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Emo online:

networks of sociality/networks of exclusion

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Abstract

This article examines Australian emo subcultural practices and new media technologies. I use subcultural studies to analyse whether emo is, indeed, a subculture. I respond to framings of emo as an 'Other' (sub)culture, in mainstream Australian media and Australian alternative music scenes. I interrogate whether, as dominant media claims, emo subculturalists' internet usage inevitably leads to 'social alienation'. First, I present a case study of a mediatized moral panic concerning the so-called 'emo suicides' of Jodie Gater and Stephanie Gestier in 2007. Media reports positioned emo adherents as non-normative 'dark' users of new technologies, particularly the internet. I counter this representation with a textual analysis of emo micro-media, in the form of MySpace homepages, which demonstrate emo sociality online. However, in my final section I look at how such sociality is limited by gate-keeping practices mobilizing discourses of subcultural capital.

Keywords: emo; internet; moral panics; music; new media; subcultural studies

Introduction

This article looks at the intersection between new media technologies and subcultural formations. In particular, I ask whether new media technologies are catalysts of alienation or sociality for subculturalists. To tease out an answer, I focus on the Australian 'emo' subculture between 2005 and 2007. Emo refers to both a genre of melodic punk-rock music, and a (sub)cultural identity associated with the young people who listen to emo music. These people are called, and call themselves, 'emos'.

I focus on the period 2005–2007 because it most effectively illustrates the intersection between emo music culture and new media, particularly internet, technologies. Emo music peaked in popularity in Australia at this time. In 2006

and 2007 there were 13 and 14 emo singles in the Australian charts 'end of year top 100', respectively (ARIA 2005–2010a; ARIA 2005–2010b); whereas, in 2005 and 2008, only six emo singles charted in the end-of-year countdown. Notably, emo's rise in popularity coincided with Australia's national charts body, ARIA, beginning to count digital singles sales in 2006. Thus, emo music's popularity corresponds with the rise of new media music providers, such as iTunes. Secondly, this period overlapped with the popularity of online social networking sites 'MySpace' and 'LiveJournal' (Cashmore 2007; Kommersant 2007). These sites hosted a plethora of emo-related online communities, with MySpace being known anecdotally as 'emospace' (Urban Dictionary 2006). By 2008, the number of MySpace and LiveJournal users declined, in favour of Facebook, which is less accommodating of group forums and music sites. Furthermore, in 2007 two young women, who identified themselves as 'emos', committed suicide. This prompted a media panic, which conflated emo music, emos and internet usage as catalysts for adolescent self-harm and, potentially, suicide.

I approach emo as a 'subculture' following Gelder's (2007) broad definition of subculture as a group of people positioned as non-normative and engaged in networked sociality. This differs from earlier understandings of subculture as necessarily, and often self-consciously, resistant to dominant (capitalist) culture (see Clarke et al. 1975; Hebdige 1979). Despite, emo music's chart success, emo adherents positioned themselves as a group outside of dominant, or what they dubbed 'mainstream', culture. Such self-positioning occurred particularly online on social networking sites.

Emos were also positioned as non-normative, indeed named a 'subculture', by commercial Australian media. Specifically, media reports suggested that emos' supposed divergence from normative adolescence lay in their excessive internet use. Such excess, the media suggested, was 'not normal' and, in fact, rendered emos troubled individuals, alienated from society. The media's assertion conflates two social anxieties—adolescent subcultural practises, and new technologies—to create a moral panic. Through an investigation of media representations of emo and emos, I will offer that such reports transpose fears of the internet's assumed potential to engulf users onto the subcultural practices of emos.

By contrast, I suggest that Australian teenage emos actually build subcultural cohesion and sociality online. Face-to-face interaction often characterizes subcultural sociality (Clarke et al. 1975; Gelder 2007; Purcell 2003; Thornton 1996; Willis 1993). Yet, emo was a highly mediated subculture. Through a textual analysis of emo subculturalists' online community practices, I suggest that the internet enabled group sociality, rather than individual alienation, for emos. I propose that online communities worked as subcultural 'micro-media' (Thornton 1996) that

maintained a coherent emo identity through discussions of what is, and is not, emo. Micro-media enables sociality within the subcultural formation.

Finally, this article will investigate whether Thornton's (1996) suggestion that micro-media can also be an exclusionary device holds true for emos (1996: 146). Are those deemed 'not emo enough' rejected and ridiculed online? Does micro-media exclude, as well as connect, particular emos? Further, are they associated with a feminized 'mainstream', like Thornton's 'Sharons and Tracys'?

Emo—an outline

QUESTION: What is *your* definition of emo?

ANSWER: feeling strongly about something...? yeah, sure that's what i think. who knows, to some people it's a genre. to others it's a lifestyle or a fashion statement. and to the ignorant, it's wearing girl's pants ('jenovalife' quoted at [_emoxlykewhoa 2005](#))¹

jenovalife is a member of an online community for emos called '[_emoxlykewoah](#)'. Her definition implies the multiple significations of emo—as a genre and a group of people. Firstly, she alludes to emo's etymological origin in 'emotional'. It is 'feeling strongly about something'. Some of her fellow community members make this notion more explicit: 'tension_terror2' says. 'To actually BE emo [is to] feel emotions deeper than normal people' (ibid.).

tension_terror2 and jenovalife are both referring to emos—a group of people—as 'feeling' either 'strongly' or 'deep[ly]'. Notably, tension_terror2 positions emos as distinct from 'normal people' who, she implies, experience emotions superficially. In fact, on [_emoxlykewhoa](#) people who appear shallow are barred from the community. This is evident in [xkrying__shamex](#)'s application to join the community, where she must answer a number of questions, including 'What is emo?':

[xkrying__shamex](#): i love being emotional so i love the 'emo' lifestyle so to speak.
[mind_detergent](#): Nope [I don't think you should join our community]... I just don't think we would get along (ibid.).

