

# Goths come home to roost

Karen Horney's (a neo-Freudian's) personality theory provides an excellent context for the analysis of the current KFC "Goth" advertisement. Horney believed that if a child is subjected to an environment of non-acceptance, anxiety results and the child develops strategies to cope with the anxiety so as to regain a sense of safety.

By [Dr Kay Brügge](#) 30 Sep 2004

Horney identified three 'strategies' or measures that can be applied in an attempt to reduce anxiety:

- Compliance or moving towards others ('gatkruip' in good Afrikaans), the rationale being that, "if people love me they won't hurt me";
- Rebellion or aggressiveness (moving against people), whereby the individual, by controlling the situation feels safer (aggression being the best defence), the unconscious logic being that, "if I'm the strongest, then I'll be safe"; and
- Withdrawal or moving away from others (detached), the unconscious motive being that "if I'm self-reliant and self-sufficient and maintaining emotional distance, I am safe".

With her 'coffin kid' regalia and 'keep-out signs' on her door, our "Goth" exhibits elements of withdrawal and detachment with a propensity toward rebelliousness.

To place the ad into context it is important to note that the three strategies to reduce anxiety are often insufficient. The detached individual whilst appearing 'cool' and 'individualistic' (and is probably admired for by peers) also experiences a sense of emotional deprivation (and a yearning for emotional attachment). Ironically, the strategy to reduce anxiety therefore creates more thereof!

If it is true that children who exhibit the 'detached' personality ('moving away from people') are less likely to be brand loyal and more likely to try different brands, then KFC has done their homework in trying to appeal to this market segment. It does so by reconciling the detached (and rebellious) personality with KFC specifically, conveying the message that one does not have to stop being a "Goth" (or risk losing the admiration of peers), to enjoy the brand.

It also suggests that it is "OK" (at least temporarily) to yield to the yearning for emotional attachment (symbolised by the "Goth" joining her family at the dinner table), given that the anxiety reducing strategy of 'detachment' is flawed. The notion that this means some risk taking on behalf of the 'detached personality' portrayed by means of the "Goth's" hesitance when leaving her room and tip-toeing barefoot down the passage and stairs (coming down from her high horse?), lest she be noticed.

A subtle but powerful touch is the change in the music from "heavy" to positively 'pleasant' but bland (signifying the threshold of the 'other' world), as she moves down the stairs. The fact that the mother looks mildly uncomfortable (or even intimidated), she compensates by being over-friendly and possibly even proud about the daughter's 'individuality'. This further reinforces the notion that it is admirable to have your own 'style' and yet be 'compatible' with the KFC brand.

## ABOUT DR KAY BRÜGGE

Dr Kay Brügge is a life-design practitioner with post-graduate qualifications in psychology and neuro-psychology, specialising in qualitative research and project management, driving market and social research projects, including methodology development and focus group facilitation. With a PhD in neuro-psychology and special interest in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), he is interested in the analysis of subliminal messages in advertising and the subconscious influences of the retail environment on the consumer. He can be reached on email:

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