

“F**king Freak! What the hell do you think you look like?” Experiences of Targeted Victimization Among Goths and Developing Notions of Hate Crime

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British Journal of Criminology, 54 (4): 613-31

Full citation as follows:

Garland, J. and Hodkinson, P. (2014) ‘“F**king Freak! What the hell do you think you look like?” Experiences of Targeted Victimization Among Goths and Developing Notions of Hate Crime’, *British Journal of Criminology* 54 (4): 613-31.

Abstract

Greater Manchester Police’s categorisation of targeted attacks on ‘alternative subculture’ members as hate crimes prompted extensive debate about whether such incidents are comparable to those of recognised hate crime groups. Hate crime experts have contributed to this debate but there is a lack of detailed empirical research on the subject. Drawing on qualitative interviews with twenty-one respondents mostly affiliated to the goth scene, this paper uncovers extensive experience of verbal harassment and, for some respondents, repeated incidents of targeted violence. The nature and impact of such experiences, we argue, bears comparison with key facets of hate crime. Such evidence informs and underlines the importance of conceptual arguments about whether hate crime can or should be extended beyond recognised minority groups.

Keywords

Hate crime; targeted victimisation; harassment; identity; goth, alternative subcultures

Introduction

In April 2013 Greater Manchester Police, in the UK, announced they would be recording attacks on members of alternative subcultures as hate crimes. Covered prominently throughout national news media and subject to widespread discussion, the move followed extensive discussions with the Sophie Lancaster Foundation campaign group, which was set up following the murder of Sophie Lancaster in Bacup, Lancashire in 2007. The attack on

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Lancaster and her boyfriend, perpetrated by a group of teenagers unknown to them in a public park, was deemed by the case's trial judge to have been motivated by the victims' goth subcultural appearance, prompting him to label the incident a hate crime. Meanwhile, although national legislation in the UK does not currently include members of alternative subcultures as hate crime victim group, a recent government document on hate crime indicated that incidents such as the Lancaster murder 'are nonetheless hate crimes and ... should be treated as such' (HM Government 2012).

The potential expansion of hate crime to include goths, alongside other alternative subcultures, such as punks, skaters, emos and metallers, is a controversial subject that has been the focus of much academic discussion and commentary in recent years (Garland 2010a, 2012; Chakraborti and Garland 2012; Mason-Bish 2012; Perry and Alvi 2012). Amongst other things, such work has pointed out that, while the extremity and consequences of the attack on Lancaster were unusual, the broader targeting of alternative subcultural participants appears to bear certain similarities with attacks on more established hate crime groups. Yet, until now, such work has been reliant upon a mixture of journalistic sources, broader observations and cursory mentions in academic studies. It has also been overly reliant upon the analysis of high profile cases of victimisation such as the Lancaster case, rather than on the experiences of ordinary subcultural participants. For, in spite of the extensive research literature available on youth cultures over several decades, the detailed examination of experiences of targeted victimisation among the members of such groups is unusual.

This paper, based on qualitative interviews with twenty-one individuals affiliated to the goth scene and connected subcultures, begins to address this gap, shedding empirical light on experiences of being targeted and the ways these can impact on participants. Our particular focus is the extent to which the experiences of our respondents bear comparison with those of recognised hate crime victim groups and with developing understandings of hate crime as a concept.

Crucially, it would not be appropriate to argue definitively for or against the specification of alternative subcultures as a hate crime victim group on the basis of our findings here. Leaving aside the need for further, more wide-ranging research, consideration of such a move – whether with respect to the treatment of victims by individual police forces or the more significant step of a change in the law – entails a series of practical questions about implementation, impact and consequences, as well as conceptual arguments about the extent of the societal problem that such victimisation represents. While we touch upon these in places, neither forms the core focus of our contribution. Rather, we address an empirical gap in the debate by analysing the nature and impact of experiences of victimisation and the extent to which such experiences bear comparison with those of recognised hate crime victim groups and understandings of hate crime. Drawing upon recent developments in hate crime theory, we emphasise the importance of such victim experiences as part of the hate crime debate and suggest that the kinds of victimisation illuminated bear some of the hallmarks of already recognised hate crimes.

Hate Crime: An Evolving Concept

The concept of hate crime emerged in the United States in the 1960s when it provided a way of uniting civil rights campaigns that were challenging discrimination around issues relating to race, gender and sexual orientation (in particular) by emphasising the harmful effects of the social disadvantage, political exclusion and victimisation that each group was undergoing (Grattet and Jenness 2003). Over the next two decades or so the growth in support for the concept developed hand-in-hand with a suite of anti-hate legislation at state and federal levels, accompanied by a burgeoning interest in hate studies amongst North American scholars.

In other countries the notion of 'hate crime' has taken longer to gain a foothold, and in the UK it has only had political currency within the last 15 years or so. During that time, a raft of legislation has been developed relating to the increased punishment of offences characterised by the incitement of hatred based upon hostility towards the victim's identity. Currently, this legislation is centred around the 'five strands' of race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. Although the law applies equally to majority or minority communities in each strand, it is commonly understood to have been designed with victimisation of minority communities in mind (Hall 2013).

In parallel with these developments has been a growth in scholastic interest in the study of hate crime. This body of work has tended to conceive of hate crimes in a broadly similar way; that they are perpetrated by those from dominant social groups against those from historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups (like those involved in the original civil rights struggles) that have suffered from discrimination and victimisation for decades, even centuries (Perry 2001). They are also sometimes 'stranger danger' crimes in which the perpetrator selects the victim not because of who they are as an individual but rather because they are part of a despised 'outgroup' in the eyes of the aggressor. They are targeted in order to send out an intimidating message not just to the victim but to fellow members of their minority community that reminds them of their 'othered' status: that 'their kind' are not welcome in the area, for example, or that they are transgressing normative notions of gender presentation or sexual behaviour. Tied in with this is the idea that hate crimes 'hurt more' because they target a fundamental aspect of who that person is; an immutable aspect of their identity (Iganski 2008).