Emo, therefore, is not simply 'being emotional' or a 'lifestyle' but the perceived ability to 'feel... deep[ly]'. The crucial distinction between [xkrying__shamex](#) and [tension_terror2](#)'s definitions is the ability to articulate their difference from others

1. This quotation is taken from a LiveJournal 'Ratings Community' [_EMOXLykeWhoa](#) (2005); the question was posed by the Community's moderators as a part of an online questionnaire for prospective members. The trope of 'girls pants' (black skinny jeans) is frequently manoeuvred by emos as a symbol of how the 'mainstream' (the 'ignorant') imagine emo to be (Aslaksen 2006: 38, 71). Note: original spelling and punctuation in this, and similar quotes below, have been preserved.

(‘normal people’) in terms of an ephemeral ‘emotionality’. That is, they present themselves, online, as more affective than others.

This prerequisite for emo identity links to the perceived emotionality of emo, the music genre, also cited in jenovalife’s definition. The emo genre stems from 1980s’ ‘emotional core’ (emocore) music. This was a type of melodic punk focused on emotional concerns—crushes, break-ups and make-ups—rather than social issues. Early emo bands included American groups such as Rites of Spring and Embrace (Greenwald 2003; Simon and Kelley 2007). In the 1990s, alternative music styles inflected emocore. Emo bands lost much of the punk aesthetic and began including acoustic elements in their songs. Their lyrics, however, remained concerned with heartbreak (Aslaksen 2006: 9). Around this time, emocore simply became ‘emo’, coincident with the minor commercial rise of the genre, widely attributed to relatively high sales of Weezer’s *Pinkerton* in 1996 (ibid.).² In the period with which this article is concerned, emo gained significant chart success, particularly in America. Greenwald (2003) attributes this to stylistic shifts in the genre, from punk-influenced ‘thrashing’ to ‘pleasant...toe-tapping sound[s]’ more influenced by popular rock music. Emo bands, such as My Chemical Romance (MCR) and Fall Out Boy (FOB), had number one albums in the popular Billboard 200 charts in 2006 and 2007 (Billboard 2010). In Australia, American emo bands, such as The Killers, as well as MCR and FOB, had albums and singles in the top 100 ‘end of year’ charts for 2006 and 2007 (ARIA 2005–2010a; ARIA 2005–2010b). Further, the third album by Australian emo band, Eskimo Joe, ranked seventh in ARIA’s end-of-year chart for 2006.

With the popularity of emo bands in the mid-2000s, a substantial and recognizable fan-base coalesced around emo music. This was not a spontaneous eruption instigated by youthful emo music fans resistant to dominant culture (Hebdige 1979). Instead emos—the music fans—were at least partly the product of music journalism and marketeering. Greenwald, himself a journalist for *Spin* magazine, points out key emo labels focused on selling emo music as more ‘real’ than its pop-rock counterparts (2003: 59–61).³ Greenwald quotes a record executive who disparages ‘corporation’ music and claims his company’s ethos is ‘getting music to kids... I don’t want to be like those other assholes. Our bands know what its like to be a fan. They don’t hide backstage’ (2003: 129). Despite the executive’s claim that ‘fan and band [are] completely on the same level’ (ibid.), the fans tend to be the ones consuming emo through music and merchandise purchases at shows. ‘Emo’ had been a term used in punk circles since

2. *Pinkerton* peaked at number 19 on the American Billboard charts (Billboard.com 2010).

3. See also Simon and Kelley’s book *Everybody Hurts: An Essential Guide to Emo Culture* (2007) which is also written by music journalists.

the 1980s. However, it was not until the 2000s that 'emo' as a generic signifier gained currency in popular music press (2003: 127). Emo came to signify a particular musical style: melodic punk verses, contrasted with loud, fast choruses, which generally contained a pop-style 'hook'.⁴

Further, as jenovalife points out, emo in the 2000s also signified 'a lifestyle or a fashion statement'. That is, the term 'emo' also began to refer to emo fans—emos—who not only liked the music but were associated with a distinctive style and discursive rhetoric. Emos' style echoed the fashions of emo band-members. They became a subculture. While diverging from Hebdige's subcultural model in many ways, emo sartorialism was generally homologous to emo's musical and lyrical aesthetics. Clothing was literally 'dark', with tight black jeans a staple (Simon and Kelley 2007). Further, the association of 'emotions' with femininity manifested in emos' androgynous style. Men and women both wore make-up, particularly heavy eyeliner and styled their hair, using hair-straighteners and hairspray. Chain clothing shops, such as Hot Topic in America and Dangerfield in Australia, began to stock 'emo' clothes and accessories (Drawings.gr 2005–2006; You'll Never Take Me Alive!! 2008). Australian emos were mostly visible in capital cities. However, a cursory study of the 'locations' of members of MySpace emo group members indicates many Australian emos were from the outer suburbs or regional areas.⁵ This supports the popular stereotype of emos as hailing from 'suburban nowhere' proffered by popular books (Greenwald 2003; Simon and Kelley 2007) and journalistic accounts (Neal 2007; Vowles 2007).

Emo rhetoric explored stereotypically 'adolescent' emotions, associated particularly with relationships with their peers and parents. Common lyrical, and emos' blogs, themes included relationship breakdowns, tensions with parents and a sense of isolation from high school peers. Lyrics and blogs often merged. Live-Journal entries often included meticulous copying of emo lyrics or emo song titles as entry headings, suggesting co-relation between the lyrics' intent and their own lives (Greenwald 2003: 293). As Greenwald points out, the genre's lyrical themes made it particularly easy for 'emotional' teenagers to identify with the genre to the point of it becoming a key facet of their identity (2003: 61).⁶

4. For example, Fall Out Boy's 2006 single 'Thx Fr The Mmrs'. This song was a hit in both America and Australia. Greenwald describes more popular emo as 'vaguely punky boy bands that produce eminently hummable guitar pop' (2003: 129).

