
Satanic Subcultures? A Discourse Analysis of the Self-Perceptions of Young Goths and Pagans

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1. Introduction

In recent years, several youth subcultures have become the focus of concerns about 'evil' and 'Satanism'. This paper considers two such groups: Pagans and Goths. It uses discourse analysis to explore how young Goths and Pagans construct their subcultures, how they feel others perceive them, and how they respond to these perceptions.

A. What are Pagans and Goths?

Paganism, especially the Wiccan branch of the religion, has experienced a boom since the late 1990s. Most bookstores in the UK now have extensive sections relating to witchcraft and Pagan beliefs. Many books are particularly targeted at adolescents and young adults; there are 'teen witch' kits, for example. Most of these books, and the people I interviewed, claim that Paganism is an ancient religion suppressed by the Christian church during the European witch persecutions. Many historians would dispute this claim, arguing that modern Paganism was invented in the early twentieth century. I do not, however, intend to examine the validity of the historical narratives constructed by Pagans. Rather, I want to demonstrate that such discourses are used to support their perceptions about the relationship between Paganism and mainstream religion.

Goth emerged in the early 1980s, with the music of post-Punk UK bands like Bauhaus and Siouxsie and the Banshees. Since the 1990s, both the UK and US Goth movements have grown, and Goth has become recognised as a distinct subculture. The huge popularity of Marilyn Manson has recently thrown the spotlight onto Goth again, although some older Goths disassociate themselves from this type of 'shock rock'. The boundaries between Goth and the extremely popular 'nu-metal' culture are blurred. *Kerrang* magazine, which is read by Goths and those into metal and nu-metal music, has recently become the most popular music periodical in the UK. Goth is often associated with a certain appearance as well as musical tastes: generally black clothing, silver jewellery, a pale complexion and dyed hair. However, there is a great deal of variety within the subculture: from Victorian-style velvet outfits to spiky fetish-wear and silver 'cyber' clothing.

Both Paganism and Goth subculture cover a diverse range of beliefs, ideas and tastes, but they are linked in three clear ways: First, both are positioned outside mainstream culture. Secondly, Pagan religions are

particularly popular amongst Goths: even non-religious Goths often wear jewellery containing Pagan symbols and take an interest in 'pre-Christian' myths. Lastly, and most importantly for this paper, Pagans and Goths have been represented in similar ways by mainstream culture. Both groups have been labelled as satanic, evil and dangerous by religious groups and in the news media, where their beliefs and tastes have been linked to violent crimes perpetrated by teenagers.

B. Goths and Pagans in the Media

Chesters noted that Goths were rarely mentioned in the media before the mid-1990s¹. When they were, they were mostly depicted in 'light-hearted' ways². In the last few years, however, the movement has acquired a darker reputation. Two crimes in particular have fuelled this depiction: the 1996 Florida 'vampire murders' by teenage members of a 'vampire cult'³, and the 1999 'trenchcoat killings'. In the latter case, two teenaged boys, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, shot and killed thirteen people at their Denver school, Columbine High, where they and their friends had been labelled 'the trenchcoat mafia'. Writing in *The Sunday Times*, Smith also links the London bomber, David Copeland, to the Goth scene⁴. In a recent *Guardian* article, Hooper tells the story of two German murderers and devil worshippers, Manuela and Daniel Ruda, who progressed from involvement in a 'gothic club' to bloodsucking, graveyard parties and eventually murder⁵.

In one typical article, Wright and Millar highlight Harris and Klebold's membership of Goth subculture⁶. They claim that "central to the Trenchcoat Mafia's identity was their association with 'dark metal' Goth music." The article quotes several song lyrics from Harris' website, implying that Harris followed the 'instructions' in the songs. The piece concludes with a reference to 'backward messages' in songs by Marilyn Manson. The 'urban myth' of backwards tracks encouraging teenage violence has existed at least since the 1970s. It seems no more likely now than it did then. Furthermore, it is hard to see why Manson would conceal 'subliminal' messages in his songs, when their lyrics already emphasise evil and death! Most of these articles construct the link between Goth and violence as taken-for-granted common sense⁷, sometimes also providing 'expert' opinion that Goths are emotionally disturbed or vulnerable to cults.