Much of this endeavour has tended to focus upon the aforementioned 'five strands' covered by the available legislation. This approach acknowledges the significance of the history of prejudice and discrimination that these minority groups have faced. In the 1980s and early 1990s the bulk of the research was conducted into the victimisation of ethnic minority groups. More recently, there has been a growing interest in the nature and impact of hate crimes against faith communities, gay and lesbian groups, disabled people and transgendered communities (Hall 2013).

However, in the last few years there has been an attempt amongst some scholars to widen the parameters of the hate crime debate by considering the victimisation of those that have not been regarded as hate crime victim groups before, or who have been pushed to the fringes of discussions. These 'new' groups under consideration include the homeless, the

elderly and those from alternative subcultural communities. Drawing upon Walklate's (2011) broader work on victimisation and vulnerability, space has been created for their possible inclusion by adopting a theoretical approach which moves away, somewhat, from the approach of including or excluding particular victim groups under the hate crime 'umbrella' on the basis of the coincidence of victimisation with structural disadvantage – as in Perry's (2001) understanding of the concept – and instead places greater emphasis upon the nature and impact of particular forms of victimisation in themselves (see Chakraborti and Garland 2012). Such a move repositions the debate away from the arena of identity politics and minority group membership by placing broader focus on the targeting by perpetrators of difference and vulnerability. Emphasis is placed upon victim experience on the basis that, if someone is targeted due to hostility towards their identity and perceptions that they are vulnerable, then – subject to practical considerations about the impact of such a move – there may be a case for considering this a hate crime.

Consistent with such a position, Garland (2010a) has suggested there may be a case for regarding attacks on goths as hate crimes as a result of the apparent similarity of such events and their consequences with targeted attacks on recognised hate crime victim groups. Drawing on a detailed analysis of the Sophie Lancaster murder, he argues that the incident conformed to the 'stranger danger' aspect of some forms of hate crime, whereby victims are potentially interchangeable, having been selected due to their membership of an identifiable 'outgroup' and that it appeared to have been prompted by an extreme dislike or fear of, their 'difference', as manifested in their gothic, alternative appearance. Garland also suggests that attacks on goths may be liable to 'hurt more' because they target a core element of the victim's identity – and, crucially, that high profile incidents like the Lancaster case are liable to have a ripple-effect that means they affect the wellbeing and security of others who identify as part of the victims' community (Garland 2010a).

Yet, as Garland has acknowledged, without detailed empirical evidence about the experiences of ordinary subcultural participants, it remains difficult to fully assess the nature, extent and impact of the harassment or violence they may be subject to and, in turn, the extent of the similarity with the experiences of recognised hate crime groups.

Existing Research on Alternative Subcultures and Victimisation

Given the amount of literature on music and style subcultures, it is surprising the vulnerability of members to harassment or attack has so seldom been afforded attention. There have, of course, been detailed references to the involvement of subcultural groups in the *perpetration* of violence, most notably, perhaps, the role of skinheads in targeted attacks against ethnic minorities (Hebdige 1979). Discussion of the general societal stigmatisation of subcultural participants, meanwhile, is probably as old as subcultural theory itself (A. Cohen 1955; Becker 1963; Cohen 1972; Thornton 1995). Yet the ways this broader stigmatisation can manifest itself in the form of unprovoked attacks on individual participants is strangely absent.

The subject is addressed fleetingly in Hodkinson's (2002) ethnography of the goth scene but discussed primarily in relation to the ways the identities of goths were strengthened

through their perceptions of a hostile outside society. Dunja Brill (2008) also touches on the subject, with particular reference to gender noting, for example, that the feminine style of goth men can prompt homophobic abuse and that, conversely, goth women can be subject to sexual harassment or accusations of 'sluttishness'. In neither case is any detail provided on the kinds of incidents goths experience or the impact they can have. More recently, Morris's (2014) small-scale study of the opinions of 10 focus group participants regarding the victimisation of alternatives indicates a range of different types of abuse, harassment and violence that some had experienced, and that this could form a pattern of victimisation that starts when young and continues well into adulthood.

Greater detail is provided in Lauraine Leblanc's (2008) ethnography of female punks in the US and Canada. Leblanc asserts that most of the interactions she observed between punks and non-punks in public spaces took the form of harassment of the former, ranging from 'obtrusive gazing to physical assault' (2008: 173). Evaluative or advisory verbal insults and threats were the most common form of harassment, argues Leblanc, and such comments sometimes involved female punks being subject to sexual advances or, alternatively, urged to be more feminine. Though verbal abuse was much more common, physical harassment is also briefly mentioned, from punks being spat at to pushed, kicked and punched. In a brief nod to hate crime discussions, Leblanc concludes that the harassment of punks constitutes an intimidating form of discrimination and notes the lack of legal protection for them:

Public harassment is a form of discrimination, whether it is directed at gays or lesbians, at people of colour, at persons with disabilities or at members of youth subcultures ... Although many forms of discrimination are illegal ... punks enjoy no such protection under the law (Leblanc 2008: 194).