5. For example, the administrator of 'T.E.A.' (The Emo Army) MySpace group is from Dubbo (Dane 2006) and members are from places such as Byron Bay (Cookie Monster ... 6ws, 2010), Burnie (Scotzilla 2010) and Townsville (Ohaii, they call me cookie :D, 2010).

6. Greenwald writes of the emo mentality: 'Someone is singing about problems just like yours. They're not commenting on them, just echoing them, making them real, validating them' (2003: 62–63). He also quotes one teenager who claims that emo music helped her to deal with

Crucial for the articulation and enactment of this identification were new technologies. Computer ownership and internet access surged in the West in the 2000s (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2009). Emo music was easily downloadable illegally or legally and internet radio sites, such as Last.fm, not only offered free downloads, but recommendations for 'similar artists'. This allowed emos quick and easy access to the music important for building their emo credentials.

Most important, though, for the development of a coherent emo fan style and rhetoric were social networking sites, such as MySpace and LiveJournal. As Greenwald points out, unlike previous subcultures, such as rave and punk, emo was as much about mediated communication as music (2003: 284). Simon and Kelley's 'essential guide' to emo devotes a whole chapter to the internet and dubs MySpace and LiveJournal as '*our* [emo] communities' (2007: 86). The emo described in such popular books was an outsider at school, who found community online (Greenwald 2003: 58). Bands also embraced social networking, and took to blogging on MySpace.⁷ This also built on the idea that emo was more 'real' than pop music. Emos could easily 'add' their favourite bands, and even individual musicians, to their 'Friends Lists'.

The sheer ease with which western emos could access social networking meant that the emo provides an almost archetypal example of a contemporary new-mediated subculture. Like other subcultures, emos fixated on distinguishing themselves from 'the mainstream' (see Thornton 1996; Willis 1993). However, emo identity constantly shifted. Every discussion thread titled 'What is emo to you?' and every online band interview which stipulated that a formerly 'emo' band now thought emo was 'fucking garbage' (Sowerby 2007)⁸ led to a swift reiteration, or reworking by emos of emo music's and emo lifestyle's definition. Although emo, as a genre and fashion style, was partly constituted through marketing, it became, particularly through the interactive interfaces of social networking sites, a subculture created and debated by emos themselves.

The internet also provided a key space for publicizing new bands. For example, Greenwald credits the rise of American band, Thursday, to LiveJournal. He writes that, despite Thursday's popularity on emo forums, '*Spin* office was flabbergasted' (2003: 58) when Thursday appeared in the Billboard charts without a press release. MySpace allowed unsigned, and signed, emo bands to post up music,

family problems. '[M]y dad...tries to hide things from me, like that he drinks... Usually, I lock myself in my room, put a CD on, and just ignore other things' (2003: 61).

7. Pete Wentz, lead singer of FOB, even began his own social networking site, called Friends Or Enemies in 2005 (Friends Or Enemies 2009).

8. This is a quotation from MCR front-man, Gerard Way, in an interview with a student newspaper (Sowerby 2007).

often for free download. MySpace eventually established a record label, consisting mainly of emo bands (ibid.). Further, MySpace Australia helped launch Melbourne emo band Behind Crimson Eyes. After paying for advertising on MySpace's front page, the band sent private messages promoting their music to almost everybody professing a preference for emo music in their 'Likes' column. As a result, Behind Crimson Eyes was signed to Roadrunner records and supported UK emo band Bullet For My Valentine on their Australian tour.

Making news/making panics—'emo suicides!'

Popular Australian media representations mobilize an 'ideal type' of emo as proof that emos deviate from normative adolescent identities. Greenwald (2003) and Simon and Kelley (2007) outline this ideal type, somewhat jokingly, in their books as wearing tight black jeans, band t-shirts and make-up and being 'depressed'. This is obviously a broad definition. However, between 2003 and 2007, mainstream Australian media offered it as *the* emo identity. They drew particularly from North American reports on emo culture as 'frightening' and a threat to family values (CBS 47, 2007; Fox 11, 2007; WDAZ 2007). I will focus on one Australian example: the suicide of two young Melbourne women, Jodie Gater and Stephanie Gestier, in 2007. The media identified them as emos.⁹

The media's binding of Gater and Gestier to generalized emo symbols rendered the young women folk-devils. Further, the media's linking of these symbols to the young women's suicide constituted a moral panic around emo. The academic concern with folk-devils and moral panics stems from Cohen's (1972) seminal work on the conflict between upstanding citizens and the mods and rockers in 1960s Britain. Cohen argues that folk-devils operate through a number of stylized tropes which are crucial to the formation of a moral panic. They construct, and remind, media-consumers what is 'immoral' behaviour in dominant culture (1972: 10). The tropes become 'symbolized' (1972: 40) as the subcultural-subject's deviant status conflates with the 'ideal' objects chosen to represent them. Cohen's work pre-dated the internet and even the widespread use of television. Thus, it mainly focused on newspaper articles. However, later work (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009; Thompson 1998) on moral panics is more useful regarding televisual and internet media representations.

