



Why kids today feel so 'emo'

Lindsay Tanner

YOU might not have heard of emos. Neither had I until two teenage girls from Melbourne's outer east committed suicide.

Some people blamed the emo culture.

Emos belong to a distinct youth subculture that emerged from the music and fashion of the goth and punk culture in the 1980s.

Emo is short for emotional. It now seems to reflect quite a bit more than just particular music and fashion styles.

Emos are supposedly sensitive, introverted and alienated.

Some claim that the emo subculture celebrates self-harm and glorifies suicide. Certainly a casual wander through an emo website can be a little confronting. You'll find plenty of comments like "I hate everything" and "people suck".

How worried should we be about this? Frankly, I'm not sure.

We've seen plenty of strange youth subcultures come and go

over the years. My generation got off on flower power, peace, love and universal happiness and we seem to have survived.

I'm reluctant to get too agitated about a particular subculture, even if some connect it with teenage suicides. It's hard to know whether that link exists anyway.

There's another angle to this issue that does trouble me though.

Emos sound a lot like kids who typically get bullied and excluded by other kids. And bullying is something I do feel strongly about. Kids choosing an odd subculture just to be different is one thing, but if it's an escape from an unhappy world of bullying and humiliation it's an entirely different matter.

I'm not really in a position to know, but I can't help wondering.

There's nothing new about bullying. But the social context in which today's kids grow up is very different from when I went to school.

If you're beautiful, brainy, wealthy or sporty, you're probably OK. If you're just an ordinary kid, not outstanding at anything, the world can be a pretty unpleasant place.

We all need to be needed. Recognition of the contribution we each make is a crucial part of our individual wellbeing. In the old world, teenagers who weren't academic stars were already in the workforce and earning respect.

HILDHOOD lasts a lot longer

these days. Without the innate dignity that attaches to adult things, such as full-time work and raising a family, it can be pretty lonely for many teenagers.

The exaggerated value our society places on individual success can have a demoralising effect on many young people. Kids who feel inadequate can become bullies, or get bullied. For those who are bullied their feelings of inadequacy are entrenched by regular humiliation.

Some cope, some adjust, some recover. But for some kids the results can be permanent, even fatal. To counteract their own insecurities, bullies home in on the weaknesses of their victims.

Schools try harder to stamp out bullying now, but it's very hard to police. I'm in favour of zero tolerance, but I realise schools can't do everything.

Parents should take more responsibility for their kids' behaviour.

We all need to pay more attention to kids, to protect them from bullying and prevent them from becoming bullies.

They all deserve a reasonable start in life.

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ANYONE with personal problems can call Lifeline on 131 114; Victorian Statewide Suicide Helpline on 1300 651 251; or Mensline Australia on 1300 789 978.

AND there's Kids Help Line on 1800 551 800.