Leblanc's findings are insightful, offering a valuable starting point for our UK study centred on goths. Yet assessment of the impact such experiences had on victims is limited in Leblanc's account and, crucially, her comments about legal protection are (understandably given that this was not her primary focus) undeveloped, with no reference to broader discussions of hate crime. The present UK study, which has the harassment of goths and related subcultures as its sole focus, builds upon elements of Leblanc's work with a view to understanding the patterns and harms of this abuse and how these might compare with the experiences of recognised hate crime victim groups and theoretical understandings of hate crime.

Research Focus and Approach

Alternative subculture is not an easy term to define. As part of their aforementioned announcement, Greater Manchester Police explained that they understood it as:

... a broad term to define a strong sense of collective identity and a set of group-specific values and tastes. This typically centres on distinctive style, clothing, make up, body art and music preference. Those involved usually stand out to both fellow participants and to those outside the group. Groups typically under the 'alternative' umbrella include Goths, Emos, Punks and Metallers however this list is not exhaustive (Press release, Greater Manchester Police 2013).

As illustrated by this definition, the notion of 'alternative' actually comprises an umbrella concept that encapsulates a number of discrete groups and whose outer boundaries are somewhat blurry and subject to debate. Having emerged in relation to hippy and counter-culture in the 1960s and 70s, the term's more recent use tends to encapsulate a range of predominantly white, middle-class music- and style-centred cultures. Each of these has its own distinct identity, while collectively sharing with the others a sense of difference from 'mainstream' fashion, peer groups and music as exemplified, for example, in typical chart music, high street clothes stores or popular nightclubs. Similarly, while punks, goths, metallers, skaters and others each have discrete subcultural spaces of their own, it is not uncommon for their loose identification with one another as 'alternative' to be reflected in a degree of contact and overlap.

The present study reflects this blurriness but focuses primarily on the goth scene, one of the most prominent and long-standing groups connected to the 'alternative' umbrella and the subject of particularly extensive UK media comment in relation to targeted harassment and violence. The goth scene emerged initially in the early 1980s and centres upon a distinctively dark, sombre and sometimes macabre style of music and fashion. Goths typically wear black clothing and often have black or brightly-coloured hair, particular styles of jewellery and, sometimes, tattoos. The scene is often regarded as relatively androgynous with respect to fashion, with both female and male goths liable to exhibit distinctive styles of make-up, have long or elaborate hair and wear somewhat feminine styles of clothing and accessory (Hodkinson 2002).

Our project consisted of twenty-one in-depth qualitative interviews carried out by the authors between January and August 2013 and lasting between approximately 40 and 120 minutes. Consistent with the overlaps within alternative culture noted above, most interviewees identified clearly as goths, but the sample also included a small minority of individuals who had connections to the goth scene (sometimes as former participants) but regarded themselves as metal fans, 'alternative' in a more general sense or, in one case, a skater. All but three of the interviews were carried out face-to-face with the others conducted via Skype. In terms of sampling, the researchers approached two goth/alternative university societies in the Midlands and South East of the UK, arranged for messages inviting volunteers to be posted on a number of UK goth and alternative Facebook pages, including that of the Sophie Lancaster Foundation, and recruited further interviewees via contacts from previous research projects (Hodkinson 2002, 2011).

The sample included thirteen female and eight male respondents aged between 19 and 53, with the majority in their 20s and all being White British. The larger number of females may reflect greater female willingness to volunteer for such an exercise since studies indicate a relatively even gender split within the goth scene (Hodkinson 2002; Brill 2008). Steps were taken to ensure the study included sufficient male experience and a diversity of respondents in respect of location, age and social class. For practical reasons, most participants were based within the South East, but the sample also included the Midlands, North West and North East of England. Participants were based in a mixture of small towns and large cities and it included individuals residing or brought up in deprived as well as more affluent areas. Measures also were taken to be inclusive with respect to the extent of harassment or

violence that had (or had not) been suffered by participants. The sample is not statistically representative, of course, but we believe any particular bias towards those with more extreme experiences to be only slight. Crucially, the aim of the project was not to quantify experiences of violence or harassment in a statistical fashion but to understand the nature and significance of an appropriate range of experiences among participants on both an individual and collective level.

The study was approved by the [cut for anonymity] University Ethics Committee and a number of measures taken to minimise the possibility of harm or upset to respondents. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed thematically. Names and places have been changed or obscured below in order to preserve interviewees' anonymity.

Experiences of Harassment and Victimization

Verbal harassment and intimidation

Respondent experiences of harassment and victimisation were diverse within the sample, but all had, at one time or another, been subjected to derogatory stares or comments at the very least. When asked to go into detail, respondents identified various examples of the kinds of verbal abuse they had received from people, from the aggressive shouting of 'goth!', 'mosher!' or 'freak!' to derogatory forms of humour and direct accusatory questions, demands or threats. The insults described by Claire, below, were fairly typical of those mentioned by others:

Claire (31) "Fucking freak!", "what the hell do you think you look like?", "why are you dressing like that?" There was actually one incident when I was walking through town ... and I actually saw someone kneel down to the child, whisper something in their ear ... and the next thing I heard this child's shouting, "Oh go F off you F'ing Goth, go slit your wrists and die!"... I've got called a vampire a few times ... sometimes you get Mosher but not as often. As I say, freak's a very common one ... they might sort of ask questions ... "Why do you dress like that? You should be ashamed!"...

In some cases, such comments would make reference to the gender and/or sexuality of the recipient. Consistent with Dunja Brill's (2008) research, both male and female respondents agreed that male goths – who tend to exhibit a relatively feminine style of appearance – were prone to sometimes receiving homophobic abuse such as 'poof!', as well as questioning of their gender, as here:

Owen (24): I'm not very masculine and there is certain, well the one thing that happens more than getting called out by the [specific] clothes that I wear, is "Are you a boy or a girl?"

