

Family and Parenthood in an Ageing ‘Youth’ Culture: A Collective

Embrace of Dominant Adulthood?

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Abstract

‘Youth’ music and style cultures, such as the punk, goth, metal and club scenes, often are regarded as opposed to the institution of the family and the values it symbolises. Yet significant numbers of the participants of such groups are now remaining actively involved into their thirties and beyond alongside the taking on of permanent cohabitation, marriage and parenthood. This article explores the increasing importance of family life for ageing members of ‘youth’ cultures in relation to the case study of the goth scene, a dark-themed grouping whose average age is rising. I emphasise the collective nature of the embrace of family among older goths and the implications of this for the values and environment of the group itself and the trajectories of individual members. Amongst other things, I explore whether the drift towards family and parenthood amongst goths might be understood as a collective assimilation into dominant adulthood.

Keywords

adulthood; family; identity; music; parenthood; subculture; style; youth

Introduction

Understandings of youth culture have long centred upon the notion of rebellion against or independence from the values and expectations of parents and family, which often are taken to form part of a broader dominant, and adult, status quo. In particular, escaping or resisting the culture of parents forms part of subcultural theories and other approaches to the conceptualisation of spectacular youth style and music groupings such as mods, punks, skaters and goths. One of the assumptions here is that participation in such youth cultures represents a temporary transitional phase for young people, consigned to the past by the time they re-embrace the family unit with themselves in the roles of co-habitant, spouse or parent.

Such understandings are brought into doubt, however, by the increasing tendency for some individuals to remain involved in distinct 'youth' style and music communities throughout their twenties, thirties, and beyond. And the notion that such continuing participants are engaged in a refusal of adulthood seems applicable only to some of these post-adolescent years, at best. For, as they move towards and into their thirties, many older punks, metallers, clubbers, goths and others are continuing to take part in their subculture even as they begin to embrace family and parenthood. A number of questions arise, not least how we should understand a situation where participation in an apparently transgressive youth culture accompanies the taking on of roles so symbolic of 'straight', adult society.

Taking recent research on older members of the goth scene as its case study, this paper explores the ways enduring participation in a spectacular 'youth' culture forms part of lives increasingly centred on long-term partnerships and bringing up children. I explore the interconnections between subcultural participation and family life, both for individuals and

for the goth scene itself as an ageing collective entity. I show that the number of goths taking on their own families had prompted a shift in the values and environment of the subculture itself. I go on to explore the extent to which the increasing family-orientations of older goths indicates a collective integration into dominant adult roles and, hence, 'normal' society.¹

Youth, family and 'delayed adulthood'

The notion that youth cultures comprise a temporary rebellion against parents and the normal society they represent is an enduring stereotype, but one which, as Dan Laughey has pointed out, has had its share of academic support. For Parsons (1949), the rebellious practices of youth constitute a temporary response to the insecurity of the transition from the family of orientation to the family of procreation. And alongside the economic journey from school to work, the transition away from dependence on one family and towards the running of another has long been at the heart of understandings of what marked out and constituted adolescence in youth transitions research. Alongside the establishment of a working life, Harry Blatterer (2007) lists independent living, stable relationships and family as key 'classic' indicators of successful end points to such transitions in established understandings of 'standard adulthood'. In these classic models, then, youth culture is located outside and in opposition to a stable family-dominated world on either side.

A contrast with parents and family also can be found in writings about distinctive youth music and style communities. In the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), it is a bourgeois 'dominant culture' and the upheaval of working class communities which form the primary focal points of the symbolic resistance of teds, mods, skinheads and

other subcultures. Yet, the notion of a ‘consciousness – specific to age position’ and a temporary, hedonistic rebellion against the culture of their parents was also a critical part of the explanation (Clarke et al 1976: 51). And, as Laughey (2006) shows, across a range of subsequent work on style and music cultures, a core opposition between youth cultures and parental values - and the conservative adult society with which the latter are associated - has remained an important underlying assumption.

Across academic and lay thinking, the family - particularly in its heterosexual, nuclear, reproductive form - has come to symbolise dominant conceptions of adulthood which, essentially, correspond to the achievement of social stability and normalcy, something typically counter-posed with the unpredictable, rebellious nature of youth and, in particular, ‘spectacular’ subcultures. As Blatterer (2007) notes, young people’s eventual embrace of this normative adulthood status, if achieved ‘successfully’, may be construed as an assimilation into hegemonic understandings of full personhood.