9. Although I lack the space to write in detail about it in this essay, the sheer amount of articles regarding emo and the Gater and Gestier suicides is notable. While focusing on the young women, other news 'events' were drawn in and related to emo. The murder of a MySpace user in Adelaide (Vowles 2007); the murder of a Perth teenager by her two friends (The Bulletin 2007) and even the alleged alcohol and drug use by 'emo kids, aged 12' (The Sun-Herald 2007) in Sydney was linked to the double suicides.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda draw on Glassner's (2000) work on the 'culture of fear' to supplement their understanding of moral panics. In particular, they suggest that when such a culture is compounded with folk-devils, fear compounds and equates to a moral panic (2009: ix). Goode and Ben-Yehuda's studies of media coverage of American high school shootings (2009: 105–106) and drugs (2009: 207–18) show the effectiveness of television for vividly creating a folk-devil 'type'. Compared with a newspaper report, televisual representations offer 'real' images of the folk-devil upon which audiences may project their fears.

Beck's (1998) 'risk society' informs Thompson's work on moral panics. Beck argues that, in contemporary (second) modern culture, individuals are more concerned with perceived 'risks' than actual material threats. Thompson elaborates that moral panics arise when the media represents so-called 'risks' as reaching a critical mass. Current culture is multi-mediated, Thompson emphasizes (1998: 22). This makes moral panics easier to constitute, and folk-devils seemingly omniscient.¹⁰ Further, Thompson notes how the media itself has become the object of moral panics (1998: 81). The internet provides an effective example. Thompson traces print and televisual representations of the internet as a 'haven' for pornographers. Moreover, he demonstrates how the subsequent panic transposed the internet as a folk-devil onto earlier panics about television destroying the traditional nuclear family unit. Thompson shows how the 'internet pornography panic' constituted the web as a threat to 'family values'. In particular, the media (television and print) cast the internet as corrupting 'innocent' children (1998: 137).

This discourse of the internet is evident in media representations of Gater and Gestier following their suicide. However, first, the media established 'emo' as a monolithic folk-devil responsible for their deaths. Within these reports, 'emo clothes' become synonymous with the actual subject of the media-story—the double suicide. This is evident in *Today Tonight's* (TCN 7, 2007) report on the young women:

Emo [is] a...term applying to a fashion style consisting of tight black jeans, black t-shirts...and dark eyeliner, though recently emos have gained a more sinister reputation, with the subculture being associated with depression, self-mutilation and now, suicide (ibid.).

10. In particular, Thompson writes on the moral panic surrounding the James Bulger murder in 1993. He focuses on print and televisual representations (1998: 75–81 *et passim*). However, a recent look at the media response to the release of Bulger's killers further demonstrates the power of new media for creating moral panics. In particular, misguided Facebook and Twitter messages led to the stalking and harassment of an innocent man thought to be Jon Venables (Narain 2010). In Australia, a hoax email in 2006 also fuelled a renewed panic about Bulger's killers. The email claimed that the person responsible for the rape and murder of a young child at a Perth shopping centre was Jon Venables or Robert Thompson (Christensen 2006).

The tropes this report associates with emo are *self* focused: self-fashioning, self-harm, mental illness and the taking of one's own life. Superficially, this implies that emos are self-absorbed and socially alienated.¹¹ Of course, a closer reading of the emo stereotype suggests an ambivalent relation to sociality. The 'uniform', in particular, could imply a desire to fit in to a social grouping (Gelder 2007).

Media reports strengthened the association between emo, the internet and alienation through the positioning of the internet as an emo technology responsible for the double suicide. As outlined above, emos *were* a highly mediated culture. Further, at the time of the young women's deaths, the internet was expanding into the majority of homes in Australia (Internet World Stats 2009). This fact was much reported in the media, often in terms of risk to young adults and children (AFP 2007; Colley 2007; Collins 2007; Cubby 2007; Gammage 2007; Hogarth 2003; Margo 2004; TCN 10, 2007). Such reports generally fixed on teenagers forgoing 'normal' face-to-face activities in favour of online socializing, or 'internet predators' preying on children. Almost all the reports I canvassed on the Gater and Gestier suicides (three television programmes and ten print articles) focused on the women's MySpace usage. One even suggested that Gater and Gestier's MySpace accounts provided 'clues' (Schliebs 2007) to their deaths. The media offered the internet as an enabler of emo's assumed propensity for social alienation. This is evident in a report, which claimed the women used MySpace to pursue their 'fascination with the brooding "emo" subculture' (Dubecki and Cubby 2007).

The emo folk-devil offered by the media is excessive in their internet usage. According to reports, Gestier spent 'all her time surfing the internet' (Dubecki 2007), and the 'experts'¹² quoted warn parents of the dangers of their child 'succumbing' (TCN 7, 2007) to emo online.¹³ As Gelder points out, descriptions of subcultures often use metaphors of excess to position the subculture as a deviation from normative values of self-restraint (2007: 4). This is also true for moral panics. Thompson's analysis of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA)'s

11. Interestingly, Greenwald's (2003) book, written by an emo, for emos, echoes these ideas by constantly emphasizing that emos are solipsistic. He writes that emos are 'caught up in the majesty of their own private drama' (55) and 'are...solipsistic' (291). Blogs, he suggests, complement emos' apparent self-obsession: blogs are 'the perfect venue for your ongoing one-woman show' (292).

12. As Thompson (1998: 31) notes, the presence of 'experts' and their advice on how to cope with 'folk devils' is integral to 'moral panics'.

13. Metaphors of 'descent' and 'falling into' subcultures are a common trope in accounts of subculture, especially evident in accounts of 'slumming' (Gelder 2007: 13) whereby the subcultural 'illuminator' descends—it is implied both physically, into 'underground' spaces, and morally, into hedonism or crime—into a subculture in order to 'study' it. In relation to the double suicide, the *60 Minutes* (TCN 9, 2007) report on the matter 'delved' into Gater's 'secret world' (ibid.). Another article referred to the young women as being 'lost' online (Dubecki 2007).

campaign against 'immoral' television programming in the UK shows how media and pressure groups represent the folk-devil as the harbinger of 'rampant immorality' (1998: 82). Further, contemporary media implicates the internet and personal computers as enabling devices for the excesses of youth subcultures (Gelder 2007: 141). In the reports on their deaths, Gater and Gestier's ideal emo bodies are transposed onto the 'nerd's body', described by Lupton (2000). The nerd's body transgresses the line between 'healthy' minimal, computer usage, and 'unhealthy' over-usage, thereby becoming socially 'repugnant' (2000: 481). These over-users are pathologized as lacking 'normal' social skills. The assumption is they are isolated from society due to their excessive computer usage (ibid.). By linking excessive computer usage to emo, media reports work inter-textually to associate emo with negatively constituted nerd culture.