In comparison to Leblanc's punk respondents, our female respondents were less likely to receive criticism related to gender ambiguity because female goth styles tend to be more overtly feminine than in the case of punk (see Brill 2008). They were, however, liable to

experience verbal sexual harassment by male strangers who would sometimes interpret their subcultural appearance as indicating an 'exciting' or 'easy' approach to sex:

Harriet (20): And I was on the way home afterwards [i.e. after a night out] and this guy in the back of a taxi just shouted out of his rolled down window, "Alright babes" at me, and I ignored him. And a few seconds later he just shouted out again, "You can't just dress like that and not expect to be spoken to".

While often verbal abuse would be momentary, in other cases individuals would be subject to sustained periods of harassment or intimidation, whether as a result of victim and perpetrators being stuck within a confined space, such as on public transport, or through victims being followed for a period of time on foot, as in the example below:

Michael (28): ... we went to visit a friend there [suburb of city] once, me and my partner ... And we were followed around [place] by some kids who were very, very aggressive in what they were shouting at us, and it was only provoked because of the way we looked ... These lads were about thirteen/fourteen, you know, they were half my age. But it was some violent threats to attack me, to assault my girlfriend ... That was a very recent experience and it was not a pleasant one ... We had to walk quite a way, so I think after a while ... they did kind of tail off. We got to our friend's house and then very quickly got in and bolted the door.

Importantly, although some experience of verbal abuse was universal across the sample, the extent and frequency of it varied considerably. For a minority, hostility of any kind on the basis of how they looked was relatively rare, or was primarily confined to experiences of bullying at school when they were younger, with such attention receding as they had grown older and/or moved out of their home town. Sarah, for example, explained that she had rarely received negative attention in the large midlands city in which she attended university, for example:

Sarah (20): So yes, especially, you know, sort of a small secondary school community as well, you sort of get marked out as the weird kid. But yes, I think in [city name] like I feel more comfortable even going out, you know, with my hair dyed a bright colour or, you know, wearing big stumpy boots and spiky things ... I don't feel like I'm particularly qualified to talk about street harassment because the most I've ever got is like, you know, walking in [name of parent's town] somebody yells, "Oi Halloween's not until October".

For many others, however, verbal abuse was a regular, repeated and almost predictable occurrence; with many saying they regarded it as an integral and unwelcome part of the everyday experience of being involved in their subculture. Some participants said they had become so used to it that they had eventually learned to 'tune out' some of the more minor/fleeting forms of abuse they received, as here:

Rosie (29): To be honest, after a few years I just kind of stopped hearing it. You just hear a noise being yelled out of a car as someone drove past and kind of just completely ignored it.

Physical abuse

Physical attacks were much less common than verbal forms of abuse, while cases of extreme violence were highly unusual. Nevertheless, many respondents had been involved in situations that had become physical in some way and even those who had not tended to know somebody else who had. Several respondents detailed incidents in which verbal abuse had been accompanied by being spat at, having objects such as bottles, eggs or drinks thrown at them or, in one case, having people attempt to burn his hair with a cigarette. In some cases the aggressors would be on foot within parks or on the street, while in others objects would be thrown out of passing vehicles. Public transport, not surprisingly, was also identified as a prime site for trouble with objects or spit often projected towards respondents from individuals sat behind them and/or out of the window after they got off, as here:

Eleanor (24): There was one where I was on a bus coming home from school, and there was just some boys at the back of the bus sort of throwing things at me, trying to get me to get annoyed at them ... so I just ignored them the whole journey ... I think I was about fifteen then. And when I got off the bus they were all leaning out of the bus trying to spit on me. And a bit of it got on my shoulder and on my cheek and everything, it was horrible ...

A minority of respondents, meanwhile, had been subject to more serious forms of physical attack as a result of their subcultural appearance. While various locations were identified, the most likely scenario for such attacks seemed to be the journey to or from subcultural nightclub venues through city centres, industrial or housing estates at night, whether on foot or via public transport – or the wait for taxis or buses to take them home. The following incident, described by Jamie, took place outside a goth/alternative nightclub and resulted in him having to go to casualty:

Jamie (33): I was having a bit of an argument with a friend ... Someone's walked up, "Fucking little Goth!"... tapped me on the shoulder, shoved me, then punched me into a concrete pillar... I went down, they then started kicking me in the head. And I've got a memory of crawling around on the floor with blood coming out the front of my face, asking where my glasses were, and I blacked out again. Then I remember going into an ambulance and I woke up in a neck brace ...

Other places that respondents commonly reported being assaulted included public parks, housing estates, subways and underpasses, where respondents' isolation could leave them particularly vulnerable to assault, as one graphically revealed:

Matthew (23): I was walking through this underpass and I heard people behind me ... I didn't like what I was hearing. And suddenly, someone must have jump-punched like from here. And I was all over the floor, I didn't know what had hit me and I was just being kicked and punched on the floor.

Although experiences were diverse, overall, the males in the sample provided more examples of being violently attacked than the females and respondents of both genders tended to agree that males were more likely than females to suffer serious physical attacks. Yet females were far from exempt from the threat or reality of violence. The following incident, from Claire, illustrates a situation that began with intimidating questioning and provocation and ended up with a broken bottle being thrown at her:

Claire (31): My ex-partner and I ... [were] sat on a bench talking ... And a group, about three teenage girls ... came over... “What are you dressing like that for? You look like a freak” sort of thing ... And the conversation, as always, turned a little bit nastier, they started being a bit more rude with their questions, as I say, making nasty comments. And then she, one of the girls started picking up stones from the floor and just throwing them at us. One narrowly missed my eye by a hair’s breadth and that’s when I lost it ... And I kicked her foot away, look go away, “eff off, I’m not happy”, and she didn’t like that. So that’s when she decided to go and get a glass bottle and said, “Right, I’m going to effing cut your face up”, sort of thing ... And we just walked into the pub and the next thing I heard was like, “Claire, watch out!” And she lobbed the remainder of the glass at me as I was walking through the pub door...