Of course, recent theorising has challenged the notion of adolescence as a brief, linear transition to adulthood. A range of factors, from the expansion of ephemeral employment and relationships patterns to protracted reliance on parental or shared accommodation are argued to signal increasingly complex and protracted transitions, especially among middle-class youth. Some explain such developments as an extended period of youth, or a distinctive new period of ‘emerging’ adulthood, characterised by a delay of career or family related commitments (e.g. Tanner and Arnett 2009) or, alternatively, by a tendency to ‘yo-yo’ between more youthful and adult orientations as circumstances change (Du Bois-Reymond 2009). For others, it is adulthood itself that has changed, with standard, conservative versions thereof regarded as generation-specific and out of date (Blatterer 2007). According to this

view, rather than clinging onto adolescence, contemporary twenty-somethings are living out new fluid and flexible kinds of adulthood which are liable to become increasingly typical across the age-range.

Blatterer's contribution reminds us that structural changes undergone by Western societies have long-term implications for work, families and identities which are unlikely to disappear for today's twenty-somethings when they reach thirty or forty. Yet we should be cautious of underestimating the pervasiveness of established ideologies of adulthood or, indeed, the importance of age. Such ideologies surely remain strongly in evidence for today's young adults as they negotiate their thirties and forties, becoming more acutely aware of ageing bodies, the time-limits to fertility and enduring societal expectations. To take an obvious example, consistent growth in the number of births to women in the thirties and early forties, suggests that the embrace of family may often be delayed rather than permanently rejected or fundamentally transformed (ONS 2011). Meanwhile, existing research on ageing and youth cultures indicates that, after an extended transitory period during the twenties, older subcultural participants often *are* embracing traditional adult goals such as marriage and parenthood during their thirties and forties.

Ageing music and style communities and the embrace of family

The study of ageing participants in 'youth' music and style cultures has begun to emerge as a small but growing area of enquiry. The significance of family life and parenthood have comprised an element of this, though they have seldom been examined in depth. Early contributions point particularly to perceived incompatibilities between family and youth

cultural features such as late nights and spectacular style. Julie Gregory identifies a strong sense among older female ravers, for example, that the demands of motherhood were unsuited to late night dancing and recreational drugs, prompting either withdrawal from clubbing, or feelings of guilt. Enduring assumptions about the centrality of motherhood to female adulthood, argues Gregory (2009), prompted a broader sense that older participation was more suited to men than women. Other studies also have noted the comparative absence of older women from public participation in some music scenes (Bennett 2006; Vroomen 2004), something addressed later in this article in relation to goths.

Other research has begun to explore the ways continuing participants are negotiating parental roles with on-going youth cultural involvement. Joanna Davis' (forthcoming 2012) identifies how older punks in her study accommodated family and parenthood, while redefining them in a manner that fit with their continuing punk allegiance. Such themes also figure in Nicola Smith's work on the ageing Northern Soul scene (forthcoming 2012), which includes consideration of the passing on of scene music and knowledge to children. Meanwhile, Samantha Holland (2012) explores connections between parenthood and the evolution of subcultural appearance, including parents' responses to pressure from their children to alter how they looked.

Interplays of transgression and conformity, as well as perceptions thereof, pervade much early work on the subject. And while some present the embrace of families as part of a dilution of youthful transgression, Jodie Taylor (2010) argues that wholesale avoidance of heteronormative life course timelines centred on marriage and parenthood in the Brisbane queer scene has enabled older participants to maintain lifestyles dominated by extensive club participation, spectacular appearances and sexual transgression. For Taylor, escaping the

family roles that mark ‘standard’ adult life trajectories serves to blur youth-adult boundaries and, in so doing, to challenge heteronormativity. Taylor’s argument is of interest in relation to this paper’s case study group, the goth scene, which has also been argued to challenge boundaries of gender and sexuality, as set out below.

Research Approach

I have been a participant and observer of the goth scene for many years (see Hodkinson 2002) but the discussion below is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2009 and 2011, consisting of participant observation at a variety of goth events, observation of communication between goths onlineⁱⁱ and, most importantly, in depth interviews lasting between 45 and 120 minutes with a total of 19 individuals. Nine interviewees had also taken part in ethnographic research I conducted on the goth scene in the late 1990s, something which enabled an assessment of how their identities and priorities had developed. Typically of older goths, most interviewees were white, middle-class and in a long-term co-habiting relationships, including nine who were currently married, six who were parents and one who became a parent a year after the interview. 16 of the respondents were interviewed face-to-face in the spring of 2010, while an additional three were interviewed in the summer of 2011, a period during which I also re-interviewed two of the original 16 in order to develop my understanding of the role of parenthood. The age of interviewees ranged from 27 to 50, while 10 were female and 9 male.

