
someone her audience knows as she shares personal experiences in the scene with her audience members, therefore, allowing her identity as goth to appear like the real deal. In contrast, IBF and TT’s identities are performed through the commodities they acquired.

**Key Findings from the Case Studies**

The case study answered the research questions posed in chapter two. To reiterate, RQ1 examines how people display their goth identities in online vs. offline fields, and RQ2 asks how cultural mediators influence the consumption patterns of their audience members. RQ3 looks at capital conversion in correspondence with commodification to understand the implications of marginality and resistive potential in goth. One of the ways that goth YouTubers do so is by presenting themselves as cultural mediators, which distinguishes them from their audience members. IBF, TT, and AB are essentially trendsetters for their audience members. They are the ones who select what items they will receive or buy and review for their audience members. From the videos analyzed, it is evident that each of these goth YouTubers portrays themselves as cultural mediators through their communication with their audiences and how they present themselves in the video. IBF, TT, and AB greet their viewers at the beginning of their videos before telling their audience that their video will be a haul video.

IBF and TT include the links to their social media at the end of their videos and tell their audience members to subscribe. TT provides her social media links on screen at the start of the video and later thanks her audience for supporting her on Patreon. She also verbally acknowledges that she is privileged to create the digital content that she wants. Through this acknowledgment, audience members can see that she distinguishes herself more as the content creator than an ordinary person. TT reveals that she has accumulated enough symbol, cultural, economic, and social capital to have the means of being a goth YouTuber. AB does not include any social media links in her video. Instead, viewers will find her social media handles in the video description. She is also selling her own merchandise on her YouTube channel's store tab. As previous research from Baym (2015) and Schwemmer and Ziewiecki (2018) have shown, cultural mediators are like micro-celebrities promoting
not only the products of another brand but also their own merchandise. Some of the items being sold feature AB’s image on some of them, making her appear as though she is a celebrity.

Through their self-presentation, each of these goth YouTubers showcases their own goth identity and ties to goth. As Hebdige (1979) and Eco (1973) described, objects can be seen as signs, meaning that what the person is wearing and what is around them is a signifier of their ties to a particular subcultural group. For TT, it is considerably easy to see from the teeth wallpaper and the coffin-shaped pillow behind her that she is interested in spooky home décor. The same goes for IBF who’s video setting is a black couch in a room with red walls and AB’s plain white background with bat-shaped wall décor. The style of clothing that each of them wears serves as an even more intentional form of communicating their ties to goth. Hebdige points to Eco (1973)’s statement regarding how one’s clothes speak for them. Eco (1973) also states that clothes communicate belongingness through a subcultural group’s behaviors and beliefs. With all-black clothing and dark make-up, they are each visually demonstrating their ties to the goth subculture. IBF’s bat tattoos on her collar bone and the facial piercing she and TT have also communicated their individual goth identities, which are forms of personal expression.

After establishing that they look the part of a goth, there are other more subtle indicators of goth identity. For example, IBF mentions that she plans to wear the dress she wears in her video to a dance party the following day. From the goth rock music she has in the background of her video, her audience can infer that she will be attending a dance party that features goth rock music. She also talks about unisex fashion and notes that KILLSTAR produces fashion that anyone can wear and adds that she will be letting her husband wear the shawl she received in her haul because he likes it. Other indicators of her own goth identity fall under the type of descriptions she uses for the items, including “spooky” and “ritualistic.” Her interest in crystals and pentagrams further highlights her fascination with witchcraft and the occult, which often get conflated with goth identity. These examples address RQ1.
On the other hand, TT is more subtle about her goth identity. It is really through the commodities that she has and her style that are visible markers for her ties to goth. Her identity performance addresses RQ1 and RQ2. One can infer that she has already established her identity as a goth in previous videos. After amassing significant subcultural capital from other videos, including her video with the BBC and her "What Not to Say to A Goth Girl" video, she does not need to justify her identity verbally. Rather than presenting commentary about her identity as a goth, audience members must search for other indicators. Her channel username of Toxic Tears and the brief glimpse of her Instagram content featured at the beginning of her video do not offer much insight into her goth identity. Commodities are the sole indicator in the video that she is goth because she does not include any further indication of her goth identity outside of her commodities.

AB verbally communicates her own goth identity through the narratives she shares of her lived experiences being a 90s goth. Although she does not plainly state that she is a 90s goth, AB tells her audience about the different types of goth fashion in the 90s, indicating that she was a goth in the 90s. Not only does she dress in goth styles, but the commentary about the types of clothing she encountered in the 90s demonstrates that goth identity she takes on from her lived experiences. Her lived experiences grant her an additional layer of credibility as a cultural mediator because of her ability to share her knowledge from the 90s goth scene with her audience members. Her knowledge and experience give her subcultural capital without having to convert other forms. TT and IBF do not have subcultural capital beyond their commodities and self-presentation. They rely on their ability to convert different forms of capital into subcultural capital. AB's subcultural capital from the 90s goth scene allows her to convert her cultural, social, and economic capital. A primary example of how she does this is how she uses her experiences to encourage her followers to create clothing by finding cheaper clothing from the thrift store and even providing them with examples of 90s goth fashion DIYs from her own experience as well as what she observed. Despite IBF including goth rock music in the background of her videos, she and TT have to convert other forms of capital from their commodities to obtain subcultural capital.
The goth habitus in the field of goth YouTube exhibits how goth YouTubers can construct goth identity through different forms of capital. Habitus and conversion of capital to shape the field of goth YouTube offer a response for RQ3. For starters, economic capital and being able to financially afford the equipment used to make well-produced videos is one of the critical components that make the aspirational labor of goth YouTubers worthwhile. The technological resources to produce quality videos are not accessible for everyone because they require economic capital as well as “leisure time to learn to use them effectively” (Duffy, 2016, p. 8). Resources to create content is substantial in the context of goth identity and subculture because it shows that capital plays a role in how goth YouTubers perform their identities. From the case studies, IBF and TT appear to perform their identities through commodities. They converted different forms of capital into subcultural capital. AB possesses subcultural capital from her lived experiences and converted that capital into other forms of capital such as social capital. The case study revealed that goth identity performances on YouTube influence the habitus that followers form regarding being a goth. For IBF and TT’s followers, the habitus centers around the shared interest in acquiring commodities. For AB, the goth habitus is formed around knowledge about the goth subculture, fostering social relationships and cultural tastes from others within that space. Depending on the type of videos followers watch, the goth habitus for goth YouTubers appears to come from cultural capital or the shared interest in goth clothing.

In addition to economic capital, cultural and subcultural capital hold a notable degree of importance as well. The importance of capital respond to RQ2 and RQ3. For AB, that lived experience of being goth in the 90s is what many of her audience members cannot obtain, so watching her haul video might entail that they seek it out through the nostalgic narrating of someone with an online reputation as a 90s goth. Additionally, cultural and economic capital entails that aspirational laborers need a great deal of authenticity in their videos to gain supporters. Authenticity might motivate some creators to format haul videos in ways that enable consumer audiences to be active participants as they are watching the video (Baym & Burnett, 2009). The formatting can account for why the camera angles are close to the goth YouTubers as they speak to create a more
personalized setting. And it also heightens the cultural and economic capital because the goth YouTuber can show their audience the detailing on particular items that entices them to want to consume.

As cultural mediators, the types of commodities featured in these haul videos drive the consumption among audience members that RQ2 poses. One of the ways consumerism has made its way into the goth subculture and online goth fields is through goth YouTubers. Each of the goth YouTubers from the case study employs language that signals the desirability of a product. IBF and TT use words such as “cute” and “beautiful” when describing some of the items they showcase to encourage their audience members to purchase these products. IBF goes beyond that to provide a complete sales pitch of the clothing that she reviews. Not only does she wear some of the items, but she emphasizes the KILLSTAR mailing list, their packing, their business card, and her personal opinion of adoring the company to drive her consumers to purchase from the line. IBF even adds that the pieces are easy to style and look nice in and that she is “happy” to have the items she received. Ironically, even the username It’s Black Friday panders to capitalism and consumption because Black Friday is a worldwide retail and shopping day. Her username in itself is a more subtle indicator of encouraging consumption.

As Bourdieu (1986) describes, subcultural capital is guided by cultural and social positions; thus, one’s taste is influential in driving consumption. IBF, TT, and AB all chose items that they liked, which guides their own identities, and their tastes shape that of their consumers. As evidenced by comments on their videos, IBF, TT, and AB’s audiences love what they see in these videos. The comments left on these videos also respond to RQ3. The lack of economic capital can pave the way for audience members that cannot afford these items to feel excluded and potentially marginalized within the field. Some even explicitly mention that they went out of their way to purchase what they saw. On top of this, the video descriptions for both IBF and TT’s videos include the link to the KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill websites, where consumers can find the items or line of clothing featured in the video.
Bourdieu’s discussion of capital creating a status for individuals within the groups and society reflects how subcultural capital shapes consumption. Subcultural capital is also said to create a status for the individual relevant to the audience members beholding that identity (Cova et al., 2007).

Because AB shares personal accounts about what she remembers from the 90s and her own participation in the goth scene, audience members see her as having a higher status and, in some cases, an authentic goth identity because of the power dynamics that exist in her video. She can use her economic capital to obtain these culturally significant clothing items establishing her cultural capital alongside the subcultural and social capital she has from her experience and connection to audience members to demonstrate these power dynamics. Thus, it is evident to see where her audience might seek out commodities in the hopes of being recognized by the cultural mediator and obtaining their own capital through the commodities they purchase.
CHAPTER 5
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS OF GOTH NIGHTCLUBBING

Several critical findings emerged from the data that demonstrate the ways in which participants perform their identities in the context of a goth club. The stories the interviewees shared intersected with discourses that include identity, clubbing, fashion, dancing, socializing, and goth music. The findings that emerged from the study are organized in the following order: (1) the participants’ introduction to goth, (2) goth nightclubs, (3) goth fashion, (4) dancing at goth nightclubs, (5) socializing and community formation at goth nightclubs, (6) virtual goth clubbing, (7) goth identity performances, and (8) marginalization, space, and safety. Each of these findings draw from the experiences of the participants as well as what they have observed attending various goth clubs in Southern California prior to the pandemic. Collectively, the narratives illustrate how active members in the Southern California goth scene view identity and subculture.

Introduction to Goth

Each participant had their own unique journey that led them to discover the goth subculture. A majority of the participants listed goth music as the primary factor that led them to discover the goth subculture. Zander, Jason, Erik, Cole, and Nova were all introduced to goth through their first experiences going to a goth club. Each of these interviewees recalled attending a goth night either by their own accord or by invitation and that led to their discovery of goth music and the subculture. Zander noted that moving from Florida to Southern California was very fascinating for him. He shared that he had grown up on hip hop and to come to Southern California where “everyone’s wearing black and doing this strange kind of dancing – it was very interesting.” Experiencing what goth was for the first time was also a unique experience for Erik as well. “I come from El Salvador… from a very small town in the countryside. So, goth music over there is…pretty much non-existent.” He would come to find out about goth through the music and clubbing from a friend. Erik not only acquired cultural capital through his attendance at this goth night, but he also acquired some social capital through his friendship with the individual that introduced him to goth clubbing. This connects back to RQ1 and
demonstrates that the connection one has within the goth scene can allow individuals to obtain subcultural capital and this often comes from the relationships members form with other insiders.