Many Christian websites also perpetuate the view that Goth music and Pagan religions are dangerous and evil. Several make links between Goth or rock music and Satanism and murder. In relation to Paganism, one site asks "what is the difference between witchcraft and Satanism? Both are anti-Christ by definition... Both are forbidden in the Holy

Scriptures”⁸. Such websites mainly include Biblical quotes linked to passages from ‘Pagan’ books that challenge them, including ‘Harry Potter’! They also often feature statements from ‘former witches’. These provide ‘expert testimony’, since these people know about Paganism and have experience of how ‘dangerous’ it is. For example, “I used to be a white witch... I had my own pack of tarot cards that I did readings from, I was a clairvoyant medium, did seances, astrology, palm reading and had a witches’ spell book... I know now that the world is being deceived by this witchcraft/new age stuff”⁹. The author of this e-mail constructs herself as an expert with personal experience of being a dedicated witch, using specific terminology, before stating that she now sees the danger in such activities.

Paganism and witchcraft are also depicted in many factual books, as well as fictional texts, films and TV programmes. These vary in their portrayals, but some make the link between Paganism and demonic forces. For example, the film *The Craft* concerns teenage girls dabbling in witchcraft, then invoking dangerous powers and harming others.

From the analysis of media sources it also seems that they depict Goths and Pagans in a dualistic way: as evil and dangerous, or as rather eccentric, strange and pathetic. Elcock points out that people who play role-playing games are portrayed in a similar way in the media: either dangerous and satanic, or geeky with bad social skills¹⁰. It seems that in all three cases there is an implicit assumption that those drawn to role-playing, Goth music or Paganism are somewhat pathetic or weird to start with and therefore vulnerable, so they can easily be influenced into the dangerous evil side of the subculture.

C. Past Research on Youth Subcultures

Social psychological research on subcultures has concentrated on the relationship between individual identity and the identity of the group. The main traditional social psychological theory in this area is ‘social identity theory’¹¹. This suggests that people organise their perceptions of themselves and others by a process of categorising themselves into groups, and then identifying with one group as opposed to another. Our sense of self-esteem comes from how I evaluate our group in relation to other groups. Research has found that people accentuate the similarities between people within their group and exaggerate the differences between themselves and people in other groups. They also tend to maximise their advantage in relation to others, thus enhancing the identity and esteem of the members of their group. Social identity theory has been criticised, however, for its failure to apply beyond western culture¹². A related approach is Baumeister’s ‘myth of pure evil’¹³. This is useful for

examining subcultures like Goth and Paganism, which may be persecuted to some extent by other groups. Baumeister suggests that when we are attacked by others we tend to portray our group - 'us' - as purely good and innocent, whilst the other group - 'them' - is portrayed as chaotic, sadistic and motiveless. These theories will be drawn on here, to some extent, to examine how Goths and Pagans use 'us and them' terms to describe their experiences.

Widdicombe states that most past research on youth subcultures ignores the ways in which group members themselves understand the significance and meaning of their subculture¹⁴. She suggests that this can be overcome through discourse analysis. This technique examines how people use language to construct versions of their experiences, rather than assuming that language simply reflects internal attitudes or 'true' events. Discourse analysis sees people as drawing on cultural or linguistic resources in order to construct their talk in certain ways to have certain effects. This method is employed below.

D. The Current Research

This paper is based on a series of interviews that I carried out with Pagans and Goths in two different parts of the UK.