The Goth Scene as Ageing Subculture

Having emerged in the early 1980s, the goth scene has been distinguishable by its dark, sinister music and style for approaching three decades. The subculture has retained a relatively consistent set of core tastes and values during this time, as well as a strong sense of identity among members (Hodkinson 2002). Until the later part of the 1990s, goth was, like many comparable music communities, dominated by youth in their teens and early twenties and characterised by familiar forms of youthful hedonism and transgression. To different degrees, regular late-night clubbing, getting intoxicated, adorning oneself in distinctive outfits and embracing ephemeral relationship patterns and casual sex lay at the heart of participation.

The extent to which, even in its most youthful days, the scene ought to be conceptualised as transgressive is the subject of debate. Proposals that its dark, androgynous style and music symbolised straight-forward cultural resistance (Siegel 2006) ought to be treated with caution, not least because the goth scene was always thoroughly implicated in media and commerce and participants exhibit a range of mostly mainstream political outlooks. Goths also have tended to be overwhelmingly white and predominantly middle-class, the latter reflected, to an extent, in the aspirations of participants as well as their backgrounds. For all the distinctiveness and hedonism of the group, it probably always placed greater value on certain dominant arbiters of success (being well-read, educationally successful) than many spectacular youth cultures (Hodkinson 2011).

Yet most agree that, in addition to its broader youthful hedonism, elements of goth style and practice contrasted markedly with the dominant adult world. Not least, the distinctive dark,

feminine and sometimes sexually suggestive personal appearance of male and female goths, entailed elements of challenge to established gender boundaries. And, although most goths were heterosexual, for some participants, the androgyny of the style connected with an embrace of gender fluidity and sexual exploration, in the form of bisexual, fetish-oriented or transgender practices. Although the picture was mixed and complex, then, goth clubs tended to act as transgressive spaces in that the presence of androgynous, non-straight practices and individuals was accepted and encouraged in a manner rarely seen outside specialist fetish, gay or queer spaces (Brill 2008).

It was from the late 1990s that the previously very small number of older goths in the scene began to grow and, as a result of the coincidence of this with slower recruitment of youngstersⁱⁱⁱ, the average age of the scene rose, to the extent that some events now are thoroughly dominated by over-thirties. The goth scene therefore provides an example of a subculture dominated by ‘the same body of continuing participants’ (Smith 2009: 428), something which contrasts with the isolated older participants in otherwise adolescent cultures focused on by many other studies in this emerging area. In previous work I have shown how, as they have grown older together, goths have developed complex negotiations between subcultural identity and a broad range of developing adult features and priorities, emphasising the significance of such changes for the collective character of the ageing goth scene itself as well as for individual members (Hodkinson 2011). As we shall see, the embrace of family roles and responsibilities has become a particularly important part of such negotiations and it is to their particular role as part of a collective drift towards adulthood that we now turn.

Family and continuing participation

Most of those involved in my late 1990s research of the goth scene were living out their teens or twenties in shared houses or apartments, with a significant number still in parental accommodation and others renting alone or with a partner. Consistent with notions of an extended period of middle-class youthful domestic instability (Heath 2009), few were home owners and relationships tended to be ephemeral, with even the most committed liable to end after a few years, and casual encounters a key feature of nights out on the scene. In contrast, the majority of older goths in my recent observations and interviews were in stable, long-term relationships, while marriage, mortgages and home ownership were widespread. A rapidly increasing minority were parents.

More so than work, or physical symptoms of ageing, the embrace of domestic stability and children were often identified by respondents as the primary cause of the abandonment of the scene by friends of theirs and a decline in the intensity of their own involvement. Those cohabiting or married recognised that the guarantee of domestic company and the status of being ‘spoken-for’ had tempered their enthusiasm to attend events or service a high-maintenance subcultural appearance. Continuing to participate regularly was most difficult of all for parents, who had endured dramatic curtailments of time, energy and finances, alongside changing priorities. The complexity of going out made the notion of doing so more than once a month unlikely. Childcare requirements either required one parent to stay in or the organisation of a babysitter. The presence of local relatives sometimes would enable greater flexibility, particularly once infants became a little older but, even here, the need to pre-plan and depend on others created effort and uncertainty, something difficult for couples and even more acute for single parents.