Having provided a summary of the kinds of experiences of verbal and physical abuse described by our respondents, we now turn to the impact such events had on them and the kinds of responses they developed, first as individuals and then as a community.

Impact and Responses

Individual impacts

Physical injuries inflicted on some respondents or their friends included cuts and bruises of varying severity (some requiring extensive stitching), bloody noses, black eyes, split lips, torn hair, neck injuries, concussion and, in the case of the friend of one respondent, a stab wound. Both verbal and physical attacks also tended to have an emotional impact, although this could vary a little. While some older respondents had learned largely to ignore minor or fleeting incidents this was often not possible. Depending on what exactly had happened, others spoke of feeling shocked, upset, angry and/or afraid on particular occasions. As one might expect, such feelings were particularly pronounced immediately after an incident but, crucially, they could easily develop into broader, longer-term anxieties, particularly in those cases where respondents were targeted repeatedly. One respondent in his early twenties said that he had developed sleep problems ever since being attacked six years ago, while another described suffering from physical symptoms associated with anxiety during nights out, due to his fear of being attacked on the way to the club.

Whether or not they had personally been the victim of violence, most respondents described a general tendency to feel cautious, nervous, suspicious and distrustful of people they might encounter within public spaces, particularly – though not exclusively – late at night. Though it was more pronounced at some times and in some places than others, the *possibility* of targeted harassment tended to colour the experience many respondents had of walking through streets or riding on buses or trains at certain times of day, or of attending non-subcultural bars or clubs. This constant awareness of the possibility of being targeted ought to be regarded, we contend, as a clear impact of the incidents of targeted harassment they endured. The following extract, from Rosie, illustrates the way respondents could feel vulnerable and exposed when travelling on public transport, for example:

Rosie (29): And actually that journey up there was really uncomfortable, going through public transport ... And it was a fairly busy train as well and that, again it was just the two of us, in a normal situation in abnormal looking clothing, and that felt really uncomfortable.

Rather than being passive in response to such feelings, respondents had often developed a keen awareness of where they were and who was around them. Many described strategies for evading trouble, from avoiding particular areas, to early identification of potential aggressors, to 'dressing down' or getting changed once they arrived at clubs in order not to attract unwanted attention, to the careful selection of seats on public transport and the wearing of headphones in order to block out possible insults. In the following example, Eleanor describes how she became scared of going into town on her own and would become nervous if friends she had arranged to meet were late:

Eleanor (24): I do still feel quite nervous if I'm out on my own... if I go into town, I prefer to meet people at their houses first and then come in.

Q: Are there any other sort of, I don't know if it's the right word, but are there sort of extra precautions that you take...?

Eleanor: Yes, trying to meet people outside of town is the main thing. Making sure that if I'm going to meet people, they're definitely going to be on time. It really frustrates me that if I do come into town to meet somebody, I want to kind of get off the bus and they're there. So if somebody kind of waits until I'm in town and then says, "Oh I'm going to be another half an hour", it's like now I'm on my own for half an hour, what am I going to do?

Others described the ways they had become skilled in the identification of people who might be likely to target them. In Michael's case this prompted a reflective lament about how suspicious and judgemental he had become:

Michael (28): I think one of the long term effects of this, is that it's making us more insular, wary. I know for a fact it's making me more paranoid, more suspicious. You can't ask someone to go for a decade of their life being harassed by complete strangers in the street and not expect them to get suspicious and closed off and unsympathetic. I know I am, it's not good for me ... Yes I'm becoming paranoid and suspicious and I am sceptical of the guy at the bar [of a goth club], who's not actually wearing a Sisters [of Mercy – goth band] shirt, you know. And perhaps he's alright but I'm at the other end of the bar going, "I've got my eye on you, I don't trust you". That's not fair either ...

Most respondents said that, in the face of potential threats, they focused on avoiding trouble by trying to ignore, humour or escape potential aggressors. However, occasionally, the fear generated by repeatedly being targeted would result eventually in a more aggressive approach. Indeed in one case, a respondent described how, following a period of prolonged harassment and bullying, she came to the conclusion that the best way to react was with physical violence:

Alex (21): I try to fight back a lot ... I thought, if ignoring them is not going to work, I'm going to try and punch their face in, which is probably not a good way of putting it, but I was literally so angry with them. Just they wouldn't leave me alone and I thought, if they're going to, you know, touch me, I'm going to touch them back ...

Leaving aside arguments about the desirability of such an approach or, indeed, the judgements made by other respondents about the kinds of people they deemed threatening, it is clear that these and the other means of coping different individuals had developed form part of the extensive impact that the threat of being specifically targeted as a result of their subcultural affiliation or appearance had had on them.

Community impact

Crucially, it was clear that, as well as having been triggered by their own past experiences, the nervousness, suspicion and caution spoken of by many of our respondents connected to knowledge and discourse about incidents that had happened to *other* members of their scene and a broader sense that, in a collective way, scene participants were somewhat vulnerable to attack. While incidents of low-level verbal abuse were sufficiently frequent that they were unlikely to be discussed at any length among goths, serious incidents of violence against fellow scene members would rapidly become common knowledge and a primary topic for conversation, both in person and via social networking sites.

