



**A Series of Information Resources
on**

***Youth Subcultures:
Understanding Subgroups to Better
Address Barriers to Learning
& Improve Schools***

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, better understanding of youth subculture is essential. This series is intended to stimulate thinking about the implications for policy and practice of the complex, multifaceted subgroups with which youth come to be identified and/or assigned by peers.

Public health and education policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and educators need to know as much as they can about the factors that lead youth to manifest behaviors stemming from group defined values, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. Such understanding is basic to promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems arise, and enhancing intervention impact on severe and chronic problems.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, as aids for policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school and community improvement planning.

**Glossary of Terms Related to
Youth Culture Subgroups**

Given that we are in the process of learning, our intent is to build a glossary over time. We begin here by adopting/adapting descriptions and student quotes from M. Milner's 2004 book *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption* (Routledge Press).

And, in the spirit of youth subculture's immersion in 21st century technology, we also provide some additional terms from Wikipedia.

Note: Many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups often are not well-articulated and may be pejorative and offensive. We do not suggest imprecision is good nor do we condone repugnant language. We do, however, recognize the need to go beyond adultcentric definitions and descriptions of youth subgroups if we are to understand youth perceptions and perspectives.

We invite additions and improvements.

The Center for Mental Health in Schools is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563. Phone: (310) 825-3634.

Permission to reproduce this document is granted. Please cite source as the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

Glossary of Terms Related to Youth Culture Subgroups*

Alternatives

“radical” subgroups such as freaks, weirdos, druggies, hippies, metal heads, deadheads, punks, goths, straight-edgers, chain gang – they reject conventional middle class values of adult authority and the status of popular students; they flaunt deviance (e.g., adopt bizarre dress, hair style, body ornamentation such as pierced ears, eyebrow, noses)

Band/Orchestra/Chorus

one set of activity oriented subgroupings; those in these activities have relatively low to moderate status at school and have relatively few ties to others not in this group; may hang out in room where activity is conducted and may date others from this group. Males are seen as unmanly (e.g., called band queers, band fags, band nerds)

Brains

academically oriented students; have moderately high status with some other subgroups

Brutes

women athletes in schools where women in sports is of low status

Chain Gang

wearing chains (e.g., billfolds attached to belts with a silver chain)

Cliques

to gain status and a sense of acceptance and belonging, students join and conform to the conventions of a subgroup that has distinguishable identifiers and hierarchical and status stratification; styles vary from school to school

Cool girls

attractive females who date popular males; focus on makeup, hairstyles, body weight, and clothes; invited to parties

Coolness

resistance to established authorities or conventional customs; involves the creation of a set of alternative or counter norms (e.g., being deviant, being bored)

Conformity games

subgroups are constantly changing by elaborating and complicating prevailing norms in order to gain a competitive advantage

Country

subgroups referred to as cowboys, rednecks, kickers; usually working class or rural; adopt western dress, country music, pickup trucks; looked down on by others, but they don't accept lower status; alienated from academics

Crashing

showing up at an exclusive party uninvited; may provoke conflict and fights

Crazy girls

described as good looking, with an urge to party and use substances such as alcohol and marijuana; often kicked out of school activities

Drama freaks/drama queers

those who adopt distinctive and extreme styles of dress and behavior; often wear black

Drifters/Floaters

those who participate in more than one subgroup; have a primary group, but also have significant associations with other subgroups

Dump on

to put down, make fun of, trash; saying things about those who are not members of one's subgroup

Freaky girls

those who use pale makeup, dark lipstick, dyed hair, knee-high socks

G's

gangsters; "wannabe" gangsters

Geeks/Dorks

those who are inept in social events, dress, and style; poor athletes; often have low grades

Generation Y

Millennial generation or Echo Boomers. Birthdates range from mid 1970s to early 2000s. MTV generation; literatures includes Harry Potter and Twilight; civic minded; seek active role in decision making (from Wikipedia)

Generation Z

one of the names used for the generation born between the mid-1990's and that 2000s. Also called Generation Next, Internet Generation. Highly connected using web, instant messaging, text messaging, cellular phone, You Tube. (from Wikipedia)

Goth

Gothic rock, an offshoot of the post-punk genre; influences from 19th century Gothic literature and horror films. Styles of dress range from deathrock, punk, androgynous, Victoria, black attire, makeup and hair. Dark, mysterious, morbid imagery and mood; self-dramatization. Emphasis on individualism, tolerance or diversity, cynicism. Fashion is dark, sometimes eroticized, black hair, dark eyeliner, black fingernails, may have piercings. Associated in media with violent crimes, including school shootings. Some backlash and aggression toward them from other subgroups. (from Wikipedia)

Gossip

those who make negative comments about someone not present; web-based bulletin boards are the new means of public ridicule