Unlike many of the members of youth subcultures previously studied in the sociological and social psychological literature, Goths and Pagans are not necessarily male or working-class. Most of the interviewees in the current research were women, only two (pseudonyms Adam and Gerald), were male. There seem to be at least equal numbers of male and female Goths and Pagans, possibly even more females than males within the Pagan movement. The interviewees were all in higher education, although they came from a variety of working and middle-class families with varying religious backgrounds. They were all between eighteen and twenty-five, although it should be pointed out that there are Goths over this age, and certainly Paganism is not particularly a 'youth' subculture. I wanted to explore the accounts of younger Pagans since they seem to be the growth area in terms of the market for books on this topic. Also, previous research has focused on older Pagans who grew up in the 1960s¹⁵.

All the interviewees were people known to me prior to the study, through mutual friends. This means that my analysis is necessarily rooted in the relationships that I had built up with the interviewees, but hopefully I have maintained enough 'analytical distance' to make the analysis useful and meaningful¹⁶. The interviews themselves lasted for about sixty minutes each, most were one-to-one, but one was with two people (pseudonyms Gerald and Carrie). Interviewees were asked general

questions about their background, how they defined themselves, how they came to Goth/Paganism, how they saw the history of their group, and how they felt other people perceived them. In addition to these interviews, I also obtained some shorter interview transcripts from another study on Goths¹⁷. Combining this data together gave four Pagan interviewees, three of whom were also Goths, and five interviewees who were Goth only, although several expressed interest in alternative religions.

Discourse analysis transcriptions can look strange to those unfamiliar with them. This is because they faithfully record the way people speak, including every 'um' and 'er'. As a code for the reader, commas indicate a pause. **Bold** text was said with emphasis. Anything in square brackets [] is a note that has been added during transcription. Some of the minimal prompts used by the interviewers to encourage interviewees to continue have been removed, for example 'mm', 'yeah', 'mmhm'. This is to make quotes more readable. Such prompts can be seen as the verbal equivalent of nods and other body language, which could not be recorded.

It is important to note that the aim of this research is not to question the truthfulness or validity of the accounts of interviewees. Rather, this research seeks to understand how the accounts are constructed and what is gained from these constructions. Discourse analysis assumes that people are performing social 'actions' when they use language¹⁸, for example, they are justifying, explaining, defending or persuading, and it is therefore important to consider what actions the talk achieves, and also what potential arguments it is designed to counteract. This is not to say that people consciously construct their arguments to be persuasive in a deceptive or manipulative way. Rather, tacit or common-sense communicative skills are employed by speakers to construct their accounts as factual and legitimate¹⁹.

2. Analysis: 'You's All Satanists'

Many themes emerged from discourse analysis of the interview transcripts. The one I will focus on here is how Goths and Pagans felt themselves to be negatively perceived, and how they responded to these perceptions. In order to make the analysis as clear as possible, I will impose this loose structure on it:

- A. Negative perceptions
- B. Who is prejudiced?
- C. Responding to prejudice
- D. Understanding prejudice

Discourses of other-ness and group history will also be drawn out in the analysis as these notions recurred throughout the interviews.

A. Negative Perceptions

All the Goths and Pagans interviewed agreed that people outside their subculture labelled them as evil or Satanic. Indeed, when asked how others responded to them, many of the Pagans immediately said the word 'Satanist'. Most of the Goths described being labelled as 'freaks'. Rather than being explicitly labelled as Satanists, most of them spoke of being seen as a 'witch', going on to say that witches are often confused with Satanists. Some also said that people were suspicious that they might have an evil or corrupting influence on others, particularly children.

Most of the interviewees gave specific examples from personal experience to support these statements. For example, Daisy and Nikki both related times when people have responded to their wearing a Pentagram. This is a five-pointed star in a circle which is a Pagan symbol often worn as jewellery by both Pagans and Goths.