Outside of music and clubbing, Blake, Ligia, and Iris describe being drawn to goth through other means including literature, films, Halloween, other goths, and MTV. Ligia recalled having Edgar Allan Poe being read to her by her grandparents. Iris listed literature by Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite and films like The Crow, Black Circle Boys, and The Craft as some of the things that drew her to the goth aesthetic. She cited that she found aesthetics in the films “pleasing.” Blake mentioned that while attending high school he encountered others dressed as goth and wished he could be part of the scene. His gradual decision to dress goth was partially inspired by Japanese Rock or J-Rock music. Blake recalled feeling simultaneously surprised and excited seeing other Asians wearing goth clothing and make-up. He revealed that J-Rock music inspired him to dress goth and recalled that he would wear his mom’s black clothes and put on make-up. “My senior year I just decided to be who I am,” he said.

Ligia, Hannah, Jason, and Ajax were introduced to goth through the music that they heard. Hannah’s father would play music from more well-known goth bands like Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and Joy Division, but he was not a fan of the goth subculture. Hannah’s interest in the goth subculture came from her enjoyment of goth music that ultimately inspired her to seek out information about the subculture on her own accord. Her interest in learning more about goth grew alongside her love for the music. This shows that goth music had a profound impact on Hannah because it ultimately led to her to find her identity as a goth through the music. Ajax was very religious at the time he encountered hearing goth music and for him it ended up being a bad and somewhat frightening experience because he was told by a family member that the music was evil. He did not seek out the goth subculture until he was re-introduced to the music by a friend that took him to a local goth night. “I always thought, Oh, man, it's gonna be like, evil and all this stuff. And it didn't turn out to be that way,” he says. Jason’s experience with goth ultimately came from industrial and shock rock music.
My first introductions, band-wise were bands like Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson and Skinny Puppy. And then I started to learn about the subculture in general and started dressing the part.

The findings show us that each participant was drawn to the goth subculture from their own experiences with clubbing, literature, media, music, and other people. Their membership in the goth subculture and their local goth scene were shaped by their interests. Their interest inspired them to learn more about the subculture. These findings tie back to RQ1, where we can see that participants acquired cultural capital through their interests and experiences. Some participants also obtained cultural capital from what they learned from others or information they sought after. Additionally, the interviewees began to form their goth identities from the things that interested them about the goth subculture. The findings also showed that the interviewees do not consider goth fashion a strong or significant interest that drew them to the subculture. This finding on goth identity highlights that goth fashion shapes the identities of goths online but does not have the same impact on goths offline.

Ultimately from these interviews, it appears that for many of the participants, being immersed in the atmosphere of a goth club and listening to goth music left a lasting impression and allowed them to gain subcultural capital. While not all of the interviewees immediately discovered goth music, the findings demonstrate that people, the aesthetic, literature, and other forms of music and media served as inspiration for exploring the goth subculture. The interviewees' experiences tie back to RQ1 because they demonstrate how cultural and subcultural capital is acquired through knowledge, music, and other creative endeavors. Each participant gravitated towards finding out more about goth through the things that initially introduced them to goth. As they obtained more cultural capital from finding stuff they liked, such as music, they established their own individual identities within the goth subculture while also refining their tastes. Their interests and, for some, their early experiences led them to discover new information about the goth subculture, which allowed them to gain subcultural capital. Subcultural capital for most interviewees came from the knowledge they gained about the subculture, scene, and music, which led them to find events, people, and fashion styles.
Goth Nightclubs

When asked to describe what goth clubs are like, the participants' responses connected to RQ1 and RQ3. In terms of identity performance, goth clubs allow insiders to express themselves and to feel connected to other individuals that attended. Additionally, the atmosphere and setup of the club provide insiders with a space that is comfortable for socializing and dancing. Socializing occurs away from the dance floor, and most clubs have a smoking patio or area where people can gather to socialize. Participants remarked that every goth nightclub is different, but the music drives the atmosphere. Each participant described attending various goth clubs and noted that each club has its own unique atmosphere distinct from other clubs, despite sharing similar characteristics.

When asked to describe what it is like being inside a goth nightclub, Nova and Ligia agreed that the buildings where the events are held are usually dark and dimly lit. Ligia stated that some clubs “put on a lot of candles, if it’s possible in the venue.” If candles are not permitted, Ligia went on to say that the venue lights usually consist of “ball lights,” “sconces” and sometimes there is an “LED light that goes in a circle so there’s some little flashes of light.” The atmosphere from the lights and the music set up an “ambience of mystery and darkness” says Ligia. She even compared going to the goth club to having “a candlelight dinner with somebody in a nice restaurant” and added that some goth clubs make you feel like you and your friends are “the only people there sometimes.”

Nova described goth clubs as having “a little bit of a dungeon aspect going on” and remarked that “the forbidden side of it really depends on which one you’re going to.” Iris observed that some clubs have upstairs and downstairs events. One of the first goth events she went to had two events held at the same time. One event took place upstairs in a “retro room, and the more industrial stuff was downstairs.” Depending on the location, some goth nightclub events are held in uncommon places. Nova recalled attending goth night events hosted in Mexican restaurants. She stated people would be “dancing on like a ten-foot by ten-foot dance floor, with no decorations whatsoever.” Locations for these events varied, but the dancing and socializing contribute at clubs facilitate a sense of community. For some participants, hanging out by the bar, indoors, or out on the smoking
patio to socializing is part of what makes attending goth nightclubs experience feel like a home. Cole shared that the smoking patio at the club he attends is where “amazing conversations are held” about a wide range of topics. On the dance floor, the music adds to the atmosphere of a goth nightclub.

The dance floor is where the music is prioritized. Music that can be heard at goth night can consist of a variety of artists. Cole mentioned several bands that he has played at goth nights including “The Cure,” “Siouxsie and the Banshees,” “Bauhaus,” “Joy Division,” “Depeche Mode,” “Tr/st,” “Hante,” and “Boy Harsher.” Jason also shared a few industrial bands that he has played at goth nightclub events where goth and industrial music both get played. He lists “Skinny Puppy,” “Suicide Commando,” and “VNV Nation” as some of the popular industrial artists that get played at these events. Other music that came up in my interview with Hannah included “She Past Away,” “The Kentucky Vampires,” “London After Midnight,” “Sex Gang Children,” “Specimen,” “Suspiria,” and “The Sisters of Mercy.” Cole remarked that the music at goth clubs has also changed over the years in terms of how it is categorized.

I noticed over the years, especially in 2000 it really started sub-genreing. And for all of us old goths (he laughs) we kinda got annoyed with it because in our day it was goth, darkwave, deathrock, and industrial. That was it. And now there’s like twenty different subgenres.

Despite the changes that goth clubs that undergone over the years, the interviewees all concluded that goth nightclubs offer them spaces where they can be themselves. Goth fashion at goth nightclubs is one example of how goths perform their identities.

**Goth Fashion**

The findings on goth fashion provided responses about RQ1 and RQ2 regarding identity and the role of commodification. Participants’ responses revealed that goth fashion plays two roles in identity performance. First, goth fashion is a visual expression of one’s subcultural tastes and interests. People attending goth clubs often dress up, reflecting their taste in music or the style of fashion they enjoy, performing their individual goth identities through their clothing. The second role that goth fashion plays for insiders is determining how long one has been active in the subculture or local scene. Goth fashion at goth nightclubs comes in a variety of styles.
When discussing fashion and outward aesthetics, Hannah, Nova, Zander, Blake, and Ajax focused a bit more on what they observed others wearing to the clubs. They described dark make-up and black clothing as part of the fashion choices that goths will wear at the clubs. Ajax recalled that his style started out as the traditional goth or “trad goth” style. The trad goth style for him “long coats, long hair, and make-up.” Blake noted that the make-up that goths wear bears similarities to Japanese Kabuki make-up and that fashion by itself could be performative. In addition to being performative, goth fashion is personal to each individual within the scene. Jason pointed out that the goth subculture holds a lot of “appreciation for the unorthodox and the macabre,” which can cross over into the style of clothing people wear. For many, the music influences how they dress and shows off the different styles of music they enjoy. For Zander, wearing all black is more of an aesthetic preference than an immediate indication that he is a goth. He is interested in the work of fashion designers like Rick Owens and Yohji Yamamoto, and thus for him, “it felt natural to go towards that kind of environment.”

The participants described particular styles of goth fashion they had seen over the years, such as cybergoth, rivethead, Victorian, and death rock. Nova noted that people enjoy “mixing and matching” fashion styles. Jason and Zander described the late 90s and early 2000s scene to be heavily into industrial. The interviewees described some of the clothing pieces and accessories that people would wear, including Dickies, Doc Martens, band shirts, velvet, fishnets, whips, and suspenders. Zander added that people with dyed hair and piercings were part of the look as well. Some people tend to stick to particular aesthetics, as noted by Iris and Hannah. Both Iris and Hannah pointed out that the Nu Goth look consists of occultic and witchy fashion and uses symbols like bats, crescent moons, and pentagrams. This style is now one of the more popular styles worn by attendees wear at goth nightclubs. Participants also indicated that some people are motivated to dress in certain styles based on how they want to be regarded by others.

For Blake and Iris, clothing reflects how they want others to perceive them. Blake shared that fashion is important to him because “it gives me a lot of confidence.” He also shared that people find
themselves in the fashion that they wear. Fashion “represents us” he says. He goes on to say that as an individual, you “know your limitations” and “what kind of clothes you should wear when [you] dance.” Participants like Nova and Iris noted that clothes can be a telling sign of how long one has been a part of the local scene. The more dressed up a newcomer is at a goth night event can indicate to insiders that they are either new or a tourist. Fashion is also personal for some participants like Erik, Iris, Zander, and Nova.

“I like to express myself the way I want to” says Erik. He added that goth fashion allows him to “let my inner self come out.” Iris also pointed out that insiders who wear goth fashion “identify with the music” and that their styles and tastes reflect their own connection to the music. Iris referred to her own tastes in Victorian and deathrock fashion to demonstrate how she identifies with goth music through her own fashion tastes. For Zander and Nova, DIYing and modifying their clothes is something that allows them to express themselves. Nova shared with me that she is often “stapling, safety-pinning stuff together and slicing stuff up.” Zander noted that he prefers clothing that is aesthetic.

I don’t like things that are kind of cheesy, like Hot Topic. I prefer clothes that are well-constructed. So for me, [I get] whatever I can gather from thrift stores and put it together. I can rework it ... Sometimes I wear women’s clothing that’s oversized because I feel like a lot of clothing even at a smaller level is still very chic.