Nights out for goth parents also tended to involve minimal 'getting ready time', lower levels of inebriation and an earlier return home, the latter required either by the need to relieve a babysitter of their responsibilities or the prospect of attending to the demands children the following morning, as here:

Matthew (43): But again... you're back to the point with that when you get back you know that the next morning you're going to up at half past seven in the morning ...Y'know 'cos you think, 'Oh I can't do that [get drunk] 'cos I've, y'know, we gotta get Karen to this, that and the other...

Combined with their increased levels of social contact outside the scene with local parents, it is small wonder that such factors should invariably have resulted in a substantial reduction in subcultural involvement among recent parents. In some cases, the extent of the withdrawal and change of orientation in the immediate post-birth months made the later resumption of involvement unlikely.

Crucially, however, for others, a period of near total withdrawal would be followed by some reintegration after 6 months or a year:

Susan (33): I think it's a case of when she was a baby, we didn't go out hardly at all on a Saturday night ... we weren't interested in going out to Edwards [goth nightclub] or anything like that until she was a little bit older. Now we can go out probably once a month now... now that she's a bit older.

Indeed, where parenthood often had coincided with long-term abandonment of the scene in the past, limited continuing involvement, or a degree of re-engagement after an initial withdrawal, were becoming increasingly common. And, importantly, this coincided with a sharp overall growth in the number of pregnancies and births among scene participants.

A Collective Embrace of Parenthood

Following a growth in sporadic instances of parenthood in the goth scene over much of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the two or three years preceding submission of this article saw a far more noticeable spike. In an apparent replication of broader trends, substantial numbers of goths, mostly in their mid to late thirties, had begun to reproduce at around the same time. One parent, who also organised a well-known goth festival, noted the fairly sudden contrast of this collective adoption of parenthood with the youthful avoidance of such commitments in the scene a few years earlier, citing consciousness of the limited time-span for female fertility as a primary cause:

Jo [40] I'm finding, I don't know whether it's the fact that goths want to hang onto their youth as long as possible or whether they are all of a mindset that they don't want kids, they are the eternally young. And then their body clock starts going tick, tick, tick and 'let's do it now!', but I found all of a sudden that a lot of people kind of between 35 and 40 are having a child now...

The scale of the flurry of pregnancies had not gone unnoticed. The notion of reproduction as an internal subcultural trend was jokingly articulated by some as a 'goth baby boom', while light-hearted terms such 'gothlings' and 'baby bats' had emerged for goth offspring. Both offline and on the internet, infants themselves were an increasingly visible presence, whether through pregnancy- or baby-related social media updates, face-to-face conversations or the presence of children themselves at goth events. As a consequence, parenting and family were becoming established as a normal feature of subcultural environments which once had been far removed from them.

The increasing presence of parenthood also had prompted moves to accommodate it in the goth scene's organisational infrastructure. The provision of advice, resources, services and consumables for goth parents had started to become common practice. The dilemmas and

difficulties of being a goth parent had become the subject of considered, lengthy discussion articles in online subcultural magazines and blogs (Asphodel accessed 2011; Martin, accessed 2011). Meanwhile, goth-themed baby outfits and children's clothes had become widely available via specialist retailers. Event organisers, meanwhile, found themselves adapting to the limited availability of an increasing family-oriented portion of their clientele, resulting, for example, in greater numbers of monthly rather than weekly events. Efforts to accommodate families were greatest in the case of larger-scale festivals, whose one-off status meant they were well-attended by those less able to go out regularly. The Whitby Gothic Weekend, for example, had experimented with organising a children's disco and become used to the presence of children throughout the event - and to dealing with queries from parents:

Tom (50): ... every six months when the next one's coming up, you'll be answering four or five people saying 'is there an age limit?', can I bring my two year old?

The organisers of Whitby also had spent some time exploring the possibility of organising child-care for parents, a facility that I later found had already started to emerge elsewhere. Among the variety of specialist stalls at the Amphi goth festival in Cologne was an organisation called Gothic Family.Net (GFN), which, as well as offering a range of baby- and child-related goth merchandise and acting as a social hub for parents, provided a free play-space and supervised activities for children.

Funded by merchandise sales and an annual membership scheme, GFN also operated a dedicated web site for goth parents, which featured, underneath a caricatured goth family logo, a photograph of the 'goth family of the week', news, an image gallery, a discussion forum, a baby sitter exchange facility and a range of magazine-style articles. Such articles often dealt with typical subcultural subject matter such as music releases, tours and events,

but integrated them with family-oriented issues and questions. According to the organisation's founder, its rapidly increasing popularity reflected the way it enabled people to stay up to date with the scene in a manner compatible with their family-orientation. Most of all, she argued, GFN demonstrated to goth parents that they were not alone and showed them how feasible it was to stay involved:

Sibylle (40): ...we try to connect the... scene life with the family life – because I think a lot of parents withdraw a little bit from the scene and they don't buy a lot of scene magazines... I've had parents who wrote me after their registration that they loved to find something like that and get in contact with other parents... and yeah they are stabilised and they can stay in the scene...