New technologies and emo—why emo girls are no fun

The Australian *60 Minutes* (TCN 9, 2007) television report on the Gater and Gestier suicides demonstrates the media's constitution of emos as non-normative due to excessive internet usage. It builds a moral panic via the juxtaposition of two reports. One focuses on Gater and Gestier's 'dark' (ibid.) use of the internet and suicide. The other regards 'Girl Power' teenagers who use new technologies 'for fun' (ibid.) and socializing. For a moral panic to be meaningful, it must not only designate the behaviour of the folk-devil as 'what not to do', but also outline the normative behaviour in which one *should* engage (Cohen 1972). *60 Minutes* rehearses baby-boomer anxieties about new technologies: while they may enhance our everyday lives, they remain mystifying machinery, which are potentially open to malfunction and cyber-crime. The Gater and Gestier report, titled 'Web of Darkness', was the programme's final story. The reporter 'illuminates' this 'Web of Darkness' by explicitly linking the young women's emo identities to excessive computer usage and their suicides:

There have been numerous theories about why the girls took their lives... Both were drawn to the dark imagery of the...emo teen subculture [and] as Rob [Gater] delved further into his daughter's secret world, he found one common thread, the internet (TCN 9, 2007).

The reporter represents Gater and Gestier as engulfed by the internet.¹⁴ He goes on to note that they preferred 'computers' to 'boys' (ibid.) and spent their leisure time alone and online in their bedrooms.

14. As Lupton points out, anxieties of engulfment surround human/computer relations (2000: 487); the computer being framed as 'open' codes it as female, and whilst open 'to the penetration of enemy others' (ibid.), 'she' also 'threaten[s] engulfment...the computer body is dark and enigmatic...harbouring danger and contamination' (ibid.).

The position of this report within the entire episode of *60 Minutes* further suggested that the women's subcultural identities made them social outsiders. The segment following 'Web of Darkness' featured the host reading out letters regarding the previous week's programme. This segment built a syntagmatic meaning that stabilizes Gater and Gestier's actions as deviant (and emo) and offered a representation of normative (and not emo) behaviour for young women. Many of the letters responded to a report on what *60 Minutes* dubbed 'Girl Power' teenagers: young women who party and shop together. The segment began with a recap clip from the 'Girl Power' report depicting young women using new technologies such as digital cameras and mobile phones. The clip positioned these technologies as social. The 'girls' take photographs at a pool-party and chat to each other on their phones. Computers were absent—perhaps because the footage centred almost entirely on outside, public, spaces. Unlike Gater and Gestier—bound to the domestic space of their bedrooms and trapped in a 'Web of Darkness'—these young women bounce happily to pop music, giggle as they try on colourful dresses and flirt with young men. *60 Minutes* represented the 'Girl Power' girls as the norm: 'today's teenage girls' (ibid.). They are social, outgoing and definitely *not* wearing skinny black jeans (ibid.).

However, one letter reminded viewers that the boundaries of 'Girl Power' can also be transgressed. The letter noted: 'This is not what girls are really like. It's only what parents *believe* they are like' (ibid.). This leaves viewers to fill in the gap—of what 'some' girls are 'really' like—by recalling the images of Gater and Gestier, alone, emo and online. Immediately after the letters segment, the host confirmed the emo's position as a folk-devil, as he encouraged viewers to join an online discussion with an 'adolescent health expert'—presumably a healthy use of the internet—regarding 'those shocking teenage suicides' (ibid.). *60 Minutes* constructed the emo as a folk-devil through a juxtaposition of emo-encoded computers with 'normal' new technology usage by teenage women. This helped establish emos as deviant and distanced from dominant society.

Emo armies and emo kids: emo sociality and the internet

Self-made emo media, primarily online, offers a different perspective of the intersection between emos and new technologies. As Simon and Kelley point out, 'it's hard to remember' (2007: 83) a time prior to online emo socializing. Contrary to the moral panics offered by *60 Minutes* and *Today Tonight*, Simon and Kelley, and Greenwald (2003) cite the internet as a place for emo social networking, rather than an engulfing technology of alienation. The sheer amount of Australian emo group forums on MySpace (currently there are 1033, mostly no longer active and

largely established during the period on which I focus) indicates the multiple social connections the internet provided for emos. Interestingly, emos used the internet to perpetuate their image as alienated. Posters regularly discussed feeling 'outside' their family and peer group at school (T.E.A. 2005). However, emos regarded the internet as a space where they could feel part of a social group (Greenwald 2003; Simon and Kelley 2007).

I contend that the internet operates as a form of micro-media, which produces subcultural coherence and sociality (Thornton 1996). Thornton defines micro-media as print material, produced and consumed by subculture members, which coheres subcultures together via 'intricate networks of communication' (1996: 137). I expand this definition to include the internet. Micro-media also supplies subculturalists with the information necessary for the constitution and articulation of subcultural capital. In her definition of 'subcultural capital', Thornton uses Bourdieu's (1992) model of 'cultural capital' as a way of explaining fields of power within, and relating to, subcultural formations. That is, one's position within a subculture is determined by one's *habitus*—the naturalness with which one engages in subcultural practices. The display of *habitus* indicates the amount of subcultural capital one possesses and directly relates to whether one is considered an insider or outsider of the subculture. Through subcultural micro-media, subculturalists can glean the 'right' subcultural information and integrate it into their *habitus*.