Comfort also played a factor in the fashion styles of Iris, Blake, Erik, and Nova. Their experience regularly attending goth clubs allowed them to figure out their own identities and styles within the goth subculture. Blake pointed out that goths know how to dress and he alluded to time, and experience being part of one’s sense of self-identity within the scene. Clothing is a form of subcultural capital that demonstrates how much one knows about goth and the Southern California goth scene. Less is more in terms of fashion. The more dressed up one is at a goth nightclub event can indicate that they are not familiar with the Southern California goth scene. Goth fashion is also tied to group identity because members of the subculture wear all black clothing. Members will also incorporate similar accessories into their outfits, such as chokers and gloves. Other participants had mentioned that their fashion styles had changed essentially for comfort while dancing. When the
interviewees know that they will be dancing a lot, they tend to opt for clothing that does not restrict their movement. Nova mentioned that for herself and other dancers, comfort is paramount. You “might be lucky if I do eyeliner,” she said when discussing dressing up in black shirts, leggings, and boots when going out to dance.

These findings indicate that goth identity in terms of outward expression is subject to change over time. It is not as fixed and rigid the way it is presented in goth clothing haul videos. Rather, goth fashion is a form of self-agency that is reflected in how the goths perform their identities. Zander, Blake, Cole, and Nova noted that the type of clothes one wears at a goth club often signals whether a person is there for dancing or socializing. For some individuals, the clothing they wear at goth clubs is worn specifically for dancing to grant themselves the freedom to perform their identities through their movement. Zander pointed out that he tends to dance for “four hours straight” and wearing comfortable clothing is ideal for dancing “more chaotically or furiously.” Others perform their identities through social interactions and will dress up in a broader range of styles.

Blake mentioned that he once tried to dance while wearing a coat and remarked his attempt did not go as well as anticipated. From his observations, people that get dressed up for the goth club are there to socialize. Comfort might not be as prioritized as dressing up for self-expression, to make a statement, or to shape how others perceive them. These findings respond to RQ1 because they demonstrate that dancing and socializing offer more insight into one’s membership in the goth subculture than clothing. Goth fashion can be worn by anyone, as pointed out by the participants. However, individuals express their goth identity and membership in the subculture through dancing and socializing. These activities can also highlight personal tastes, experiences, and knowledge of the subculture and local scene.

Zander, Blake, Ajax, and Ligia mentioned that theme nights at goth clubs can also influence how people dress. Blake and Zander add that people usually get dressed up for theme nights and events where people from out of town and other states will show up. Zander added to that notion by sharing that certain clubs and events have specific moods that often inspire him to dress up based on
that theme. He notes that for some clubs there is room for him to be more “dramatic” with his style.

Zander candidly remarked that sometimes he will wear a dress depending on the club and theme. He often experiments with “volume” and “different shapes” in his clothing at these events. Nova pointed out that people often form or “build” their outfits specifically for a theme night, suggesting there is preparation involved. In some cases, Ligia mentioned that people sometimes get together to dress up and get ready for event nights. “It’s a whole, very creative process,” she remarked. These findings on the role of fashion in dancing, socializing, and theme nights reveal that goth fashion also shapes how goth identity is performed at goth nightclubs.

A few of the interviewees noted that commodification has impacted how people perform their own goth identities, addressing RQ1 and RQ2. Ajax pointed out that for some people, goth is just fashion. He shared with me that goth “for a lot of people starts off that way,” indicating that people think goth is only a fashion before they learn more about the subculture. Clothing worn at goth clubs has changed over the years. Cole’s experiences in the goth community reveal that sometimes change is gradual for individuals.

As you get older, you don’t wear as much make-up (pauses) you don’t dye your hair as much. It’s not that you don’t care; it’s just that you…you realize there’s other priorities. But I don’t let it go.

He also shared that goth fashion has also changed within the last decade that he referred to this change as “goth lite.” When asked to describe this change, he mentioned that people gradually stopped dressing up within the last ten years.

I started noticing it going down. And not in a bad way. I just noticed that people weren’t (pauses) dressing up in their best outfits anymore. They were just doing the black jeans and t-shirt. I think a lot of that was also, uh, for lack of better words, a normal crowd and they’re being introduced to the scene and liking the music.

His observations draw attention to normal people entering goth spaces, which is something that Nova also observed.

For some participants like Nova, the clothing worn by attendees of goth clubs communicated that they are tourists. She frankly stated that commodification has contributed to tourism at goth clubs. Tourism entails individuals who act goth by dressings up as goths (Spracklen & Spracklen,
Nova referred to these individuals as “Insta-Goths” and shared that about five to seven years ago, these individuals “would show up in head-to-toe, two- or three-hundred-dollar Hot Topic outfits just to come to the goth club to check it out.” She adds that sometimes the clothes have “never been washed” and “never been worn.” Outside of the goth club, Nova briefly discussed how working on and off for a Hot Topic within the last ten years gave her additional insight into how goth fashion has been commodified. She stated:

[People would come to the store] just to find a t-shirt of a band that matched their sneakers or matched their baseball cap without knowing anything about the bands or the genres. And I mean, they would go to the heavy metal [and] industrial bands because the graphics look really cool on the t-shirts. And it matched whatever other fashion accessory they were buying.

Iris recalled seeing patrons attending goth nightclubs wearing a vampire-inspired look that consisted of “white face paint,” “long hair,” “contacts,” and “Victorian jackets and coats with brocade patterns.” Ajax mentioned that the vampire aesthetic and style that was once popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s has largely died down. He alluded to the fact that the look is often used to “stereotype” goths, and seeing people dressed in this style at goth clubs is rare. Iris noted that the individuals she saw tended to stand nearby the dance floor and socialize, which gave her some mixed impressions about their identities and their motive for attending a goth club. Iris said their placement by the dance floor suggested that they were tourists or spectators. She stated that she did not think they were there to socialize with other goths but rather “to make fun of people” since they “did not dance.”

As Nova had previously pointed out, that there are a variety of styles that appear at Southern California goth clubs that indicate how long someone has been active in the scene. She had mentioned that on occasion, people who have never been to the club would come in wearing head-to-toe goth outfits that looked brand new and as if they had never been worn. Nova also mentioned that the month of October seemed to attract tourists and outsiders to the goth clubs. She stated that October is a month where “they have more time off,” and out of curiosity, they will attend goth clubs. She added that it is often that based on the way they dress that makes them stand out compared to the regular attendees that are not as “hardcore” about the specific aesthetics they sport to the clubs.
Ajax branched off this sentiment by noting that over time people realize they do not need to try hard. Thus, the more one gains subcultural capital and insight from attending goth nightclubs their fashion and aesthetic choice will change, and, in some cases, people might end up tailoring their clothing for dancing or for socializing. The more comfortable or casual one dresses, the more likely they are there for dancing, whereas a person that is dressed up in head-to-toe goth clothing gives off the impression that they are either a tourist, a newbie, or there for socializing. This finding demonstrates that insider knowledge about the scene is visible through one’s clothing choices and adds to the finding that often, the less dressed up a person is, the more insider knowledge and experience they might have regarding goth clubbing.

From Nova’s responses, fashion could also entail that people buy what they can afford or what they have access to. Ajax noted that he has come across people that buy band shirts before they listen to the band. Hannah also noted that Nu-Goth fashion is something a lot of people will buy into. She even recalls seeing people wear Nu-Goth fashion at clubs and mentioned that the fashion people equate to goth fashion might factor into what they can afford to buy. She asserts that “even though goth is a music-based subculture, I know a lot of outsiders that know goth because of its fashion aesthetic.” Nova and Zander also brought up the concept of transforming clothes and acknowledged that some people might not have the skills or resources to make their own or to reconstruct pieces of clothing. Goth fashion in Southern California has also experienced a variety of changes since the late 1990s.

Based on RQ1, those that are not familiar with the changes in clubbing attire for goth clubs might assume that dressing up in all black with elaborate make-up and clothing is still the norm. However, based on the responses that a majority of the participants gave, it is evident that newcomers and outsiders do not have the same insight on the scene that insiders have. As a result, insiders can infer people’s motives for attending a goth club based on the way they are dressed. Cole and Jason describe some of the changes in clubbing attire over the years can change over time. Cole had previously noted that during the past decade, fewer goth club attendees would dress up. He also
observed that dressing up was at the height of its popularity in the 90s and early 2000s. Jason described his own fashion choices when he first started dressing goth to be “more like the Marilyn Manson, baby bat - don’t necessarily know what you’re doing kind of style.” Jason noted that his style was influenced by the late 90s. At this time, people dressed up in industrial fashion. Their styles included a lot of experimentation with fabric and hairstyles. It was not uncommon to see people “putting things in their hair; to give themselves fake cyber falls” or wearing “darker eye make-up.”

While goths still enjoy wearing these styles of goth fashion, a lot has changed over the years in terms of how dressed up a person gets to attend a goth club. Blake emphasized that at a regular goth night, “I feel more relaxed because goth nights is when all the regulars come.” We can infer from this that he feels comfortable just being himself and being present at the goth night. This is the opposite for an event night because that’s usually when goths from other parts of Southern California and other states attend. When discussing event nights, Blake said that he goes out of his way to dress up. “I’m gonna make sure I look all good. I mean, you gotta represent… with my full-on heavy make-up and stuff.” Insiders are aware of the nuances in how goth fashion has changed over time, and many recognize dancing and socializing as better indicators of how goths perform their identities within the goth nightclub space.

**Dancing at Goth Nightclubs**

Dancing at goth nightclubs revealed the different ways that goth dancing creates room for goth identity performance and for resistance to commercialization which answers RQ1 and RQ3. Alongside goth fashion, goth dancing is a form of subcultural capital among members that reflects their insider knowledge being a part of the goth subculture. Attendees that attend goth nightclubs can use their dancing as a form of subcultural capital that demonstrates their insider knowledge about the styles of dancing and music they enjoy. Dancing as subcultural capital can be converted into cultural capital where attendees’ musical tastes are reflected in the songs they dance to. Goth fashion can serve as some indication of one’s interests and tastes in goth music; although, as pointed out by the participants, commodification has changed the way people demonstrate belongingness within the
subculture. Dancing communicates more about individuals’ identity, experience, knowledge, and tastes than fashion.

The goth nightclub space offers individuals a chance to be creative through dancing. Zander noted that goths tend to dance like “dead trees” and even “cheerleaders” due to their forms and the type of songs that are being played. Cole and Jason observed that people dancing at goth clubs wear comfortable clothing in part because of the energetic and upbeat nature of the music played. Dancing can come in various forms, and for many of the interviewees, dancing was the primary form of self-expression they engaged in when going to the clubs. Twirling around, bobbing one’s head up and down, swaying, stomping, gliding, and even using flowy veils and skirts as part of one’s dancing are a few ways that participants described goth dancing. The participants also stated that these are styles of dancing they have observed and engaged in themselves. This finding ties back to RQ1 because it reveals that goths use their dancing as a form of identity performance.

Hannah enthusiastically talked about how certain songs and artists like Siouxsie and the Banshees just compel her to run onto the dance floor and dance. She describes goth dancing as putting people into “a very joyful state of mind that most of us are in.” Iris and Ligia describe dancing as something that individuals feel comfortable enough to do and that in the goth club, people feel free to be themselves. Ligia stated that people express themselves in their dancing how they want to, and in many cases, she will “dance like no one’s watching.” While music and fashion are apparent indicators of goth identity performance, dancing holds an even more important role for goths. Dancing allows for them to demonstrate their goth identities visibly through movement.