While in some respects this community impact was cumulative and long-term, integrating for each individual with their own experiences, specific incidents sometimes could have a marked effect at particular times. Mark, for example, described the local impact of a serious attack that left a friend of his in hospital. News of the incident had spread rapidly in his local scene and the collective anxiety generated led to more cautious approaches to travelling to and from their local subcultural venue:

Mark (42): It made, people just stopped going out ... on their own. But if you went, if you left or if you were going to get the bus, then you'd go in a group, rather than on your own ...

Q: So people sort of consciously changed their behaviour a bit?

Mark: Yes because you left, if there's five/six people, they're less likely to be attacked ... That was it, I mean I noticed that more cars were there, so people were choosing to drive, rather than get, take public transport and walk. Yes, I never got the bus after that, I drove.

And while attacks on friends would often be felt particularly closely, respondents often also emphasised the impact of attacks that were covered in local or national media – and then distributed through subcultural networks via social media. Most notably, all respondents knew, in detail, about the Sophie Lancaster case and some outlined the substantial impact the incident – which was covered in the UK national press – had had upon them and their friends. Owen described the immediate emotional effect on him and the way the event prompted him to reflect upon the risks to himself as a member of the same subculture:

Owen (24): I just remembered sitting in his bedroom just bawling my eyes out ... The thing that shocked me the most was the severity of it. It wasn't like, you know, a couple of punches, you know, it was really serious, like really malicious ... Then it got me thinking, should I stop dressing alternative? But at the same second I thought that, another part of myself said, hell no. Just, you know, stick around people that you know you feel safe with, you know, safety in numbers and everything ... I did spend quite a lot of time thinking, like going over like scenarios in my head, like what should I do if somebody grabbed me from behind ... It made me ... think quite a lot about my own personal safety and safety of my friends ...

Of particular note was the impact of high profile attacks on how participants felt about the lower-level incidents that many of them were more likely to experience. Many respondents directly connected what happened to Sophie Lancaster, as well as to other high profile victims, with their own experience of verbal abuse or low-level harassment and some specifically said that they felt, in relation to the Lancaster case, that it 'could have been them', as here:

Eleanor (24): Because everyone's been in that situation of having abuse and harassment, that everyone just thought, that could easily have been me, especially because she was with her partner at the same time. You sometimes think, "Oh if I had a guy with me it would be fine, people wouldn't bother trying to fight with me". But, of course, because they both got attacked, it's just that feeling that, a little bit of helplessness, that there's not really much I can do. If I go out in public it could happen really.

As a consequence of this sort of reaction to attacks on others, incidents of verbal abuse can be experienced in a manner characterised by greater anxiety and fear than would otherwise be the case. Crucially, then, although serious attacks on goths and members of related subcultures are rare, they nevertheless have a substantial impact on levels of suspicion, anxiety and, sometimes, fear throughout the subculture. Knowledge of them can heighten concerns that verbal abuse may escalate into violent assault and, as noted earlier, this often prompts avoidance strategies of various kinds. As we explore in greater depth below, what this illustrates, with respect to the notion of hate crime, is that targeted attacks on goths – or indeed on members of related alternative subcultures – have the potential to affect the whole subculture because they are (rightly) perceived by participants as motivated by the singling out by perpetrators of the distinctive identity they share.

Comparisons and Discussion

The findings detailed here offer plenty on which to reflect in relation to discussions about the similarity of the experiences of participants of the goth scene and related subcultures with those of recognised hate crime victim groups. Building on limited previous work such as Leblanc's (2008) study of punks, they demonstrate a variety of experience but show that the targeted harassment or violence, whether actual or potential, can play a significant part in their life in the subculture. All respondents had experienced verbal harassment of some kind and, for many, this was a fairly regular occurrence that was sometimes accompanied by 'low-level' physical abuse such as having objects thrown at them. Although serious physical attacks are less common, some respondents had direct experience of them and most knew others who had also been assaulted. We also showed that being targeted can have a substantial impact, both individually and collectively and that consciousness of the potential to be targeted can prompt feelings of suspicion, nervousness and fear that can affect people's behaviour. Crucially, the content of verbal attacks and the accompaniment of violent attacks by such verbal abuse leaves little doubt as to the targeted nature of the incidents described.

Connections between the experiences of our respondents and existing understandings of hate crime are not particularly difficult to discern. First, with some exceptions (including

incidents some respondents cited of repeated bullying by people known to them at school), the incidents described fit clearly with Perry's (2001) understanding of hate crime as prompted primarily by the specific distinctive identity/community of those on the receiving end rather than anything more personal to the victim and, often, perpetuated by strangers. When asked, respondents were adamant that their subcultural distinctiveness had been why they had been targeted and, as noted above, this was usually confirmed clearly by the content of the verbal abuse they received. In this sense, even though factors such as extremity of appearance may render some more at risk than others, victims within the group remain potentially interchangeable. They are noticed and targeted primarily on the basis of what they appear to represent and their transgression of established norms (Walters 2011), rather than because of anything they have said or done as an individual. As a consequence, whether intended or not, such targeting seems specifically to punish difference and, as a consequence, to police established understandings of normal. Such incidents, in this sense, send messages about the potential consequences of the display of such a distinctive identity to members of the group in question and the rest of society. In this respect, the experiences described resemble attacks upon members of recognised hate crime victim groups, such as gay, lesbian or transgender communities, who can be subject to vicious assaults by strangers due to their transgression of accepted norms of gender performance and sexual orientation (Hall 2013).