MySpace was a key emo micro-media between 2005 and 2007. MySpace is a large database, which links users to one another and hosts blogs. It hosts individual homepages ('Profiles') which users 'pimp'¹⁵ (modify) to 'reflect' their personalities. MySpace also hosts homepages for bands and subcultural institutions such as pubs and nightclubs. One may also join 'Groups' where members discuss shared interests on forums. Upon creating an account, MySpace requests users list 'Likes and Dislikes' relating to music, film, television and 'General'. The individual items on each list are hyperlinked to other users who share similar tastes. These lists, and their connections, constructed a sense of shared distinction among emo-users and granted emos the opportunity to 'friend' others who share their tastes. MySpace was the most popular social networking site for emos during the early to mid 2000s (Simon and Kelley 2007).

One key for emos' social networking was MySpace groups centred on emo music and culture. They boosted emos' subcultural capital by offering the latest information on emo musicians, tours and nightclubs. One Australian Group was *T. E. A. (The Emo Army)* which offers users the opportunity to discuss 'SPE-

15. 'Pimping' one's MySpace involves modifying the default 'Profile' interface to display one's tastes. Generally, this means altering the html code to change the background colour of the Profile and adding extra text and images.

CIFICALLY EMO' (T.E.A. 2005) subjects.¹⁶ The hyperlinked band-names on *T. E. A.* users' profiles form an extended network of MySpace emos. The 'Friend Lists'¹⁷ of active *T. E. A.* members also reflected this network. Such lists featured avatars of their emo friends, some of whom leave 'comments' suggesting they found their fellows through browsing band names, for example: 'e m i l i a: hey dane. thanks for the add [to his Friends List]. Lets speak and stuff :). I like behind crimson eyes too' (Dane 2006).

Profiles, friends, and likes and dislikes lists are primarily sites where users constituted a coherent emo identity, which depended on validation from their extended network of 'commenting' emo friends.

The extended network of emo MySpace users established an emo norm and 'wins space' (Clarke et al. 1975: 97) for the subculture in the virtual realm. Through the 'pimping' of their (my)spaces as emo, online emos territorialized a small section of the web.¹⁸ When networked together, their profiles constructed the subcultural cohesion that facilitates subcultural sociality. Emos are a dispersed global population (Greenwald 2003; Simon and Kelley 2007) and it is the internet that links this population together.

However, MySpace also acted as an interface between online emo subculture and localized, emo geographies in 'real life'. Due to their lack of access to property ownership, teenage subculturalists mark, generally public, spaces as their own through the enactment of subcultural practices (Clarke et al. 1975).¹⁹ Australian emos between 2005 and 2007 seemed more likely to use the web to reinforce localized subcultural groupings, albeit informed by globalized understandings of the subculture. As Hodkinson (2004) suggests, online subcultural networks facilitate offline subcultural sociality. They extend the subcultural network and territorialize 'real' places as subcultural spaces. This is evident on the *emo kids* MySpace group (emo kids, 2006) which proclaims its local position in its 'Headline':²⁰ 'we be [*sic*] the Flinders Street [Station] kids' (ibid.). Flinders Street Station is Melbourne's

16. The members' profiles indicate similar musical tastes, and 'pimped' profile designs, which favour black roses, dark colours, and imagery of guns. These users also display 'ideal' emo fashion-styles in group members' 'Pics' (photographs) sections.

17. 'Friending' on MySpace is a practice whereby one user 'adds' another to their 'Friends List'—thereby enabling both to talk online via leaving 'comments' on each other's profiles.

18. In Simon and Kelley's book, there is even a section on how to 'emo-ify' (2007: 86) your MySpace profile aptly called 'Making MySpace *Your* Space' (85–89).

19. Gelder suggests that the notion that subcultures territorialize places as 'theirs' is a key 'narrative' of subcultural studies (2007: 3) with subcultures being understood as 'at one remove from property ownership. Subcultures territorialize their places rather than own them, and it is in this way that their modes of belonging and their claims on place find expression' (ibid.).

20. MySpace profiles often have a 'headline'—a short statement, meant to 'represent' the self, projected in the profile, or just to get attention and garner more friends.

central train station. Young Melburnians hang out and, often, enact subcultural identities in the station's large foyer and on its wide steps. The *emo kids'* stake on offline territory is evident in posted photographs of the *kids*, dressed in emo style, sitting at the station. These photographs, one of which is captioned 'AHHHH... home' (ibid.), firmly located group members in a local, offline context, extending their territoriality beyond the virtual internet space.

Accept/reject: the limits of online emo sociality

According to the *emo kids* group forum, when its members met 'face-to-face' at Flinders St Station they sat in the foyer and guarded their zone from interference by 'scene kids'. Scene kids were emos deemed 'inauthentic' by the *emo kids*, due to their alleged privileging of emo fashion over emo music. The spatial practices of subcultural exclusion may happen in real life.²¹ Yet it seems to be just as important for the *emo kids* to outline the parameters for scene kid status through discussion threads such as, 'EVERY1 TELL ME HOW MUCH U HATE SCENE KIDS' (malcolm enjoys the company of cows, 2006). The *emo kids* constructed 'scene kids' as a homogenized Other. This served to bolster subcultural cohesion, through the rehearsal and mutual affirmation of what the *emo kids* are not and, thus, what scene kids are. That is, *emo kids* did not wear band t-shirts just for the look (___ Tommy___ 2007); listen to mainstream pop (ibid.) and so on.