Nikki

The symbol of the pentagram, um, which people, when they see it they automatically think, 'oo Satanism'... er coz, um, one of my other friends, he um, went to get a tattoo, last year ... and he wanted a pentagram, and he went into the, tattoo parlour and the guy said 'oh you're a Satanist are you' (laughs) and he was like '**no**, I am **not** thank-you'

[Interviewer says: yeah, so it's really common]

yeah, and I, I used to draw them as well just as like, doodling at school I'd just draw pentagrams and this girl came up to you and she was like 'oo are you a Satanist Nikki that's the sign of the devil' and (laughs) I just thought, 'no'.

Daisy

Always worn a pentagram ring ... and, people have always looked at it and gone 'oo ooo Satanism' [dumb voice] 'no, no', ... and er, yeah, I've often had, yeah, certainly in, during my GCSEs and my A levels I had to defend my myself against allegations, and the whole of Paganism against 'ay you's all Satanists though aren't you' [dumb voice] most people are are absolutely pig ignorant about it

It is interesting that both Nikki and Daisy use the same wording in their examples: 'oo Satanism'. This is known as active voicing: the reporting of speech within accounts²⁰. It is unlikely that words reported

like this were originally spoken exactly as they are presented. Daisy probably cannot remember perfectly back to her schooldays, and Nikki was not even present in the tattoo parlour. So there is some reason why utterances reported in this way are designed to be heard *as if* they were said at the time²¹. Here it seems that active voicing is used to show that these events really happened, in support of the claim that people often see Pagans as Satanic.

Both Daisy and Nikki also use hypothetical illustration²². They distil recurrent features from actual events into one hypothetical example: someone coming up to them in school and saying 'oo are you a Satanist?' or 'ay you's all Satanists though aren't you'. This prevents direct examination because it is not one real-life event. It also gives the impression that events like this have happened many times. It is clear that the interviewer picks up on this in the comment after Nikki's tattoo story: 'so it's really common'.

Finally, the active voicing used here serves the purpose of pointing out the prejudices of those speaking. Later on both Nikki and Daisy spend a lot of time explaining why the notion that Pagans are Satanists is wrong. Here they accomplish a similar thing without needing any explanation. They simply put on a dumb or silly voice when imitating the people in their stories, so it is obvious that they regard these perceptions as ridiculous. Daisy's example is particularly clear because her active voicing also uses poor English: 'you's all Satanists', displaying that people with such prejudices are generally 'pig ignorant'.

The Pagan interviewees tended to depict the prejudice they had experienced as ignorant and annoying since it meant that they were not taken seriously or treated with respect. However, they did not describe aggressive attacks in the way that the Goths did. The Goths all described abuse being shouted at them on the street, whereas the Pagans tended to relate examples of prejudice in one-to-one situations with people they knew. It seems likely that one reason for this is that appearance is a major part of Goth subculture, whereas it is not easy to instantly recognise a Pagan. Perhaps this is why many of the stories the Pagans relate are about people noticing their pentagrams: this is the one aspect of their appearance that provides a clue to their beliefs.

Like the Pagans, the Goths supported the claim that they experienced prejudice with specific examples. Gerald in particular told several long stories of occasions when people were violent towards him. The overall picture was of regular verbal abuse that frequently became physical.

Gerald

I mean, up, up here at one point last year there was, when we were walking up [road name] there was about, twenty, odd people up there who just started yelling random stuff and one guy decided he was gonna come down and try and do something about he ended up trying a leap up and hit me round the head with a beer can.

Georgina

I mean I've sat in the pub before with a bunch of blokes we all had leather jackets on all dressed in black erm all the blokes had long hair and apparently (laughs) we'd been staring at people as if we wanted a fight and I mean this was a bunch of what I'd definitely determine as normals ... and it was **us** that calmed the situation down the others were up for a fight and whatever but we said, 'no look mate don't wanna fight we're just sitting here we're really sorry if we were staring' or something I mean none of us actually had registered they were even in the pub (laughs) you know.