Depending on the beat of the music played at goth club events, the slower songs tend to bring in the older crowds that enjoy melodramatic and elegant forms of dancing accompanied by music with a slower tempo. Cole notes that when the music changes, the dancing gets rougher, and the pace increases. He also recalls the alongside fashion, the styles of dancing at goth clubs have also changed. He described how the 90s had a popular form of dancing where people used artifacts like fans and veils to dance. In his words, he shared with me that:
In the early 90s, people, men, and women, didn’t matter, would come in veils, long flowy things, and fans. I loved hearing the fans pop. Because they would actually get into it and I don’t want to say twirl, but there were times where they looked like they were floating on the floor. It is beautiful to watch.

Now that dancing styles have shifted, Cole went on to describe what dancing at a goth night he hosts looks like nowadays.

In the beginning stages of the night, it’s very ethereal and poetic. Especially for the older crowd that danced in the 90s. They would go completely out, and I loved watching them. And I’m mesmerized by them. Cause I can’t do it. I’m an Industrial kid at heart. But then over the course of the night when I speed it up it does change.

When the music changes, the style of dancing changes with it. From the goth events he hosts, Jason shared with me that when he plays industrial music, peoples’ movement changes to incorporate stomping and rapid arm movements to match the tempo of the music.

Music with faster tempos like industrial music will compel people to incorporate more stomping and fast-paced dance moves. The more stomy and fast-paced dancing is significantly different from the ethereal and graceful dancing, like the “ballerina movement” brought up by Nova and “belly dancing” that Blake noted. Instead, this form of dancing is equated with industrial music and other form of heavy electronic music like aggrotech where even the movement differs from goth dancing. In some instances, Jason observed that the “two-step” goth style of dancing sometimes continues when the music changes. Goths will use quick arm and body movements when dancing industrial music and other forms of heavy electronic music like aggrotech. These responses provided by Nova, Blake, and Jason underscore the significance of music, revealing that music drives goth identity. Dancing also indicates that individuals’ preferred styles of dancing correlate with the types of music they listen to, which also attests to the way they use their movement to perform their goth identity.

Near the dance floor, there is not a lot of socializing that goes on. Nova shared that the dance floor was a space where people “don’t like to be around each other,” and they “definitely don’t like being touch [or] danced with.” Both Zander and Ligia added that people usually dance for a while if they attend the goth club to dance. Zander shared that at goth clubs his is usually “dancing for like four hours.” Ligia added to the sentiments shared by Nova early on that most goth people prefer to
have space when dancing and noted that people “don’t typically grind on each other.” Ligia remarked “I feel positive, and I feel good,” when she is dancing at a goth club and openly expressed how much she missed dancing during the pandemic. In some cases, dancing can even prove to those around them that an individual belongs in the subculture, like in one experience that Blake recalled at a goth club where his fashion was not enough for one individual to consider him a goth.

From the interviews, Blake briefly recalled his experience with racism and marginalization within the scene. Blake recalled wearing a cowboy hat to a goth night and getting told to go to the rock en español event instead by another goth. While he did not detail the person who made this comment, it was evident that the statement was hurtful from his description. Blake's response to this comment was to go on the dance floor and dance away the feelings and emotions he was experiencing. His dancing later earned him praise from the person that criticized his cowboy hat. Blake’s dancing was his way of using identity performance to prove to himself that he is goth. Despite the opinion of this other attendee at the event, dancing communicated his experience and knowledge about the subculture. Blake’s experience addresses RQ3 by showing us that dancing can be a form of subcultural capital. Blake’s insider knowledge of goth dancing shows us how he used dance as a personal form of resistance to marginalization and as a way of performing his identity as a goth within the goth nightclub space. Goth identity can also perform identity at goth nightclubs through socialization.

**Socializing and Community Formation at Goth Nightclubs**

The responses about socializing at goth nightclubs align with RQ2 and RQ3 because they provide concrete evidence for how goths can resist commodification and create spaces for resistance. A majority of the participants cited socializing as a way in which goths create communities where they can interact with other like-minded individuals. The interviewees had already demonstrated that goth fashion does not have as big of an influence on goth identity performance in so much as goth dancing and music. Socializing also allows goths to perform their identities in ways that enable people to foster a sense of community that the outside world sometimes does not provide.
for them. These communities can subvert the influence of commodification by prioritizing the creation of spaces for shared experiences amongst group members.

Ligia noted that socializing at goth nightclubs is going to vary depending on the individuals attending as well as the club space. She noted that she has friends that have social anxiety as well as friends that are on the autism spectrum. Being in the goth nightclub has allowed for individuals that marginalized to feel welcome in the space. She went on to say that:

Everyone has ample amount of space, and you can go off to someone you don’t know, and that person is not going to be judging you. They’re not going to look at you in a poor manner, because you’re different.

The goth nightclub space has created a sense of community where people can engage with others. Cole added to this notion of participating in conversations with people at goth clubs by sharing his own experiences.

When asked about what made goth significant for him, Cole shared with me that the people that attend goth clubs were influential in his journey as a goth and part of why he attends goth clubs. He described the many wonderful conversations he was part of that would take place out on the smoking patios of the club venue. These conversations would also include some “friendly debates” about politics and other topics deemed more controversial. The open-mindedness of the people was astounding to him, which indicates that goths can communicate and establish resistive potential within goth nightclubs. The perspectives, personalities, and conversations that goths share deviate from the types sustained by mainstream society. Mainstream society often preserves traditional and conservative viewpoints and values while shunning transgressive and radical forms of thought. Rather than partaking in that same attitude that mainstream culture holds, these conversations at goth nights allow communities to share different opinions and take on controversial issues. As Cole put it – people "learn from each other."

For many participants, goth clubs are spaces where they feel like others will not judge them. Erik added that attendees of clubs are often going to clubs to see their created family. People form tight-knit relationships with each other and feel comfortable being themselves in the goth nightclub
space. Going to goth nightclubs offers them a sense of community and a way of connecting to the people they care for, like family members. Erik and Ligia’s discussions about how being a part of the goth club space allowed them to feel safe with the people around them. Blake and Megan also felt that the goth club space gives them a sense of safety and freedom to detach from mainstream society and regular life responsibilities. They do not need to put on a specific performance like they would at work, school, or on social media. Members can find like-minded individuals that they can bond and interact. The sense of community and care that people have for each other is one of the biggest reasons why several interviewees go goth clubbing.

Erik, Blake, and Iris find that the space that goth clubs provide is inviting and comforting. Erik shared that the communities he found at goth nightclubs were often inviting and welcoming to newcomers and went on to say that he believes that the attendees would look out for those they do not know. Blake enthusiastically described goth clubbing as “the cure” because when you go there, “you know that you're not the only one that came from work and just want to dance.” He adds that people look truly “happy” when they are there because the atmosphere feels positive and energetic. As for the inside of a goth club, Iris described it as dark and that “it feels accepting.” She indicates that people feel like they can be themselves on the dance floor because of the atmosphere. The darkness, music, and atmosphere create a safe haven for those that attend goth nights to dance. The responses provided by Erik, Blake, and Iris answered RQ3. The atmosphere of goth clubs and the people attending can resist commodification through community building and creating safe spaces for members to perform their self-identities.

**Virtual Goth Clubbing**

The participants in the study had mixed sentiments about the Internet regarding their use of it and how they use it. Most of the interviewees responded that they used the Internet mainly to participate in online goth night events. This study took place during the height of the pandemic, where state-wide mandates forced many clubs, bars, and venues to shut down, allowing Twitch to emerge as a space for goths to recreate the sense of community they were missing out on during the
pandemic. Cole, Nova, Zander, Hannah, and Blake found that Twitch offered them a sense of community that was missed and needed by members who would often go clubbing before the pandemic. Nova replied that the closest she has gotten to frequenting online goth spaces was "following certain DJs on Twitch and attending their weekly Twitch streams or multiple times a week."

She added that this has helped her "stay sane" until the clubs open back up and also became a space where she can get her "fix of community." Nova also revealed that even though she had never met some of the people she interacts with online in person, they still fostered close relationships with one another. One example she gave was befriending a DJ online and how they both refer to each other as "a dear friend" despite not knowing each other in real life. As a DJ, Cole added that there are more freedoms that come with Twitch than live DJing.

[On Twitch] You have no idea what's going on. But you have more liberties, no restrictions. You can play anything you want. You don't have to play from 10 to 2 and then stop because you get kicked out. You can play whatever you want and whenever you want, so it's a double-edged sword.

Like Twitch, Zoom also received mixed opinions from insiders of the goth subculture.

Zander pointed out that, similar to Twitch, Zoom can create a sense of community when interacting with other people is limited. He added that he and others in the scene initially thought that clubs being online would "be kind of a temporary thing," which eventually lead to online clubbing starting to "lose its charm." When comparing clubs that offered a Zoom room for people to hang out on during the Twitch live stream, Zander noted allowed for more interaction among individuals. Some individuals would be dancing during the streams, and some would talk to each other, which Zander noted make it seem like there was "more environment." From these findings, we can see that offline goth communities can function online to recreate a sense of community and foster connections through music, dancing, and socializing. Twitch and Zoom allow people to perform their identities through different channels. Although it's not the same as being at an event in person, these findings reveal that goth communities can be created and maintained online. Zander attested to this by sharing that he could still dance and socialize at virtual events as he could at in-person goth events.
We can gather from these findings that goth identity for members of a local goth community often transcends the confines of a goth nightclub.

**Goth Identity Performances**

RQ2 brought up commodification and how it has impacted the contemporary goth subculture today. The responses provided by active members in the Southern California goth scene have also revealed that goth identity can be constructed, maintained, and performed in various ways. Hannah shared that she knows many outsiders who "know goth because of its fashion aesthetic." Nova shared similar sentiments to Hannah by stating that goth identity can be a lot of different things. She said that “for some, it is just a mindset; for some people, it is a lifestyle. And then [others] it's just a fashion fad.” Nova also went on to share her thoughts on goth identity as a whole.

I think it's more individual. If you resonate with it, and you had positive experiences, and that's how you found yourself as an individual, then I think you're more likely to keep it as a lifetime passion and a lifestyle than someone who was just being more of a tourist and just visiting.

Nova's description of identifying newcomers and tourists at goth clubs demonstrates that goth identity can be staged or performed for a short amount of time before one loses interest in it. Ligia also noted that she could also pick out another goth from "like halfway down the street." She shared that:

We give each other a smile or nod because we know there's something about the person – there’s something mysterious…something intriguing. You could pick it up by a piece of clothing or a piece of jewelry, or the way someone walks or presents themselves. I think once you're in that culture, like any other culture, you're going to be able to notice different eccentricities or motions or the way someone walks or moves. You're going to be able to identify that person in that particular culture.