Alongside the general visibility of other parents, then, the increasing family-orientation of parts of the subculture's organisational infrastructure, including services like Gothic Family.Net, was helping to make it more conceivable for parents to continue to participate. That they increasingly were doing so was particularly apparent from the striking growth in the number of goths pushing buggies, carrying babies or walking hand-in-hand with children at subcultural festivals such as Whitby and Amphi. Each year, such visibility - which so far as it was possible to tell was accepted by other goths, young and old - acted as an additional encouragement to others:

Sibylle (40): [there are] more and more parents who dare to take their children with them, for example to the Amphi festival, because they know us, they see other families with children there... something like that is very good for parents who don't dare to take their children... They see us, they see all the children there and then 'oh next time I bring it [their child] with me'... and there are a lot of pregnant people today asking about next year...

Of course, not all goth events were family-friendly. Regular pub or nightclub evenings tended to take place late at night and in premises with high minimum age-limits and/or otherwise unsuited for the presence of children. It was the occasional, residential, multi-venue and partly outdoor nature of festivals, alongside their taking place throughout the day rather than only late at night, that made them more suitable. Nevertheless, the increasing numbers of parents taking children to these events, together with their visibility online and presence

(without their children) at more regular events was contributing to a shift in the overall milieu of the subculture. Strikingly, the single biggest cause of individuals breaking all their ties with the the goth scene in the past had started to become an integral element of the group's collective fabric.

Assimilating to Dominant Adulthood?

In their early and mid- twenties the continuing subcultural participation of my respondents tended to be accompanied by broader youthful lifestyles and a reluctance to embrace 'adult' living arrangements or other commitments. Alongside the increasing importance of their careers, however, the apparent rush to embrace of family and parenthood as they reached their thirties or forties suggests their continuing participation by this point no longer could be explained by the notion of a refusal of adulthood. Rather, continuing to be a goth had become something that accompanied and adapted to everyday lives whose embrace of family life was relatively unexceptional within the broader contemporary adult world. Rather than representing new or transgressive approaches to older life that fundamentally deviated from prevailing understandings, there are elements of the embrace of family here that cohere with fairly standard versions of contemporary adulthood (Blatterer 2007). This embrace of dominant adult roles tended to be accompanied by a dilution of some of the subcultural challenges and transgressions associated with participants' goth identities in the past.

Certainly, the developing identities and practices of older goths rarely approximated the enduringly transgressive identities and environments described in Taylor's aforementioned study of middle-aged Brisbane queer scene participants, in which standard models of family,

amongst other things, continued to be rejected even as participants aged (2010). The situation in the goth scene vis-a-vis sexuality and transgression may always have been a somewhat more ambiguous one, but there was a fairly clear collective drift among older participants away from the relaxed, promiscuous and, sometimes, transgressive approaches to gender and sexuality of the past and towards heterosexual monogamy and the nuclear family. Though not intended to be exclusionary, GFN's stylised male, female and infant logo symbolised this, in spite of simultaneously imbuing its nuclear family with a distinct goth veneer.

Marriage itself also was popular in the subculture, to the extent that, like parenthood, it had been observed by some goths as a collective trend. Ceremonies often were goth-themed and subcultural entrepreneurs had emerged to cater for the demand for appropriate dress, floristry and decoration. Yet, in practice, the embrace of the institution itself tended not to be particularly distinct from that of the range of middle-class married couples outside the subculture. Consistent with this, some had gone through break-ups and divorces and this sometimes prompted a period of more intense subcultural involvement (Hodkinson 2011) and/or a temporary re-embrace of more casual approaches to relationships or sex. Such junctures illustrated the complexity of individual trajectories and the tendency for some to 'yo-yo' (Du Bois-Reyond 2009) between more 'adult' and 'youthful' orientations, as well as broader changes to the structure and expectations of family life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). There was little evidence, though, that such disruptions diluted the notion of the nuclear family as an ideal.