Here it seems that Georgina, Gerald and Carrie all construct themselves as reasonable people in unreasonable situations. Georgina and Gerald both tell their stories in a format that Wooffitt refers to as 'I was just X ... when Y'²³. They set the scene of their group doing something normal and everyday (sitting in the pub or walking up a particular road) when they were verbally attacked by a group of 'normals' or 'drunks'. Wooffitt says that this type of discourse generally emphasises the normality of the situation and speaker in relation to the strangeness and abnormality of what happened. In this case, it serves to construct Georgina, Gerald, Carrie and their groups as reasonable people, whereas the non-Goths react in shocking and unreasonable ways. Georgina underlines the unreasonableness of the 'normals' thinking they were being stared at with her statement that 'none of us actually had registered they were even in the pub'. This is what Jefferson refers to as a 'normalising device': the speaker's way of emphasising that they are an 'ordinary person' who reacted in a normal way to events²⁴.

Following the quote given here, Gerald and Carrie went on to further construct themselves as reasonable by attempting to excuse the behaviour of their attackers (drunkenness, or the external fact that Gerald was already having a 'bad week' for abuse). They even seemed to take some responsibility on themselves by saying that they 'should've ignored them more than we did'. However, they then constructed their slight retaliation as reasonable since both of them have found that they cannot

predict whether ignoring abuse will help or make it worse. This further illustrates the random, chaotic nature of the attacks they have experienced. This fits with Baumeister's myth of pure evil: the common way in which people construct themselves - 'us' - as good, innocent victims provoked by sadistic, chaotic attackers - 'them'²⁵.

B. Who is Prejudiced?

When interviewees were talking about those who were prejudiced, they mostly said 'people' or 'they' to indicate that people in general have ignorant attitudes. Both groups felt that society in general perceives them negatively. This suggests that the interviewees constructed themselves as 'outside' mainstream culture. This construction comes across when the Goths and Pagans talk about the groups who are prejudiced against them, since these mainly seem to also be the groups they construct themselves in relation to. The Goths mostly talk about 'norms' or mainstream people, whereas the Pagans talk about Christians, and they view Christianity as the mainstream religious belief in the UK. In both cases, the interviewees spoke against the structured 'rules' inherent in mainstream fashion/music or Christianity. The idea is that their group are open-minded and varied, whereas the other group are structured and unthinkingly follow the rules. Similar comparisons were made by those involved in rave culture in Elcock and Adair's study: accepting rave culture was contrasted with judgemental mainstream society and beer-oriented, lecherous mainstream pub culture²⁶. The constructions of the interviewees could be explained by social identity theory: we see those within our own group as individuals, and those in the other group as all the same²⁷. However, later quotes in this section suggest that interviewees' accounts were somewhat more complex than this.

Georgina

There are the more townie normals that I just really don't get on with because they have the view that you must dress like this you must wear all the named brands you must like clubby music erm.

Su

Um I view people who dress in a conformist way as very, easily, um, as, very, easy to blend in people that kind of don't think for themselves people who, take the kind of easy option and, simply, wear what they're told to wear rather than thinking for themselves um.

Examples of Goths defining themselves favourably in contrast to the norm can also be seen in the earlier quotes where Gerald, Carrie and Georgina construct 'normals' as violent and less intelligent than themselves.

The Pagan interviewees generally spent some time showing that they had some experience of Christianity (from home or school), and then talked about it being restrictive, structured and intolerant in comparison to Paganism.

Nikki

And I, I preferred their, sort of rule system that, the only thing they have is, just, harm none, which I think is fair enough rather than having the, 'thou shalt not kill thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's, donkey or' (laughs) it gets a bit far fetched that

Christine

I, liked that fact that it was so, laid back and relaxed, really, and that it meant that you didn't have to, um, be, talking about your religion all the time saying 'oh I, I, believe in Jesus' or 'I'm, I go to church every Sunday' or whatever, you don't have to do that.

They also stated that Paganism is more concerned with the environment and less patriarchal than Christianity. They used the historical discourse to implicate Christianity in persecution, control, oppression and money-making, whereas Paganism has always been natural and free.