We can see that some members within the goth scene might not hold the same attachment to the goth label as newcomers or those that are continuing to solidify their identities as goths.

Through outward expressions, people can use their bodies to express themselves creatively, as pointed out by Ligia and Nova. Both of them noted that their mixing of fashion styles, hair colors, and even piercings (in Nova's case) allows them to express themselves outwardly. Their responses address RQ1 and confirm that fashion and outward expression are notable in how individuals construct and perform their goth identities. Those that are there to socialize will dress up more
elaborately. For these individuals, dressing up is not necessarily for comfort, but more for personal or aesthetic choice. Their style often suits their personality, as Blake alluded to when he mentioned that insiders of the scene refined their tastes to suit their personalities and style. Goth fashion and aesthetics can be outwardly significant to those that are part of the subculture because their clothing can reflect their reason for attending clubs, their music tastes, and even their style of dancing. What is noteworthy to take from this finding is that insiders of the Southern California goth scene know when to dress up and how to curate their styles to suit them. By reflecting on what participants previously discussed about fashion, we can see how dressing up at regular goth nights can indicate a lack of knowledge about the scene. Typical goth clubbing attire now prioritizes comfort for dancing, whereas dressing up is often for socializing or reserved for special events.

Goths are aware of the nuances of goth identity as well performative facets of their culture. Some interviewees shared that their involvement in the goth subculture and offline goth communities gives them a sense of security that their identities are authentic. Zander mentioned he does not go around referring to himself as goth. For Zander, listening to the music and his experiences in the scene are enough. He does not need further approval because he has the subcultural and social capital to take on a goth identity. Commodification has created diverging uses of the goth label, and in some cases, the use of the goth label has impacted goth spaces in negative ways.

**Marginalization, Space, and Safety**

Other findings from this study responded to RQ2 and RQ3. These findings address how the impact of commodification transforms goth spaces. Commodification impacts goth spaces through the forms of marginalization, space, and safety. There are cases where racism and marginalization can impact individuals’ sense of security in their own identities. Space and safety can also create issues where insiders prioritize certain members' safety while neglecting the safety of others. Because these challenges occur within the goth space, several participants have offered their experiences that describe how commodification can influence their identity performance. Blake had previously mentioned his story about being marginalized for wearing a cowboy hat to a goth event. He used his
knowledge about goth dancing to perform his identity and show that he has subcultural capital. Zander also revealed that he had experienced marginalization within his local scene based on race. Zander mentioned that for a while, he felt marginalized being one of two black people attending goth nightclub events. He shared with me that he “didn’t feel welcome” at some events. “It wasn’t very accepting. And I think it was something that was just like, ‘oh, who is this guy? Why is he here?’” After sharing this, Zander moved on to describe how he stepped back from the goth scene for a while to attend 80s clubs. At one of 80s nights events that Zander attended he saw an individual shadow dancing to Michael Jackson. As previously mentioned, “shadow dancing” is not formally defined. It is a style of dancing that allows the dancer to use their movement and sometimes artifacts like fans or veils as a form of visual performance art. He later spoke with the individual later that evening, and the individual encouraged him to attend a goth club to check out more music. Adding onto this, Zander also mentioned that Facebook helped him to meet other goths in his scene. He said:

I feel like Facebook kind of opened up the goth scene … it’s like, ‘cool, this person goes to my club.’ And now I know his name, you know. And so, after that…after the clubs, we would go to Denny’s and hang out.

Meeting people within the scene and being invited to join the events changed how Zander approached goth clubbing, and one might infer that he seems more assured of himself and his own identity as a goth. From these findings, I critique the current body of literature on goth because there is a need to address racism, marginalization, gatekeeping within the goth subculture, and local goth scenes.

However, based on these accounts of marginalization and racism, we can see an apparent contradiction regarding who can freely perform their identities. These experiences with marginalization and racism reveal that some insiders experience judgment and, in other cases, are shunned by others in the community. Race within the goth subculture and various local goth scenes can shape the experiences that participants have within the scene. Racist behavior and commentary might be linked to gatekeeping, where individuals within the scene use prejudice and racist
inclinations to shun other members from the global subculture and community. A majority of the participants described their experiences within the scene to be very positive, and for many individuals, the nightclub space as a place that offers them the freedom to perform their identities without judgment. It is also important to point out that Zander and Blake did not spend much time discussing these experiences with racism and marginalization. Not spending more time on these topics might suggest that the goth subculture and possibly local goth nightclubs do not allow enough room for people of color to voice their opinions and experiences. Alongside racism and marginalization, there are also concerns about safety within goth spaces.

Whiteness has also created problems within the goth subculture. Jason noted that there are white people in the subculture who try “to keep people of color from feeling welcome in the scene.” He continued his response by stating that “fascism [is] trying to co-opt the goth scene” and describes fashion as one example of how this can occur. Jason pointed out that the once popular 90s goth magazine, *Propaganda Magazine*, often featured styles of fashion and certain iconography that “would be considered fascist today.” Jason also shared that the goth subculture and people with it will resist commodification, racism, and marginalization by not buying music or merchandise from racist artists and creators. These findings show us that the goth subculture has been impacted in multiple ways by commodification that posed challenges and opportunities for resistance.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

The findings from this study complicate the current body of literature on goth subculture, goth identity performance, and commodification. As goth emerged into the mainstream in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the process of commodification transformed the goth subculture and people's understanding of it today. This study sought to address three research questions. The first question focused on how goths perform their identities online and in person. The second question sought to explain how commodification is transforming the goth subculture. The third question examined how different forms of capital correspond with commodification in order to understand what this means for marginality and resistive potential. The interpretations of the findings reveal that while the current body of literature on the goth subculture provides a comprehensive understanding of the goth subculture, there are contradictions in this study that challenges existing scholarship.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings from this study challenge the current body of literature on the goth subculture, commodification, and the conversion of capital. The results from this study answered RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 by demonstrating that commodification has changed how goths perform their identities in different contexts. Goth identity varies from individual to individual, as evidenced by the case studies and interviews. The findings not only expand the research on the ambiguity of goth identity, as previously noted by Hodkinson (2002) and Jasper (2014), but they also complicate the research because they demonstrate that the different types of goth identity performance indicate people's idiosyncratic understandings of the goth subculture. In the case studies on goth clothing haul videos, some viewers interpret that goth identity comes from commodities. Cultural mediators such as IBF and TT can also reinforce these interpretations of goth identity by converting their symbolic, social, or economic capital into subcultural capital. By seeing cultural mediators convert other forms of capital into subcultural capital through commodities, viewers’ consumption patterns can be affected by the decisions of others, as pointed out by Feick and Price (1987). Although we cannot assume every
viewer will purchase the commodities they see in these videos, the comments left on IBF, TT, and AB’s videos suggest that goth YouTubers can influence viewers to consume from watching these videos. Cultural mediators' performances of goth identity online offer us insight into how their viewers approach goth identity precisely because these performers would not be remarkable if they did not have many followers.

For some individuals, goth identity boils down to simply wearing goth clothes. For others like the participants that I interview, goth identity is rooted in music. One example of a fashion-based goth identity comes from Toxic Tears, who performs her identity through goth fashion. As Marcuse (1964) and Belk (1988) pointed out, commodities are an extension of one’s identity, meaning people can use commodities to define themselves. Cultural mediators’ identities differ from the identities of the interviewees. Participants hold more of a homogeneous identity rooted in the music they listen to, as described by Skutlin (2016). From these findings, we can conclude that goth identities performed through commodities do not take on the same subcultural characteristics that goth identities performed through music take on.

Ulusoy (2016) argued that subcultures seek to produce new experiences and meanings that subvert dominant commercial culture. The findings uncovered different ways of resistance within the goth subculture and goth clubs that challenge mainstream culture. After the pandemic hit, participants like Cole, Nova, and Zander resorted to using online spaces like Twitch and Zoom to reproduce meaningful community experiences. Jason also discussed that people respond to racism and whiteness by not purchasing music or clothing from racist individuals. The responses demonstrate that resistance to commodification occurs within local goth communities. These findings expand Hodkinson (2002)’s claim that ownership of consumer goods is not enough to grant an individual subcultural capital. This study uncovered that goth fashion offers little subcultural capital offline. However, online consumption of consumer goods can give individuals cultural capital, which they can convert into other forms of capital.
Unlike offline goth spaces, the focus on fashion in goth clothing haul videos reveals that people take on heterogeneous identities online. Individuals with heterogeneous identities identify with the dominant culture rather than the goth subculture. Hodkinson’s (2002) research findings do not offer a definitive answer regarding whether or not goth has its own field, habitus, or capital. This study complicates Hodkinson (2002)’s work by accounting for the impact that commodification has on offline and online goth fields. The findings demonstrate that goths use capital to inform habitus differently in online and offline contexts. One can quickly come across individuals who use the word "goth" in their social media profile descriptions, hashtags such as #goth, and even in the titles or descriptions of goth YouTube clothing hauls videos like in IBF, TT, and AB’s videos. The Internet has made it easier for people to call themselves goth and take on a performative goth identity online that does not require them to listen to goth music or partake in goth events.

This study revealed that individuals often convert other forms of capital to obtain subcultural capital. Subcultural capital is harder to come by online for individuals with lower statuses in the field or less capital than others. Goth YouTubers can convert their symbolic, social, cultural, and economic capital into subcultural capital, which allows them to shape the habitus of the field. By shaping the habitus of the field, they can use commodities to perform their goth identities. Offline, it is harder for outsiders to convert other forms of capital to achieve subcultural capital. Tourists and newcomers often assume that owning goth clothing (or having cultural capital) grants them immediate access to a homogeneous goth identity. The findings from the interviews contest this assumption and demonstrate that insider knowledge is obtained through dancing, socializing, and knowledge about the local goth scene and the goth subculture. Online goth identities challenge the collective identities of the homogeneous goths. As indicated by the freedom to openly refer to oneself online as a goth while simultaneously lacking membership and shared experiences with other goths is common in online goth fields. This finding regarding online goth identity expands Spracklen and Spracklen’s (2018) point about goth changing from a music subculture into a loosely defined idea about darkness. This finding also complicates a detail in Hodkinson’s (2002) research regarding commitment through...
participation in online goth communities. As evidenced from the case study, some goth YouTubers perform their identities through commodities that differ from other goth communities, including goth nightclubs and Twitch/Facebook virtual goth nights, where identity forms around music.

There are countless examples of this on Reddit forums where individuals will ask similar questions about becoming goth. The goth label online holds significant importance because it indicates belongingness and association with the overall goth subculture. On the other hand, this label seems to matter less in offline communities, complicating the current body of literature on goth identity. Cohen (1985) argued that the communal experiences of members cultivate and sustain identity. Goth identity performances in goth nightclub spaces allow people to express themselves through socializing openly, dancing, and music. Other insiders can learn about people’s interest in music, their knowledge of how to dance to goth music, and even their understanding of other clubs and events within the local scene. Identities offline do not require that participants explicitly call themselves goth because these different aspects of their goth identity are tacitly communicated in their identity performance in the context of the goth club. Within the context of a goth nightclub, people are simultaneously demonstrating their capital without ever saying, “I am goth.” Goth identity is reproduced and disrupted through commodification.