More generally, for all their pride about their continuing identification with the goth scene, when it came to their domestic life, many parents were keen to emphasise how normal they

and their children were. Megan's response to a question about whether the goth scene influenced her parenting was fairly typical:

Megan (36) No not really – I mean yeah she has got the occasional outfit which if we were to go anywhere she could sort of dress up as a goth... but... the majority of her wardrobe I have to say is quite definite mainstream sort of stuff... what all the other kids are into... I know my neighbours next door have children... but I wouldn't say that I'm any different with Gemma as a parent than they are with their children...

As well as reflecting the situation as they saw it, such response seemed to involve the staking of a certain claim to legitimacy as respectable, committed parents, perhaps in anticipation of doubts from people outside the goth scene about their appropriateness for the role. Amongst other things, this embrace of normalcy with respect to family life complicated a little, some of the us/them, subculture/mainstream boundaries at the heart of the identities of many goths when they were younger (Hodkinson 2002).

The increasing family-orientation of parents also tended to lead to greater distance between themselves and the most transgressive elements of the goth scene. Not surprisingly, the co-presence of families with children and individuals wearing sexually explicit outfits or paraphernalia at festivals sometimes could result in a degree of awkwardness, for example. Meanwhile, the founder of GothicFamily.Net strongly endorsed the goth scene as an inclusive environment with respect to sexuality but explained how she felt an obligation to restrict the presence of overtly fetish- or BDSM-oriented material on the organisation's web site and at its events, on the basis that the latter were oriented to families and children:

Sibylle (40): it's only a few weeks ago that a mother asked me if I can put an advertisement for a special SM [BDSM] party and I said 'sorry... it's nice that you are doing it, have fun', but I don't think it worked with our idea... if it's too sexual then... you can't work with that – we are doing [organising] some scene markets at a special club in Duisberg and so we have some other stalls there and even there I tell them to have a look what they put on their desk and withdraw extremer things...

Sibylle was at pains to emphasise that her concern related to the co-presence of children and explicit sexual paraphernalia or imagery, rather than the general presence of the latter within the goth scene. Nevertheless, it seems possible that, as greater numbers of participants warm to a more family-oriented approach, this could eventually push sexually transgressive elements further to the margins.

Not surprisingly, parenthood also could have gender implications for older goths. Consistent with broader trends, in most of the families with children I came across, both men and women were negotiating their family responsibilities with career commitments. Yet, in more than one case, it was the female partner who withdrew from goth participation more acutely and permanently than the male, indicating their taking on of a greater share than their partners of childcare responsibilities – something again consistent with broader trends (Dryden 1999). Indeed, it was sometimes their willingness to do this that enabled their male partner to continue to participate more intensively, as here:

Jon (38): Yeah, when Claire was born I don't remember Janet coming out with me... I don't believe until quite a long time afterwards that we went out together socially on a Saturday night until quite some time... I think she's so involved in the parenthood side of things that she feels like... part of her isn't there anymore and to a certain extent I think she doesn't feel she has the same energy and zest of the whole idea of getting ready to go out...

The finding was far from universal and in the case of other couples, it was more common to take it in turns to go out or employ a babysitter. Overall, older female participation in the goth scene was considerable, and much higher than in recent studies of the punk and rave scenes, for example (Bennett 2006; Gregory 2009). Nevertheless, it remains worthy of note that the onset of family life would sometimes impose greater restrictions on women than men when it came to continuing participation in the goth scene.

Such developments in terms of conjugal roles can, perhaps, be connected to a gradual dilution of some of the goth style's challenges to dominant understandings of masculinity and femininity in respect of dress and appearance also. The 'toning down' of appearance in response to ageing bodies and roles entailed a drift towards more established visual distinctions between male and female. Many goth males had responded to changing responsibilities, larger bodies, coarser skin and receding hair by developing a somewhat more masculine goth look consisting of undyed or shorter hair, reduced makeup and jewellery, looser clothing and, sometimes, goaty beards (Hodkinson 2011). And whereas goths of both genders previously spent extensive time 'gothing up' before a night out, roles had sometimes drifted more towards dominant patterns in this respect also:

Phil (35): ... I haven't done this for a while... but I might wear some eye-liner but... Jane doesn't like lipstick on me so I haven't worn that for a very long time – I haven't been bothered with nail varnish for a long time... and my hair will be however I decide to put it up... otherwise it will just be I'll go out in something black. Jane will make more of an effort than I will obviously but that's...

Jane (29): I'm a woman!

Phil: She's a woman – but I didn't want to say it, you said it!