Harassing

verbal and physical harassment of the most vulnerable; using names like prude, dork, geek, dweeb, bamma; making one a social outcast; source is more likely wannabes, than high status students

Hip-hoppers

those who adopt hip-hop (e.g., baggy) fashions to establish a distinctive identity

Hippies

as used currently, refers to those who are less aggressive than other alternative groups; may adopt some of 1970s life styles

Homies

described as playing loud rap music; dressing in baggy jeans, basketball jerseys, and dark colors; drinking and doing drugs

Hoodlums

subgroups referred to as hoods, gangstas, thugs, dirtbags; willing to threaten and use force; low status, but feared

Hooking up

dating; who's going out with whom; status relationships

JAPS

Jewish American Princesses and Princes; fashion conscious

Jocks

highly athletic-oriented; usually popular and rarely friends with less popular; letter jacket is status symbol

Losers

Alternatives (see definition above) who have poor academic records or are openly defiant with aggressive behavior

Music subcultures

Indie rock: originated in the 1980s, describes means of production and distribution of underground music. Artists control music and distribution, word of mouth promotion. Subgenres include garage punk riot grrl, twee pop, grindie, post-punk revival

Emo: a style of rock characterized by melodic music and expressive lyrics. Known as "emotional hardcore" or "emocore." Blends with pop punk and indie rock. Also describes related aspects of fashion, culture, and behavior (e.g., skinny jeans, bright colors, tight t-shirts with band labels, hair dyed black with bright color highlights and often spiked); associated with depression, self-injury

Metalhead: fan of heavy metal music; hesh. Strongly masculine; long hair, leather jackets and band patches; black jeans and army fatigues. Opposition to authority; mainly white, male, lower/middle class; Stage diving, moshing, head banging, windmill/head shaking, slamdancing, crowd-surfing. (From Wikipedia)

NBC

Nerds by Choice; a group who, having experienced unpopularity, join together to form their own independent clique

Nerds

those who are socially inept or too publically studious

Normals

most of the students in a schools – regulars or average students; model themselves after the popular crowd but are not members of core cliques

Partiers

those who hook up or have sex with multiple partners (e.g., 2-4 times a semester); high status girls could not hook up too much or they would be considered a slut

Partying

associating with others, usually involving some form of deviance (alcohol, drugs, sex); locations kept secret to increase exclusivity and status

Poseur

a pejorative term to describe a person adopts the dress, speech, and mannerisms of a subculture to gain acceptance in the group, but doesn't share the value of the subculture. (From Wikipedia)

Preps

image conscious types; neatly groomed; surreptitious sexual activity and alcohol and drug use

Pretend hoodlums

those who dress and walk like those associated with gangs, but behave and are concerned about academics

Punks/Weirdos

nonconformists, apathetic to social hierarchy

Popular crowd

combination of male preps and athletes and the most attractive females in the school

Redneck girls

tight jeans, lots of makeup, frizzy hair, lots of gold jewelry; spend time and money on appearance

Rockers

alternative grunge, skateboard types, "surfer" stereotype

Royalty

female cheerleaders; female drill team; star athletes

Rumors

crucial mechanisms in the competition for status

Skaters

skateboarders vs. bladders; associated with drug use

Sports

designates the heightened status that athletes on school teams receive due to the recognition of teachers and administrators.

Straight-edgers

those who eschew drugs, alcohol, or promiscuous sex; may be vegetarian or vegan

Sun gods

those with good looks, clothes, cars, and an afterschool social life

Whiz Kids

described as brains, intellectuals, APers (Advanced Placement Students); intelligent; not interested in brand name clothes; interested in computers

*Glossaries probably exist for many youth culture subgroups. For example, we note there is one online for Goths at <http://www.gothicsubculture.com/definition-intro.php>

The Center's Series of Information Resources on *Youth Subcultures: Understanding Subgroups to Better Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools**

Online:

What is Youth Culture? A Brief Introduction

Glossary of Terms Related to Youth Culture Subgroups

Youth Subcultures: Annotated Bibliography and Related References

About Youth Gangs

About the Goth Youth Subculture

About Hip Hop Youth Subculture

About "Loners" and "Losers"

About "Jocks" as Youth Subculture

About Emo Youth Subculture

About Surfing and Skateboarding Youth Subcultures

About the Cheerleading Youth Subculture

About "Mean Girls" as a Youth Culture Subgroup

About "Nerds" and "Geeks" as an Identified Subculture

About "Preppies" as a Youth Culture Subgroup

About Sexual Minority (LGBT) Youth Subculture

Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies

About Raves as a Youth Culture Phenomenon

Others are in development

*Many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups often are pejorative and offensive. We do not condone such language. We do, however, recognize the need to go beyond adultcentric definitions and descriptions of youth subgroups if we are to understand youth perceptions and perspectives. So the *Information Resource* documents reflect the terms used by youth.