By describing goth as a “clear and sustained group identity,” Hodkinson (2002) states that goth as a subculture counts as a “substantive” and resilient grouping that is not “ephemeral” (p. 31). Members of online and offline goth communities hold substantial interest in the shared cultural tastes regarding music, literature, and style. Moreover, while these interests have bonded members, they have allowed members to see themselves as part of a collective group and community. However, findings from this study that support R1, RQ2, and RQ3 complicate Hodkinson’s (2002) point about the substantiveness of group identity among goths. The study revealed that goth identity online in spaces like goth YouTube is often heterogeneous. Heterogeneous identities challenge individuals with homologous goth identities. In the context of goth nightclubs, individuals with heterogeneous identities might not attend these events to participate in a shared experience. Instead, these
individuals might attend as tourists or spectators and perform a goth identity through commodities based on their loose understanding of the goth subculture.

Regarding online participation, many of the participants felt that online communities could foster subcultural affiliation. The responses participants gave confirm what Hodkinson (2002) noted about online goth communities. In his book, he details how goths communicate online and writes that they "communicate knowledge and construct subcultural tastes and values…providing everyday practical information for goths" (p. 183). Iris and Hannah noted that cultural mediators like goth YouTubers could share helpful information online to help people learn about the subculture. Iris referred to It’s Black Friday, Rose Nocturnalia, and Ree Phillips as examples of goth YouTubers she watches. Iris noted that she finds them to be "funny," "informative," and "not judgey." She also remarked that they are encouraging for people that are new to the scene. Hannah also shared that although she does not watch many goth YouTube videos as much as she used to, she found that some of them encourage people like herself who are shy and reserved to go out and support the local goth scene by attending shows and clubs. This observation extends Hodkinson's (2002) point on obtaining subcultural capital from learning information and establishing one's individual goth identity. From these findings, experiences, and analyses, individuals can reproduce community identity within smaller friend groups. Community identity can also play a prominent role in the everyday lifestyles of members.

Individuals reproduce goth identity through their interpretations and performances of goth identity. The findings extend Hodkinson (2002)’s research. Although music is relevant for participants and why they choose to gather at nightclubs, their subcultural interests vary and expand beyond this scene. They may also share some outside interests but not others. As indicated by participants, gothic and horror films, literature, and music are examples of interests shaping their own goth identity and tastes. Though these different aspects of individual identity are not part of the shared interests of goths, their intersection produces personal meanings that can drive the way individuals perform their identities as goths.
Commodification changes subculture community identity by selecting specific aspects such as clothing and music and manufacturing mass quantities of these products to sell to consumers. By opening up the market to a mainstream audience, community identity becomes associated with the products companies like KILLSTAR and Dolls Kill sell. Commodification can cause outsiders to attribute the values of goth and other subcultures to the artifacts they see in the mainstream markets and media. While the stereotyping and misunderstanding of the goth subculture are part of the issue, they are not the only issues. For goths and other subcultural groups, the commodification of group identity can lead to members feeling a loss in their own individual identities as goths. Nova briefly alluded to this when she mentioned how shocking it was for her to see people buying band shirts without knowing anything about the artists behind them. Nova's response demonstrates that goths are aware of commodification and indicate that they also grapple with understanding why people go out of their way to perform goth identities. It can lead to feelings of judgment or resentment against tourists, and that immediate judgment can reflect how people interact with newcomers.

Individual identity loss can stem from members feeling that commodification of group identity has led them to feel like they are losing something personal. Loss of creativity with the introduction of mass-produced clothing is one instance where we can see that individual creativity is not as prioritized as it used to be. In AB's video, she recalled how she and her friends would seek out clothing they could modify from thrift stores. The commodification of goth fashion has left AB with narratives and memories of a time where goth fashion highly valued creativity. In addition to fashion, commodification has also challenged goths to redefine themselves as a music-based subculture. Hannah feels that the commodification of fashion has contributed to this.

If somebody is a newcomer, or just a baby bat, which is a younger goth under 18 or does not know so much about the subculture, I do recommend them just researching what goth is. That it's music-based, where you have to listen to goth music in order to be goth, and that does go back to being punk. A punk isn't a punk without knowing punk music, and then a metalhead isn't a metalhead without knowing metal music.

Hannah is not alone in defining goth as a music-based subculture. Ajax, Blake, and Erik also mentioned music as being a significant component of goth identity. Alongside people feeling a loss in
creativity through fashion and outsiders' lack of understanding of how important music is to individual members within the subculture, commodification has also impacted people’s response to outsiders entering goth spaces. The feeling of identity loss poses new challenges in how insiders respond to outsiders.

The terms “elitism” and “gatekeeping” are often conflated with one another but mean two different things. Elitism is a more extreme response to outsiders. One might expect people to know everything about a band, but do not consider that the information might not be accessible for all. Outsiders often use the word elitism when they expect goths to accept them as “authentic” and “true” goths because of their interests in fashion alone. This term has a one-sided connotation that poses a challenge to the homogeneous group identity that Hodkinson (2002) proposes because it reveals that commodification has created other forms of goth identity based on commodities. The term gatekeeping is more accurate in describing how online and offline communities respond to outsiders and commodification and focuses on how people respond to outsiders. For example, some people might respond to claims about gatekeeping by explaining to outsiders what the goth subculture is. Others might not respond with an explanation but will either ignore other people's interpretations or block them on social media.

Gatekeeping is a response to commodification that seeks to keep outsiders out of goth spaces, and it can occur both online and offline. Gatekeeping varies in severity. When it is not extreme, it is often evident in comments educating others about the goth subculture. Online interactions that become negative can compel insiders to resort to commenting, blocking, or banning individuals from accessing content, commenting, or posting content. Similarly, offline gatekeeping may be more or less direct. Sometimes people will be questioned about their knowledge of goth music or be subject to rude remarks or comments. In more extreme cases, people can be removed or banned from attending events. Blake mentioned attending a goth night where one of the attendees kicked out a group of individuals invited from another event.
While gatekeeping is one way that insiders will respond to commodification, it is not the only way. Many goth YouTubers will use their platforms to speak up about commercialization. Rose Nocturnalia is one example of a goth YouTuber who has spoken up about commercialization and consumerism. Nova and Ligia both mentioned that they encourage people to attend events and talk to goths about what it means to be goth. Furthermore, while these different ways of responding to commercialization can lead to others learning about goth, they can lead to adverse outcomes like marginalization that directly impacts the goth subculture.

Marginalization within the goth subculture is an overlooked subject in a lot of goth scholarship. The findings from this study complicate the current literature regarding who can have access to goth spaces. There is some mention of marginalization and racism within the goth subculture that this study expands on. From Zander and Blake’s experience in the goth subculture, we can see that goth spaces and communities can form around prioritizing certain members. This finding reveals that racism exists with goth spaces, and some people respond to sharing goth spaces by shunning out other goths and outsiders. Rather than focusing on ways to disrupt or subvert commodification, some individuals attempt to preserve their individual and community identities by limiting other insiders' or outsiders' or outside access to the subculture. One way gatekeeping offline can be an appropriate response is when it facilitates a safer environment for community members by keeping individuals with the intent of harming others out of the scene. However, gatekeeping offline often comes at the expense of making it difficult for newcomers to join and exclude active members from participating and expressing their own identities at goth events.

However, based on these accounts of marginalization and racism, we can see an apparent contradiction regarding who can freely perform their identities. These experiences with marginalization and racism reveal that some insiders experience judgment and, in other cases, are shunned by others in the community. Race within the goth subculture and various local goth scenes can shape the experiences that participants have within the scene. Racist behavior and commentary might be linked to gatekeeping, where prejudiced individuals shun other members from the global
subculture and community. Yet, a majority of the interviewees described their experiences within the scene to be very positive. For many individuals, the nightclub space is a place that offers them the freedom to perform their identities without judgment.

It is also important to point out that Zander and Blake did not spend much time discussing these experiences with racism and marginalization. Not spending more time on these topics might suggest that the goth subculture and possibly local goth nightclubs do not allow enough room for people of color to voice their opinions and experiences. These findings complicate the research because they suggest that individuals within the goth subculture use their racism as a form of exclusion. They also imply that people use racism and marginalization to preserve their own access to goth spaces that can compromise the safety of others. Alongside racism and marginalization, there are also concerns about safety within goth spaces.

Many attendees form relationships with each other that expand outside of the confines of a goth nightclub. The participants I interviewed felt that being within a goth nightclub space is liberating and a place where they can be themselves. The same can apply to members of online communities that foster relationships around these shared interests. For members that have fostered close-knit relationships online and offline, community identity can create a sense of belonging similar to that of a family unit. Moreover, while this is the case for many individuals, there are safety challenges often attributed to how commodification impacts the safety and sense of community people feel in a specific goth space such as the goth nightclub.

For some members, the space of the goth nightclub offers them the freedom to perform their identities through dancing and socializing as they please. Ligia and Iris described their own experiences being in a goth nightclub as feeling freeing and liberating. Ligia candidly described feeling comfortable and safe enough to dance like no one is watching, and Iris added that the atmosphere feels accepting. However, this is not the case for everyone. From the findings, it is clear that some people experience marginalization within the community. In addition to limitations to
performing identity within goth night spaces, safety also begs the question of how people within local
goth communities respond to safety concerns for attendees and members.

From the interview findings, Nova and Iris discussed the concept of tourists or outsiders that
often show up to goth clubs to see what it is like being at a goth event. Within tourists and local goth
scenes, there can be people with malicious intentions to harm others. Not all goth nightclub spaces
allow people to feel safe in an environment to perform their own identities. Erik notes that some clubs
only care about attracting crowds because they offer loud music and women. He notes that goth is
about “having a good time rather than being comfortable as a person” for people that attend those
clubs. Prioritizing fun over comfort can impact one’s sense of belongingness and comfort in the goth
subculture and local scenes and can be considered a type of identity performance. This finding
extends the current research on goth identity by demonstrating that people can perform a goth
identity around their individual identities.

One of the interesting things that Erik’s statement suggests is that there is a stark contrast
between mainstream clubbing and goth clubbing. Mainstream club cultures often prioritize having fun
and aspects of club culture like drinking, but this tends to be the complete opposite for many goth
clubs. Feeling comfortable in offline goth spaces allows people to feel a sense of belonging in the
local goth scene and demonstrates that relationships and community form from the shared
experiences of being in a space where people feel comfortable enough to be themselves.
Furthermore, while having fun is part of why people attend clubs, Erik alluded to instances where
clubs compromise the safety of others by creating communities within the larger community and that
those groups often get prioritized in terms of safety.