In some significant respects then, the approaches and values being embraced by goths who were co-habiting, married and/or childrearing reflected a drift towards the taking up of adult roles in a relatively typical sense. And as well as being of significance on an individual level, the number of people involved and their continuing participation in the goth scene suggested that, to a degree, the subculture itself was shifting towards an environment more compatible with dominant adult values. Notably, the embrace of stable, heteronormative approaches to sex and relationships affected not only the individual lives of family-oriented goths, but also the overall balance of lifestyles and values within the scene they formed an increasingly significant proportion of. The increasing normalisation of parenthood within the scene compounded the collective rebalancing of values that was taking place. In a social environment once dominated by promiscuity, hedonism and exploration, single and/or non-

heterosexual individuals and understandings were often in the minority. Rather than being relinquished in order to embrace family, parenthood and ‘normal society’, then, active subcultural participation was persisting, but this meant that the gulf between the identities, ideals and practices of the subculture and those of broader middle-class adult society were narrowing.

Negotiating Goth and Family

Yet, to dismiss the relationship between continuing goth scene participation, family and parenthood as a wholesale and straight-forward abandonment of distinctive or transgressive approaches to life in favour of hegemonic adulthood would not do justice to some of the subtleties of the interaction between the two. Indeed, we ought not to discount the significance, in itself, of the increasing tendency, amidst all their focus on the domestic sphere, for individuals to remain actively involved in the world of the goth scene.

Involvement may have been less intensive than when they were younger, but most had retained a distinctive and recognisable goth style, while continuing to regard the subculture as their primary source of friendships and the most important part of their identity. They may have tended to emphasise their normality when it came to parenthood, but interviewees had retained a strong sense of distinctiveness in other respects. Megan, who was probably the least active of my respondents in terms goth event attendance, said the following:

Megan (36) I still do consider myself to be a goth, you know, at heart, um, and... I still do go out on the goth scene, although, albeit not as much as I used to. So I still consider myself to be a goth at heart and I still buy a lot of goth music and what have you.

Likewise, although the scene itself had drifted towards becoming a more heteronormative and adult environment, an emphasis on distinct and sometimes extreme forms of music and style,

alongside nights out dancing, drinking, watching bands and so on were still present. Some felt that going out to goth events had retained a sufficient number of its previous features that it could function as something separate from, rather than entirely entwined with, everyday family responsibilities:

Jon (38): Yeah for myself very much it probably has become more disparate and disassociated from home life as time has gone on... it's a particular avenue I've got to explore – a more creative side, you know dressing up and going out...

Such an experience suggests that, even if work and domestic lives largely entailed an acceptance of dominant adult roles, continuing social involvement in the goth scene could sometimes comprise a compartmentalised retention of distinctiveness. And for a small minority of parents, this could sometimes include non-heteronormative sexual practices or identities too.

Equally, in the rapidly increasing number of situations where subculture and family life *did* integrate with one another, the relationship involved more than just assimilation of the former into the latter. They stressed their normality as responsible parents, but most respondents also discussed ways they had involved their children in elements of the goth scene, or ideals they associated with it. As well as taking their infants to goth festivals at least once or twice, most had dressed them in some sort of goth attire on these and other occasions. Elements of goth music and style also pervaded the home environment, whether in the form of the photographs, posters, other forms of decoration, the playing of music or the appearance of parents and their friends. And once children were old enough, parents would typically involve them in all this, whether through playing music to them, inviting their opinion on favourite songs or discussing how mum, dad or their friends dressed (see Holland forthcoming 2012). Whether all this amounted to a substantive passing on of subcultural capital from one generation to another, in the manner described by Smith (forthcoming 2012)

in relation to Northern Soul families, is far from clear, particularly as few goths currently have children old enough to become involved in the scene as independent participants. What is clear is that the distinctive world of the goth scene was forming an important part of the habitus of participants' children in certain respects.

There was also a universal sense among parents of wanting to pass on ideals they associated with the goth scene, or felt they had learned through the experience of being involved. Specifically, most hoped their own association with the subculture, together with any direct exposure to it their children might have had, would result in the development of an open-minded, unprejudiced approach towards people with different cultural backgrounds, appearances and approaches to life. In particular, even though their own lives usually were centred on heterosexual nuclear families, most parents emphasised the impact of the goth scene on their children's attitude towards non-heterosexual approaches gender and sexuality, as here:

Susan (33): I think that in some respects Karen won't bat an eyelid at men in makeup or there's a lot of people she won't bat an eyelid at that maybe some children might look... if that makes any sense.