The experiences illustrated in our data also bear comparison with some of the finer details of the victim experiences in recognised hate crime victim groups. Although elements of the context are clearly different, the repetitive nature of victimisation for some respondents and the crucial connections between low level and more serious incidents is reminiscent of some aspects of Bowling's suggestion that racist harassment in East London resembled a continuum of violence and intimidation. For Bowling, rather than being discrete one-off events, such abuse was often experienced as a series of interconnected incidents that could, even in their so-called 'low-level' forms, have significant cumulative impact upon the wellbeing of the recipient (Bowling 1998). As in Bowling's research (and also in the case of many victims of other forms of hate crime, such as disablist or homophobic) it was the persistence of verbal abuse for our respondents, to the extent that it could become unsurprising, that generated a drip-drip effect harmful in its own right. We have also noted a specific connection between such lower-level incidents and more serious ones that also applies to recognised hate crime victim groups, which is that occasional experiences of physical attack render verbal abuse more frightening and, likewise, the experience of more serious incidents when they occur is coloured by previous incidents of verbal harassment.

In another similarity with recognised forms of hate crime, the most common locations for the respondents in our study to be targeted were public parks or on public transport, or in 'risky' locations like town and city centres at night, when they were most vulnerable to drink-fuelled hostility. Similarly, while greater research is still needed on the identity and motivations of offenders, respondents' descriptions of those responsible for targeting them – consistent with existing evidence as to the profile of assailants in high profile attacks on goths such as the Lancaster case – tended to be broadly comparable with those often identified as the most likely perpetrators in many violent hate crime cases; young, mostly male, and often from social and economically deprived backgrounds (Gadd 2009; Gadd and Dixon 2009), acting in groups to apparently target those deemed 'outsiders'.

As a consequence of the ways they or their friends had been targeted in the past, respondents also mirrored the approach of recognised hate crime groups in the development of a keen awareness of safer and more risky locations and a tendency to modify their routes through the city and their behaviour accordingly (Perry and Alvi 2012; Garland 2010b). The development of these and other coping strategies – from avoiding walking alone at certain places/times, to spurning public transport, to ‘dressing down’ and identification or avoidance of groups of strangers deemed threatening – also are comparable with studies of hate crime victimisation (Hall 2013). Of course, as well as illustrating how goths and participants of related alternative scenes can be active in responding to potential threats, such strategies also illustrate their consciousness that, because of the targeted nature of previous incidents, they bear a particularly high risk of attack. The cautiousness, suspicion and sometimes fear this awareness could generate, we argue, constitutes a clear impact of the harassment they or their peers endured.

Most striking with respect to comparisons with understandings of hate crime, however, are the clarity of our findings on the collective impact of targeted violence. The sharing of information and comment on serious attacks suffered by friends and high profile incidents covered in media prompted such incidents to have an effect on the community. This tended to go beyond general feelings of upset and anger into a specific sense among participants that the victim could have been them and that, as a fellow subcultural member, they may potentially be at risk in the future. Crucially, this meant that even those who had never been subject to targeted physical attack were aware of the possibility of being attacked and were liable to connect this possibility to any lower-level incidents they did experience. In this sense our data illustrate that incidents of targeted violence had a community impact, something reminiscent of the ways that high-profile racist or homophobic hate crime can affect the wellbeing of fellow members of those communities – even those at a geographical distance (Perry and Alvi 2012).

Hate Crime Victims?

Taken together with other studies such as that of Leblanc, the analysis of evidence presented here illustrates, then, that, while the Lancaster case may have been unusual in its level of extremity, targeted harassment and violence against members of alternative subcultures appears to be a far broader phenomenon. And, as we have shown, some of the key elements of the ways such targeting is experienced are comparable with the documented experiences of other hate crime victim groups. Yet, as noted in the introduction to this article, such comparability of victim experience does not, in itself, vindicate the notion that ‘goths’ or ‘alternative subcultures’ should be added to the list of hate crime victim groups, whether conceptually, operationally or legally.

As we have already alluded to, practical complexities and controversies remain with respect to the impact such a development might have and how we might define a term such ‘alternative subculture’ in a sufficiently clear manner for it to be operationalized by the police or in legislation. There are also important further questions about whether goths, punks and others falling under this umbrella are more deserving than various other societal

groups who may find themselves targeted as a result of their distinctive identity and who may have similar victim experiences to those described here (Garland and Hodgkinson 2014). For some, the practical impact of including alternative subcultures would be that it would precipitate a 'slippery slope' liable to water down the hate crime concept to such an extent that its value with respect to those groups it was initially developed to protect recedes (Freeman 2013).

In particular, for more structural theorists like Perry, hate crime centres on the exercising of power by the dominant over the weak (see, Perry 2001; 2009) and is a mechanism of oppression enacted in order to maintain society's rigid hierarchies, be they racial, sexual, physical or mental ability or gender identity. As Perry argues, 'bias-motivated violence is reflective not of individual values or sentiments, but of culturally normative values of domination and subordination. It is one of the many mechanisms in an arsenal of oppressive practices' (Perry 2005: 125). Consistent with this, while Bowling's (1998) work on racist harassment illustrates some striking similarities with the experience of goths as discussed here, he also emphasises the ways repeated incidents of victimisation tie in with broader structural experiences of prejudice and disadvantage. As a consequence, for some theorists, if they are to have any utility or meaning, hate crime interventions must connect to the ongoing struggles of minority communities that have been marginalised for decades, perhaps even centuries. Indeed, the notion of hate crime itself was borne out of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s when disparate groups that faced widespread, entrenched discrimination and violence looked for a concept that could unify their different campaigns for social justice (Gerstenfeld 2013).