Referring back to the Goth GF meme, goth women’s objectification and hyper-sexualization
can attract creeps to these events. And while these individuals are usually there to hypersexualize
and objectify goth women, some people identify as goth to take advantage of women under the guise
of goth. In light of the revelations of Marilyn Manson as a figure that exemplified what people initially
assumed were only stereotypes, we can see that the connection between creeps using goth as a
guise to make their way into the scene is not a far reach. From the findings, we can see that what consists of a goth identity is not clearly defined, as Hodkinson (2002) suggests. Instead, the findings extend Spracklen and Spracklen (2018)'s notion of goth identity needing to redefine its boundaries, re-politicize itself, and start actively resisting commodification. Commodification within online and offline spaces demonstrates that performing goth identity through goth fashion is one of the ways outsiders can use goth identity to take advantage of others. While the goth subculture has overlapped with BDSM culture, some worry that the overlap has carved out an easy way for creeps to enter goth spaces.

These findings critique the research because safety within the goth community is often not discussed when discussing the openness of sexuality within the goth subculture. Ligia noted that merging the BDSM culture with the goth subculture has created instances where she believes that promoters and, in some cases, "people that aren't necessarily in either scene” figured they could profit from the entertainment this merging would provide. A goth club's sense of community can play a big part in how safe people feel within their local goth club scenes. Erik noted that the club he attends regularly feels safe because the attendees will look out for one another. He even says that if people see that someone is in trouble, "they will come out and ask, 'are you okay?'" Nevertheless, he also mentions that this might not always be the case for clubs that emphasize entertainment. We can see from these findings that social and subcultural capital can play a huge role in determining the safety and well-being of individuals that attend goth night events.

To further develop this critique, there is also a need for understanding the role of social capital and relationships within goth communities. Having social capital can allow individuals to reach out to those they trust if they feel threatened or unsafe. In some cases, one might not even need to have social or subcultural capital, as Erik pointed out – some goth club communities prioritize all attendees' safety and well-being. However, this is not always the case. When some communities gatekeep, marginalize, or prioritize only their tight-knit circles with goth nightclub spaces, they allow for destabilization within local communities to occur. These findings are noteworthy because it shows us
that creating ingroups and outgroups within goth communities can destruct the sense of safety and freedom that members seek from goth communities.

**Resistance to Commodification**

Cultural mediators have the potential to modify not only part of the mainstream narrative about what the goth subculture is about but also the power to disrupt the process of commodification with the digital content they produce. By using their capital and platforms to share their own experiences, they can carve spaces for newcomers to learn about the subculture and generate interest in attending both events. One example of goth cultural mediators that have created spaces for newcomers and current members of the goth subculture to partake in clubbing, music, and learning about goth is Obscura Undead. As a collection of music writers, they have created content about various topics, including sexuality, racism, DJing, Black Lives Matter, and more. Content highlighting the goth subculture's essential parts are examples of how goths can use their capital to subvert commodification, build strong goth communities online, and re-politicize goth.

Obscura Undead is a collective group of goths from Florida who have created content about the goth subculture that deviates from other cultural mediators like IBF, TT, and AB. Their primary focus is on goth music, and a lot of their content involves reviewing music and discussing music with each other online. During the transition to online clubbing, they were among the first groups of cultural mediators to band together and use their online platforms to create virtual goth nights and stream these events on various platforms such as Facebook, Twitch, YouTube, and Mixcloud. Obscura Undead's subcultural capital comes from their knowledge about goth music and their own experiences and tastes. They combine digital content with their subcultural capital to create other forms of capital, including social, symbolic, and cultural. From the music they play at clubs that involve a blend of early goth and newer goth music, individuals within the goth subculture can take part at these events and get a feel for what goth clubs are like in the real world. Newcomers to the subculture and active members are brought together by this small-knit community and have found a
sense of belonging attending these events and are seeing the voices of queer goths and goths of color represented in the online goth community.

Their discussions offer room for encouraging self-exploration of one’s identity. Sharing their experiences and perspectives gives others a chance to think about how heteronormativity operates in the real world and the goth subculture. They do not shy away from the difficult conversations about consent, abuse, and harassment. Instead, their conversations get people to think about these things and how they might create instances of marginalization, racism, gatekeeping, and even threaten safety within goth spaces. As cultural mediators, Obscura Undead can demonstrate that the goth subculture still holds onto the radical feminist politics that Spracklen and Spracklen (2018)’s research presented. Tying this back to RQ1 and RQ3, cultural mediators can perform goth identity as radical and transgressive within their content. Cultural mediators can demonstrate resistance to commodification, showing audience members that online goth communities can resist commodification by performing their identities outside of commodities. Offline goths can also resist commodification.

In addition to cultural mediators, individuals within the goth nightclub scene also have the potential to resist commodification. Many currently resist commodification by wearing comfortable clothing for dancing, disrupting depictions of goths as dressed from head to toe in elaborate clothing and make-up. Cole and Jason also pointed out that goth nightclub DJs can grant people subcultural and cultural capital through the music they play and share with others. Socializing also allows people to foster a sense of community within local scenes that can also translate into the goth subculture. Goths can also use their experiences and capital to resist mainstream narratives about commodification. Not shopping for goth clothing at stores like KILLSTAR or Dolls Kill are potential ways of resisting commodification, but they are not the only ways to do so.

For some people, purchasing clothing from these brands and other fast fashion companies is based on their ability to afford them with the economic capital. Not everyone can DIY their clothing or has access to suburban thrift stores. Goth fashion purchased from a fast-fashion company can still be
unique to the individual wearing the items. Rather than attempting to resist commodification by fighting over the value of commodities, goths can channel that energy in other ways. Goths can build strong online and offline communities, re-politicizing and creating more discussions about ideology and beliefs, carving spaces for goths of color and other marginalized members, and finding ways to address stereotypes and hyper-sexualization of goth women. With this knowledge, the goth subculture and communities can continue to maintain their subversiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. The first limitation was finding and conducting interviews during the Coronavirus pandemic. Gathering interviewees was somewhat tricky and required using several means to obtain a sample of ten participants. The second limitation was time constraints. I had a short timeframe to gather participants and conduct and transcribe their interviews. Finding ten individuals during the height of the pandemic offered just enough perspectives to conduct part of the research. A majority of the interviewees have been active within the goth nightclub scene since the 1990s or early 2000s. Only one participant – Hannah, has been involved in the scene since the late 2010s. The intergenerational gap between my participants can complicate the research because it does not account for the perspectives of newer members in the Southern California goth scene. Regardless of the intergenerational gap, the interviewees’ views on goth identity reflect the changes the scene has undergone from the 90s to the present day. This study demonstrated the different ways individuals perform goth identity on- and offline. The study also found that cultural mediators can inform how viewers construct their own identities and how cultural mediator’s versions of goth habitus inform their approach to commodification. This study also found different forms of resistance to commodification in online and offline goth spaces.

Future studies should consider exploring some of the findings that emerged from this study, such as how goth identity is performed. One possible direction is to replicate this study to understand how goths outside Southern California perform their identities. Future studies can look at how different generations of goths perform their identities, the role of gender and race in identity
performance, and how these individuals use the context of the goth nightclub space spaces to perform their goth identities. Another direction would be to examine how racism and marginalization occur within the goth subculture and goth spaces like goth nightclub events.

Racism and marginalization are vastly overlooked topics in the current subcultural and goth literature. This research clarifies that goth is not a subcultural community for cis-gendered and heterosexual white people. The lack of representation and the muting and silencing of the voices of goths of color need further exploration because it impacts online and offline communities and says a lot about challenges goths of color face regarding their ability to perform their goth identities in goth spaces freely. Other future directions to explore that stem from the findings on marginalization include safety and gatekeeping.

Performing a goth identity to gain access within online and offline goth communities can pose challenges regarding how goths can perform their identities. As Erik pointed out, some goth nightclubs do not prioritize all attendees' safety, which in itself can shape the way communities form within these spaces. This future direction may explore how cliques form within goth spaces and how hyper-sexualization of goth women impacts identity performance and safety in goth spaces. Gatekeeping and elitism are also other directions that can offer insight into the perceived connotations of goth identity by insiders and outsiders, contributing to our understanding of capital, commodification, and goth identity.

By understanding how gatekeeping and elitism come into play in these debates among outsiders and insiders, we may find additional support for the findings in this study. One possible finding we might obtain from studying gatekeeping and elitism is how lack of economic capital can contribute to disagreements about the role of goth fashion. We might also note that the role of aspirational labor is present in these debates. We have already seen people who comment on goth clothing haul videos sharing their desire to obtain specific pieces of clothing and how they wish they could afford to buy them. We may also understand the impact of commodification on community and individual goth identity as clothing has already informed some stereotypes about the goth subculture,
such as the Goth GF meme. Lastly, the pandemic has inspired some potential directions that future studies can explore regarding reproducing elements of offline goth communities in online contexts.

Some of the interviewees found Twitch/Zoom virtual goth nightclub events to be a great way to connect to others and foster a sense of community during the pandemic. Virtual events for community members such as Nova, Cole, and Zander foster some sense of community during the pandemic. These participants felt that the virtual spaces of Twitch, Facebook, or YouTube could offer members a way of connecting to the scene. While virtual communities are something many of the participants in the scene are familiar with, many of them were not as familiar with goth YouTubers or influencers. Most of the interviewees felt a degree of skepticism or uncertainty about the idea that newcomers obtain information about the subculture from goth YouTuber or influencers on Instagram. Future studies can examine this sense of dilemma experienced amongst members who do not engage with goth YouTubers. A study that explores skepticism could also pave the way for qualitative or quantitative studies on how goth YouTube videos or content they view online aligns with their goth experiences, primarily occupying offline goth spaces.

The goth habitus differs depending on context and what each individual prioritizes about the goth subculture. For some individuals like IBF and TT, commodities inform their experiences and ways of constructing, performing, and viewing goth identity. For others, goth music, social interactions, and dancing inform how they experience goth as well as how they construct, perform, and view goth identity. Online and offline contexts allow us to see how different constructions of habitus and the role of capital allows for goth identities to diverge.

Online, cultural mediators have the potential to shape how others view and perform their own goth identities. Goth YouTubers have symbolic, social, cultural, subcultural, and economic capital. These forms of capital allow them to participate in aspirational labor to create digital content about whatever they want. Aspirational labor can allow for individuals to prioritize aspects of goth that they want to prioritize. As cultural mediators, goth YouTubers possess a high status in online communities and become reference groups for others to construct their perceptions or identities based on the
habitus of the goth YouTubers they watch. Online goth identity is often performed through commodities, as we have seen from the case studies, but there are aspects of lived experiences present in these videos. AB’s video is one example of how her personal experiences being a goth in the 90s inform her cultural and subcultural tastes in goth fashion. Other cultural mediators like Obscura Undead use their subcultural capital to reproduce online goth communities where the voices of queer goths and goths of color can also perform their goth identities. Goth identity and habitus offline retain aspects of capital, but more so prioritize goth identity through the community.