These logics of exclusion illustrate Thornton's (1996) second understanding of subcultural micro-media as an 'institution' of exclusion. She suggests that micro-media's cohesion of subcultural identity relies on the classification of an Other group identified as lacking subcultural capital. Further, by displaying knowledge of the Other's lack of subcultural capital those constructing and consuming the micro-media indicate their own subcultural capital.

MySpace groups, such as *emo kids*, demonstrate the exclusionary potential of online micro-media. Many use discussions of 'what emo is' as a way of displaying competence, and incompetence in emo *habitus*.²² One discussion topic, 'Non-emotional emos?', demonstrates this idea:

21. This is implied in posts on *emo kids*. One member writes: 'if i [*sic*] see a male scene kid, id [*sic*] smash the fucking shit through him' (malcolm enjoys the company of cows, 2006). He continues, by recounting a supposedly real life incident where he 'hit there [*sic*] mate... lol [laugh out loud] there was this wonderfull [*sic*] sound that guys [*sic*] jaw made' (ibid.).

22. Emos are unlike Hodkinson's (2002) goths who appear more comfortable with what goth 'means'. The goths in Hodkinson's study discuss upcoming events and bands as displays of subcultural allegiance. However, online emos are preoccupied with definitions. This may be partly due to the predominance of emos under the age of eighteen, their access to 'over-age' emo gigs and concerts, as well as money to participate in events and purchase albums, and so on, is perhaps more limited than the university-student-aged goths in Hodkinson's work (2002, 2004).

Sarah: 'Emo' is short for 'emotional', so is there such a thing as a non-emotional emo? If a kid fits the emo image (e.g. Wears skinny jeans, listens to My Chemical Romance etc.), but isn't emotional, then are they an emo? Or are they just a kid who fits the image, but not the personality? In my opinion... I think if there's no emotion, then it's not emo. They're just... emo posers (Sarah 2007).

Sarah follows a logic prevalent in online emo subculture. She demarcates the 'true' emos from the 'posers' or scene kids, offering the broad sentiment of 'emotion' (ibid.) as a key differential. Usually emo understandings of emotion indicate sincerity, and emotions associated with emo lyrics, such as longing, loneliness and sadness (Aslaksen 2006; Greenwald 2003; Simon and Kelley 2007). Posers, on the other hand, are those who 'fit...the image' (Sarah 2007) stylistically but allegedly lack emotional depth. To be 'truly' emo, one must embody the emo 'personality' (ibid.)—that is, one must display emo *habitus*. Australian emos' concern with what is 'truly' emo adheres to emos' wider concern with sincerity, evident in emo band-members' emphasis on the 'truthfulness' of their lyrics (Aslaksen 2006: 160). Greenwald's (2003) work also discusses emo music's connotations of 'realness' and 'truthfulness'. He quotes one young woman as saying 'Emo isn't all happy-go-lucky music [like pop music]. It's not fake. This is all the stuff [the singer] has actually been through and it's amazing to hear him express it like he does... I don't care what people think of me [listening to emo music]... I'm not gonna be fake. I'm gonna be real' (2003: 61). Another one of Greenwald's interviewees, a musician, offers a similar sentiment: 'everything we sing about is real. Real things that happen to us and people in general. And they [the fans] can easily relate to that ... A real feeling' (2003: 128). A valorization of 'truthfulness' is also evident in *T. E. A.*'s discussion 'All you guys are fakes' (Rory TDTF, 2006):

Rory TDTF [Rory]: Seriously, don't you guys [have] anything better to do than sitting in a group saying you are emo when you are not. It is really quite scummy. And get some new music NOT My Chemical Romance²³ and The Used. They are both sell outs.

ROSE KNOWS! [ROSE]: LOL. I like this kid [Rory]... *sarcastic*²⁴ yay the used. =[[[gross (ibid.).

Here, Rory and ROSE establish a definition of emo by demarcating certain bands and emos as 'sell outs' and 'fakes'. Further, their proclamation of what is and is not 'true' positions them as 'real' emos. They become gatekeepers of what and who can claim 'emo' status.

23. In his thesis on emo, Aslaksen (2006) describes the reluctance of some emo-identifying young people and performers to enjoy the music of, particularly, My Chemical Romance, who they see as 'mainstream'; see especially chapter 1, 'The Emo Performers' (32–65).

24. Use of asterisks in online conversation generally indicates tone or actions.

Rory follows the logic of subcultural capital that Thornton discusses, which uses a monolithic 'mainstream' as an exclusionary device and a measure against which subculture members position themselves, as alternative, underground and authentic (1996: 115). This logic excludes those deemed 'unhip' by aligning them with the mainstream. The mainstream is generally synonymous with popular music, present in the Top 40 charts. MCR and The Used had both achieved Top 40 success in Australia when Rory made his post. As the thread progresses Rory exercises his subcultural capital in order to exclude another member of *T. E. A.* due to his mainstream music tastes:

IT'S DANTASTIC! [DAN]: wtf ['what the fuck'], why are you [Rory] calling me fake]??? y would i listen to the used? they suk ass.

Rory: Dude you said in a earlier post you listen the used and my chemical romance, and you have them on your music [Likes] list. All of a sudden you don't now? (Rory TDTF 2006)

As a gatekeeper of emo subcultural capital, Rory aligns DAN—whose lack of subcultural capital is 'proved' by his 'Music Likes' list—with 'fake' emos who listen to popular emo music. In this example, the micro-media of a MySpace group displays and constitutes emo subcultural capital. However, by attempting to build subcultural coherence through a discussion of emo's definition, the group also establishes boundaries that exclude those deemed to be lacking in the subcultural capital required to be 'truly' emo.

Supré emos: does emo feminize the mainstream?