In some cases this extended to the hope their children would feel empowered to pursue whatever appearance, lifestyle, sexuality or identity that felt true to them. Such aspirations are not inconsistent with broader norms associated with liberal middle-class parenting, but the context in which they were expressed seemed to reflect the long-standing collective emphasis in the discourse of goths on self-expression and resisting mainstream pressures (Hodkinson 2002). Indeed, the passing on of such broader ideals tended to be afforded greater priority than the specific transference of goth norms and tastes, as here:

Megan (36): I don't necessarily want to push my opinions of my tastes, musical tastes and my dress sense... onto her – I want her to have her own feelings and make her own choices...

Continuing participation in the goth scene and the integration of certain elements of the scene and its ideals into family life demonstrates that, at the same time they and their subcultural environment were drifting closer to standard adulthood, the versions of this adulthood they were developing and the tastes and values they were passing onto their children still incorporated traces of subcultural values or distinctiveness.

In her study of older punks, Joanna Davis (forthcoming 2012) argues that ageing involves a substantial amount of accommodation of established roles, but that the details of older punk lives also demonstrate attempts to redefine it in a manner consistent with a long-term punk identity. Likewise, Haenfler (2007) and Bennett (2006) have indicated how, for older straight-edgers and punks, lives increasingly dominated by standard elements of adulthood continued to be tinged with elements of subcultural distinctiveness and, sometimes, transgression or rebellion, even where individuals had entirely abandoned their active participation in the scene. In the case of family-oriented goths in this study, active participation had persisted, even if its intensity was reduced. A substantial part of their trajectories involved an accommodation and acceptance of dominant adult roles and identities and this acceptance involved not only each of them as individuals but the collective character of their subculture as a whole. Yet at the same time, their continued participation, together with longer-term subcultural experiences and ideals, enabled goths to subtly redefine and colour elements of this adult world with traces of their subcultural identities and experiences.

Conclusion

This article has explored the relationship between family, parenthood and subcultural participation in relation to the case study of older goths. It has done so against the backdrop of an enduring tendency to understand youth subcultural groupings as outside and in opposition to family, even as understandings of the parameters of youth and adulthood change.

I have shown that the embrace of family and parenthood had become a collective development among older participants and that this was resulting in a shift in the overall milieu, values and organisational infrastructure of the goth scene. Such a collective drift, I have argued, appears to suggest a broader embrace of dominant or 'standard' understandings of adult roles and a narrowing of the gap between their grouping and broader adult society. What their continuing participation suggested, then, seemed to be less the individual endurance of youthful transgression and more a collective shift towards dominant adult roles and priorities.

Yet, in spite of this overall direction of travel, the continuing participation of goths and the ways this involvement coloured their domestic lives, suggested more than a straightforward assimilation. It remains remarkable that a distinctive, spectacular subcultural affinity originally associated with adolescence should continue to be retained alongside the embrace of an institution and roles so emblematic of the normal adult world so many years later. And neither, in spite of inevitable reductions in the intensity of participation, had peoples' involvement, or the collective environment of the goth scene itself, become so watered down as to be indistinct. Rather participants engaged in complex negotiations between the goth scene and their family roles, whereby traces of the former informed the latter as well as the other way around.

In a broader sense, the case study serves as a useful reminder of the continuing pervasiveness of certain established features of adulthood and growing up. Certainly, the goth scene is a middle-class subculture which always has embraced certain hegemonic ideals. Yet it also encompassed fairly extreme forms of youthful hedonism, spectacular style and transgressive approaches to gender and sexuality. That the members of so distinctive a grouping have begun to collectively embrace somewhat unremarkable approaches to the taking on of family roles alongside their continuing participation perhaps illustrates the enduring status of certain elements of 'standard adulthood', even if the length of time they are avoided by some young adults is increasing. At the same time, the study shows how music and style communities first embraced in adolescence can become a constant, long-term presence, tinting developing adult roles and environments with distinctiveness, even as the increasing presence of the family and parenthood affect a collective 'growing up'.

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ⁱ Debates about the merits of subculture and proposed alternative terms are ongoing and sometimes can become a distraction. As elsewhere, I use subculture here to refer to the world of the goth scene, but hope readers will understand my not engaging with terminology debates here.

ⁱⁱ Online observation consisted of keeping up to date with public goth web sites and some on-going general observation of discussions between goths on some social networking sites and forums. As with observations at goth events, this provided a broader, deeper context against which interview research could be developed and understood. Direct references to public-facing blogs and web sites are fully referenced, while in the few cases where I (in other publications) have quoted social networking site conversations directly, permission was sought from individuals in question.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not all teenagers adopting dark styles resembling goth have much direct connection to older generations of goths. They sometimes have formed newer dark cultures, such as 'emo', associated with distinct music and spaces.