Goth nightclubs allow individuals to perform their identities collectively and in proximity with other like-minded individuals. As we have seen from the qualitative interviews, insiders obtain subcultural capital through their experiences within the subculture and their participation within their local goth scene. The interviewees also share that contrary to what others might assume about the goth subculture, goth identity for attendees of goth nightclubs is not strictly limited to the accumulation of commodities and goods. Even though the current body of literature has primarily focused on music and style, it is crucial to understand that identity and expression in goth nightclubs come from music. The music played at goth nightclubs influences social interactions, dancing, and fashion. There is less emphasis on one's recognizability and status in offline goth spaces to indicate membership within the goth subculture and one's local scene. However, this might not always be the case for every member as we have also seen that racism, marginalization, and compromised safety can also occur in these spaces. Altogether, this study complicates the current body of literature on the goth subculture by pointing out the differences in how people perform goth identity and how commodification has impacted online and offline goth spaces.

**Conclusion**

This study supports RQ1 by demonstrating how goth identity is performed in online and offline contexts. RQ2 is also supported because the findings have pulled up various ways in which commodification has transformed the goth subculture, including the role of goth fashion in goth identity performance. Commodification impacts both online and offline goths space, including goth
nightclubs and goth YouTube. RQ3 was also supported because the study highlighted how marginalization could occur among members within the goth subculture. RQ3 also answered how subcultural reproduction through the goth habitus and identity performance enables the goth subculture to resist commodification.

Goth identity is personal to individuals and reflects how they associate themselves with the subculture and membership. By understanding how identity is performed differently in online and offline contexts, we can see how goth identities are enacted, reproduced, and disrupted by commodification. Context, capital, and individual experiences can shape how one performs their own goth identity and influence how others perform their identities. We must recognize that online and offline goth spaces can allow individuals to make sense of their feelings and thoughts freely. However, we must also acknowledge that the way identity performance may vary in some fields and that the type of communities one occupies can inform whether people feel comfortable enough to perform their identities in specific goth spaces. The individual goth identity performance differs from group identity performance and shows us that individual identity is more heterogeneous. This study ultimately contributes to the literature by complicating contemporary understandings of goth identity, subculture, and commodification.
APPENDIX A

GOTH GF MEME

Shadow-spawn from beyond the stars gf

I take this form to comfort you, my love.
We should eat more meat.

The last star will wink out before our love fades

What is "vidya"?
Teach me.

Your light is so precious to me.

I enjoy this thing you call "cuddling."
However brief, you make me feel warm.

Do I scare you?
Stay hydrated.

I adore how you squirm beneath me.

Under darkened light with black stars
Where slant winds howl and no light breaks
Where enemy's tale is under dead sum.
I will hold you closer and love you still.

You are mine.
And mine alone

You know I would never harm you.

It may take many of your years...
But our progeny will usher a new age...
For both our kind.

I do not trust how those women look at you

I would never have known feast about hold so many pleasures.

You are marked
None can harm you without trespassing me

Courageous of you to want to copulate when I lack human form.

I appreciate your humor. It is relaxing.
APPENDIX B

VERBAL SCRIPT

I am a researcher in the Department of Human Communication at California State University, Fullerton under the direction of Dr. Jessica Kamrath, PhD. My research focuses on the communicative processes of identity and sense-making in connection to the goth subculture. I am interested in the ways in which members of the vast Southern California goth scene make sense of their identity through aesthetics and clubbing. I am inviting your participation, which will involve completing an interview that should take approximately 45-60 minutes. In order to qualify for participation in this study you must be:

- 21 years of age or older
- Active in attending Southern California goth clubs

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In order to participate, you will need to read the informed consent.
APPENDIX C
VIRTUAL SCRIPT

Hello [Name]:

I am hoping you can please help me complete my research project for my Qualitative Research Methods course by taking the time to complete my survey. My research focuses on the communicative processes of identity and sense-making in connection to the goth subculture. I am interested in the ways in which members of the vast Southern California goth scene make sense of their identity through aesthetics and clubbing. There are a few requirements for this interview. The first is that you are 21 years of age or older. The second is that you identify as goth. And the thirds is that you attend Southern California goth clubs. Your participation is voluntary and responding yes to this message will be taken as your consent to participate in this study. I am also asking that you please forward this message to any others in the goth scene that fit this description that might be willing to participate and ask that they do the same. I am trying to get 10-12 participants in the next two weeks so that I can complete my project and move towards preparing to graduate. Thank you so much for your help and willingness to participate.

Thanks again – I really appreciate it!
APPENDIX D
IRB APPROVAL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Office of Research and Sponsored Projects
P.O. Box 6850 or 1121 N. State College Blvd, 2nd Fl, Fullerton, CA 92831 / T 657-278-7719 / F 657-276-7238

APPROVAL NOTICE

From the Institutional Review Board
California State University, Fullerton

October 9, 2020
This consent form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later and leave the study at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study.

What is this study about?

My research focuses on the communicative processes of identity and sense-making in connection to the goth subculture. I am interested in the ways in which members of the vast Southern California goth scene make sense of their identity through aesthetics and clubbing. You are being asked to take part because you attend goth night events and your experience in the scene could benefit future research. Taking part in study will take about one hour of your time. You cannot take part in this study if you are under 21 years of age or have not participated in goth club events.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire and participate in a semi-structured interview. You are free to decline to answer at any time. The interviews will occur at a time and place that is most convenient for you. Interviews will be audio recorded and recordings will only be used for research purposes.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study. If you take part in this study, you may help others in the future.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.
**Will my information be kept anonymous or confidential?**

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

- The participants will be given pseudonyms that only the researchers know. The coded data will be kept in a password protected computer in a locked private office.

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. The data for this study will be kept for 3 years. Individuals may keep the data indefinitely. However, if the data is to be used again it will only be used by the same research and the same measures of confidentiality will be taken.

**Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?**

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

**Who can I talk to if I have questions?**

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the researcher. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (657) 278-7719, or e-mail irb@fullerton.edu.

**What are my rights as a research study volunteer?**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

Only the research team will have access to the recordings. To protect your identity and the identities of others, please refrain from using names or other identifying information during the interview.
What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form.
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns.
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns.
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

Statement of Consent

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 21 years of age and agree to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) _________________________________________

Signature of Participant____________________________       Date: ___________

Signature of Investigator___________________________       Date____________

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audio/video tape your responses.

Signature of Participant____________________________       Date____________
APPENDIX F
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

General Directions: Please fill out all of the information to the best of your ability.

Participant Demographic Form

This information will remain strictly confidential. Your name and demographic information will be kept separate from your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use pseudonyms when connected to an interview exemplar, work observation, and/or artifact description.

What is your age? (Check one of the following)

- 18-23 years old
- 24-30 years old
- 30-40 years old
- 40-50 years old
- 50-64 years old
- 65 years and over

What is your gender? (check one)

- Female
- Male
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Not listed (optional fill-in)
- Prefer not to respond

What is your race/ethnicity? (check one)

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic
- African-American
- Other/Multi-Racial
- Native American/Alaska Native
- Prefer not to Respond

Which part of Southern California do you reside in (city and county)?

____________________________________________________________________

Please write out a preferred pseudonym.

____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Intro – Obtain permission to start recording.

Did you have any questions about the consent form and your agreement to participate?

*Address any concerns.

[Establish Rapport] Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to meet with me. I am doing a study on the experiences of goths within the Southern California goth scene regarding goth aesthetics, identity, and clubbing. I would love to hear more about your experiences with the goth subculture.

[Purpose] So, as we talk today, I will be asking you some questions about experiences you have had and the way it made you feel to try to identify any connection or shared consistency. I am specifically learning more about goth aesthetics and fashion and how it has been influential in how goths in the Southern California goth scene see themselves and other others.

[Motivation] From hearing your perspective I would hope to see how strong the connection is between aesthetics and goth identity.

[Timeline] This should only take 45-60 minutes. Take your time and please do not feel rushed at all.

Feel free to expand on things.

(Transition: Let’s begin by talking a little bit about your experience first learning about goth....)

Interview Questions:

1. Can you describe how you were introduced to the goth or the goth scene? (Generative)
2. Can you tell me approximately when you decided you wanted to be goth? (Experience)
   a. After deciding that you wanted to join the subculture, did you join the subculture immediately after that moment? (Experience)
      i. What events led up to you joining the subculture? (Timeline)
      b. If not, what made you decide to join the subculture later? (Experience)
3. What type of things interested you or piqued your curiosity about goth and/or the subculture? (Typology)
4. Was goth fashion or outward aesthetics something that immediately got you interested in goth? (Closed-Ended)
   a. Were your personal aesthetics influenced or inspired by anything you saw in pop culture or media? (Directive)
5. What has your experience in the goth subculture been like? (Experience)
a. Potential follow up (depending on what era of goth they consider themselves to be part of: 80s, 90s, 2000s, etc.) Some people argue that the early 80s goth era is the only true era of goth, what do you make of this? (Devil's Advocate)

6. Do you dress goth? (Closed-Ended)
   a. How would you describe your style of goth fashion and outward aesthetics? (Directive)
   b. How often do you dress goth? (Experience)
   c. Has your style changed over the years or months that you have been part of the subculture? (Experience)

7. What makes fashion and outward aesthetics personal to you? (Directive)

8. How would you describe your personal style in terms of aesthetics and fashion? (Directive)
   a. What are some aesthetics that you have seen at goth nights/events in Southern California? (Typology)

9. How does goth fashion and aesthetics influence how you feel about yourself? (Directive)

10. Do you think that goth fashion and aesthetics are what the subculture is known for the most by those who aren’t part of the subculture? (Directive)

11. I have seen people outside of the subculture post on social media that goth is a fashion and/or a mindset or lifestyle. What do you make of this? (Devil’s Advocate)

12. How would you describe goth identity in general? (Directive)

13. In research conducted by Paul Hodkinson (a known author of various goth subculture writings within academia) – they describe goth identity having four markers: sustained group identity, commitment to the scene, distinctiveness, and autonomy. How do feel about these four markers? (Directive)
   a. Do you think these markers hit the main element of what goth identity is? (Directive)
   b. Are there other categories that might be added to these markers to reflect the contemporary goth scene? (Typology)

14. What do you think goth fashion and aesthetics says about individuals within the goth subculture? (Other People’s Motives)
   a. Do you think goth fashion and aesthetics demonstrate a sense of commitment to the scene? (Directive)

15. Talk to me about what it is was like attending at a goth club in Southern California prior to the pandemic? (Tour Questions)
   a. Can you tell me more about the atmosphere, what people do at the club, etc.? (Directive)

16. Have you since attended any goth nights after the pandemic? (Closed-Ended)

17. How does clubbing allow you to express your goth identity? (Directive)

18. Do you feel like you can be yourself within the goth club setting? (Directive)
   a. Outside of the goth club setting, are you able to demonstrate your goth identity through how you dress on an everyday basis (for work, errands, school, etc.)? (Experience)

19. Do you participate in any online goth communities? (Closed-Ended)
   a. With a lot of the goth community now being active online, you do think that online communities have the potential to create community and foster goth identity? (Future Prediction)

20. Is there anything you wish more people understood about the subculture or being goth that was not already discussed? (Catch-All)

21. What advice would you give someone interested in exploring the goth club subculture or club scene? (Identity Enhancing)

Conclusion
Thank you so much for your time. It has been a pleasure talking to you about this. Thank you for being willing to answer my questions.
REFERENCES