Thornton also looks at how subcultural logics often feminize the mainstream, and thus position women as lacking subcultural capital (1996: 139). The association of a generic female subject with the 'mainstream' often belies a class-based exclusion of non-middle-class subjects attempting to permeate the subculture (1996: 101). That is, the supposed banality of working-class culture is embodied in the image of 'Sharons and Traceys dancing around their handbags' to Top 40 music at a chain club or pub. The feminizing of a classed mainstream is evident on another MySpace emo group. It is confusingly named *:::Allergic to Emo:::* though its members are actually concerned with defining 'real' emos from 'posers'. Here, users associate the mainstream with the chain women's clothing shop 'Supré':

Manda Bum: Yeah, there's now emo-posers-barbies who just wear skinny jeans and have the emo mullet.

Erin: I hate those mainstream emos!!! ... Emo has moved into supré—the ultimate 'look at me i'm a pretty girl' shop (Sarah 2007).

Erin attained further distance from 'mainstream emos' and their budget clothing,²⁵ through a projection of herself as middle-class and educated; distinct from the emo 'try hard[s]' (ibid.) who occupied Brisbane's Queen Street Mall:

Erin: I go to uni at U[niversity of] Q[ueensland]... so I have to walk through Queen St Mall almost every day... Those girls with their dog collars... hair in pig tails, pink glossy lips and a supre bag. WHY????!!!! If you want emo boys... that's not going to do the trick. They will merely assume you're... a stupid try hard as the rest of us think you are!!!! (ibid.).

Here, Supré's local cultural connotations of being a cheap shop frequented by mindless 'barbies' conflates with the idea of 'emo posers'. Such posers are opposed to the middle-class and educated emos who possess the subcultural capital to recognize the inauthenticity of 'Supré emos'.

The feminizing of the mainstream and 'emo posers' was particularly evident on another social networking site LiveJournal. Like MySpace, LiveJournal operates through hyper-linked database entries, with personal profiles and 'communities' sorted by 'interests'. It was also a popular social networking site for emos (Greenwald 2003). However, in contrast to MySpace's groups, LiveJournal communities' methods of inclusion and exclusion are more structured. Rather than simply ignoring or verbally abusing users whom members find distasteful, community moderators can ban members from posting and delete posts. LiveJournal also hosts a plethora of 'Ratings' communities. Here, prospective members must apply to join and, once accepted ('friended'), gain access to 'Friends Only' posts regarding the community's interests. Applications involve the posting of personal details and photographs; listing likes and dislikes specific to the interest of the community; and detailing one's personal opinions on general 'issues'.²⁶ The semantics of online 'community' have been discussed at length elsewhere (Gelder 2007; Wilbur 2000). However, it is worth noting that, unlike a group, which implies more permeable boundaries and disparate membership, a community signifies a more located and bounded identity, with stricter policing of who joins.²⁷ To be 'rejected' (the term used on LiveJournal) by a community, implies a failure to meet certain 'community standards'.

Just as in real life, where community can reflect conservative norms of conduct (Bennett 2000), ratings communities favour hetero-sexist logics. The emo ratings

25. Aslaksen recognizes a similar distaste for chain clothing shops in his thesis on emo, with his ethnographic subjects concerned that 'emo-style' clothing being sold at 'Hot Topic' (48, 93) was 'mainstreaming' their 'rebellious' (2006: 93) subculture.

26. Such as abortion, non-heterosexuality and gun ownership.

27. This is evident in online communities that charge membership fees (Wilbur 2000: 47).

communities I looked at universally accepted the few male applicants²⁸ based on their music likes and opinions. However, the communities' moderators often positioned female applicants' appearances as the basis for acceptance or rejection. All the 'rejectees' whom I canvassed were women, confirming the feminization of the 'true' emo's 'fake' Other. Reasons given for rejection were often lack of 'cuteness'. However, users often deflected their sexism onto a homogenized pop 'mainstream'. This is evident in this quotation from __EMOXLykeWoah:

__willdeliver: [referring to the applicant] you're not cute. at all. what so ever. basically i can't say yes to someone who doesn't like the ataris. also, you sound like you got your list of emo bands from MTV2. No [you are not accepted into the community] (__EMOXLykeWhoa 2005).

__willdeliver's rejection of notice_me_x (a female applicant) is primarily due to her lack of 'cuteness'. However, he displaces this sexist judgement by his following comment, claiming her failure to be accepted is 'basically' due to her lack of sub-cultural capital symbolized by her popular (MTV2) music tastes. On ratings communities, such as __EmoxLykeWoah, sociality is conditional upon the applicants' deemed emo authenticity which, for women, lies in their adherence to dominant norms of attractiveness.

Conclusion

In this article, I focused on the received notion that emos were socially alienated, due to their use of new technologies, and interrogated this assumption via an analysis of online emo practices. Recent media representations constructed emos as folk-devils whose internet usage made them deviant to normative adolescents. However, I found that sociality and subcultural cohesion was established online in emo MySpace groups. MySpace works as a facilitating network for emos on- and offline. However, the constitution of subcultural capital in online micro-media often depends on the classification and exclusion of those deemed 'not subcultural enough'. The internet can create boundaries between 'true' emos and 'scene kids'. The tendency to conflate femininity with scene-ness displays a patriarchal element in emo. However, it also confirms Thornton's hypothesis that the feminized mainstream subject is also a classed subject. In this case, 'fake' emos were associated with cheap chain clothing shops.

28. I am basing this on a study of applications on five of the seven emo ratings communities on LiveJournal, a cursory knowledge of other LiveJournal ratings communities (of which there are hundreds), such as those based around rock music or television fandoms, where there is certainly a slant towards female applicants.

This article demonstrated that the internet enables emos' sociality. This contradicts the media's assumption that emos' computer use implies loneliness and alienation. Yet, I wish also to emphasize the conditional nature of this sociality. Even online, the real-life logics of subcultural capital, replete with sexism and class discrimination, remain significant.

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