Under such a framework it is difficult to see how goths and those in related subcultures, who are commonly white and middle-class (Hodkinson 2002), could be included as a hate crime victim group. It would be difficult to justify that they are subject to systematic or historic deprivation or marginalisation, or that they are targeted in a manner that maintains their assailants' dominant societal position over them. As we have noted earlier, goths often described their assailants as coming from backgrounds more deprived than their own. And they sometimes did so in a manner specifically disparaging of the perceived connection between such backgrounds and intolerant forms of violence, most notably through frequent use of the term 'chav' which according to many commentators has become a means to stigmatise the culture of those from deprived backgrounds (Tyler 2008; Jones 2012). While similar kinds of stigmatisation by victims of perceived hostile groups located at the margins of society have also been identified in studies of racist hate crime (see, for example, James 2013), in the latter case there remains a clear structural subordination with respect to race and ethnicity.

Such complexities with respect to questions of power and subordination, however, do not negate the significance of the repeated experiences of unprovoked harassment or violence suffered by goths and other alternative subcultures – or the similarities we have identified with the key elements of the experience of other hate crime groups. What they suggest is that, if such groups were to be included under the hate crime rubric, this would amount to a significant conceptual departure from what some regard as a key facet of its meaning, purpose and significance. It would indicate a shift towards more recently proposed conceptions of hate crime that centre on victim experience and, specifically, the targeting of

victims due to fear of their 'difference' (in this case, their distinctive identity or affiliation) coupled with perceptions of them being a 'soft target' and thus vulnerable to attack, whether or not they are from a historically oppressed minority group (Chakraborti and Garland 2012). This kind of a framework prioritises the nature of the more immediate experiences of victims and their communities and leaves to one side the extent to which they are, or are not, attached to broader socio-economic struggles. Were such a framework to be accepted then the nature of the experiences documented here would seem to make part of the case for the inclusion of those harassed or attacked for their membership of alternative music and style subcultures. It is clear that goths were frequently harassed or attacked in a manner specifically targeted at their difference, that this had a substantial impact on them individually and collectively and that the lack of threat they were deemed to pose, also contributed to their being targeted. While such evidence is vital in informing the debate, however, the inclusion or otherwise of such experiences under the hate crime framework clearly depends upon the resolution of the conceptual argument we have outlined here as well as to practical considerations relating to its operationalisation.

Conclusion

This article outlines new empirically-generated findings in an area of increasing criminological concern that has, until now, been under-researched: namely the nature and impact of the targeted victimisation of the participants of alternative subcultures. Drawing on a set of qualitative interviews with twenty-one respondents, most of whom are affiliated to the goth scene, we have outlined a mixed set of experiences while emphasising that many were regular recipients of verbal harassment and some had experienced violent forms of assault. We demonstrated the ways such targeting can affect feelings of security and wellbeing among participants and can prompt feelings of vulnerability, caution and suspicion in public spaces. Frequently respondents had developed ways of coping with the perceived threat of victimisation in order to try to minimise the chances of being the subject of hostility from others.

We then drew comparisons between the experiences of harassment and violence illustrated by our research and the plight of recognised hate crime victim groups, noting a number of similarities with respect to the nature of the targeting of our respondents and the impact on and response of victims. In particular we emphasised the collective impact of the targeting of subcultural members, whereby serious incidents sometimes had a significant emotional impact across the community and could precipitate feelings of insecurity and caution even among individuals who had never been subjected to violent attack. Such collective experience of serious incidents served, amongst other things, to increase the significance of the lower-level forms of verbal abuse that occurred far more regularly. In summary, our findings illustrate that, on the basis of the experience of victims, the targeting of goths and alternatives show a number of similarities with the experiences of established hate crime victim groups. We have also draw attention to the importance of conceptual arguments, noting that, although goths and alternative participants would not seem to fit comfortably with structural conceptions of hate crime, their experience could be regarded as more consistent with recent theorisations of hate crime that centre in a broader sense on the targeting of difference and vulnerability (Walters 2011; Mason 2014; Mason-Bish 2014).

We would suggest that our findings are of particular importance in the context of the ongoing debate following Greater Manchester Police's decision to recognise this type of targeted hostility as a hate crime, something itself consistent with previous UK government inferences that the notion of hate crime ought not to be restricted to the groups currently specified by legislation. Having widened the net so publicly, GMP may, perhaps inadvertently, have thrown the parameters of the hate crime debate open by departing from structural conceptions of hate crime and taking an approach that - apparently - includes groups purely on the basis of the extent to which members are deemed vulnerable to targeted attack and the impact of such targeting – a move that could be deemed to mirror aforementioned conceptual developments. It remains to be seen whether this approach will be replicated by other UK forces or indeed, in the form of a change in the law. And, although many of our respondents would support such a direction of travel, questions remain about the implications of doing so.

Crucially the study of victim experiences presented here cannot, in itself, resolve the arguments alluded to over whether or not structural disadvantage should or should not remain central to understandings of hate crime (although Garland has begun to set out his position elsewhere in that regard (Garland 2010a; Chakraborti and Garland 2012). Not does our study illuminate the practical implications of including goths or alternatives as specified victim groups by the police or legislators. Rather, our contribution centres on the analysis of much needed empirical evidence relating to the victimisation of alternative subcultural participants and, primarily in this particular case, goths. Building on the limited previous research on the subject, we have shown that the repeated targeting of alternative subcultural participants does indeed comprise a specific and ongoing problem and that the experiences of those on the receiving end do appear to resemble those of recognised hate crime victims in a number of respects.

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