I found tensions in many of the interviews when it came to notions of tolerance. On the one hand, most participants expressed intolerance of those who abused them, or those members of their group who gave them a bad name. On the other hand, they were wary of sounding intolerant themselves, particularly because many of them saw tolerance as being a big part of being a Goth or a Pagan, and because they had experienced intolerance themselves. Although many of the Goth interviewees spoke about unintelligent, aggressive 'normals' or 'trendies', some of them were also uncomfortable about labelling people in this way. This view was expressed most strongly by Adam, when he was asked about so-called 'normals'.

Adam

I **don't** like that word at all, erm, it distinguishes between things too much, I don't see things as having black and white boundaries i.e. you're **this** or you're **that**, I think things exist in a far more fluid state, I know plenty of people who look perfectly normal, erm, and I get on with them **really** well, they've got a lot of similar interests to me, erm, and I don't think it's fair to use that word **at all**, in what way is it referring to them as normal, is it normal in appearance, normal in intelligence, mind set, then you get into the whole run of things, what is a normal state of mind?

Georgina, however, justified her labelling of 'norms' with the ideas that they are the dominant group in society and they label her, therefore it is alright for her to label them. However, it is clear that she has also considered this problematic issue.

Georgina

Erm so I mean we're not **really** being offensive when we call people norms it's just a way of defining people I suppose I mean they'd call me a Goth and I'd call them a norm because there isn't actually a sort of subculture or whatever that **they** are part of erm

[Interviewer asks: because they're part of the bigger culture?]

Yeah they're part of what's meant to be sort of your general English culture so they're norms.

[Interviewer asks: So you're allowed to label them as well]

yeah I think so I think if they label us then we can label them back

Many of the Pagan interviewees mentioned Christian people they knew who did not fit the negative picture they might have painted. Again, this may serve to show that they are aware that the 'us and them' distinction is not as simple as they might have portrayed it. It also positions them as even more reasonable, thoughtful and tolerant, in comparison to the other group.

C. Responding to Prejudice

During the interviews, most people spent some time countering the assumptions that they felt were made about them. The Pagans used two

main devices to challenge the claim that they were evil or Satanic. The first was to show that Paganism was staunchly opposed to causing harm. All the Pagan interviewees said that the main rule of Paganism was not to harm anyone.

Christine

Pagans don't do that though [try to harm others], if you, if someone actually does like start, doing curses or whatever that person, couldn't be classed as a Pagan because they have the harm none thing.

Christine, like the other Pagan interviewees, cites the 'harm none' rule to show that 'real' Pagans could not be involved in evil in the way that they are portrayed by outsiders. She goes so far as to say that someone who did this could not be Pagan.

Daisy and Christine also both spend some time explaining how Paganism is very different to Satanism. Daisy takes the view that Satanism is negative, dangerous and ridiculous. In contrast, Christine expresses the view that Satanism is fine as a belief system, but it is just is not her belief system.

When Ann talks about not being Satanic or evil, she incorporates both the previously mentioned devices into her speech. First, she has very different beliefs to Satanists, and second she is non-violent:

Ann

I just say well 'I can't be a Satanist I don't believe in god, you can't have one without the other, therefore, I'm not a Satanist, so', but they don't seem to **get** it (laughs)... I used to get approached by the god squad quite a lot... and, sometimes they'd come up on their own and have a go at us and say 'oi, you, you're going to burn in hell you witch', and I'd just confront them and say 'well, how can you say that you don't actually **know** me', youknow it, does annoy me a lot because, I mean I am, like a, I'm basically, I'm quite a gentle person, I'm not actually that violent, I don't **steal**, I don't do **drugs** I, certainly don't youknow, go, robbing things and bashing old ladies and taking heroin.

Here Ann uses two three-part lists to illustrate quite how different she is from the assumptions that are made about her by 'the God squad'. Jefferson says that a three-part list is a culturally available resource for list construction which we often use in everyday conversation²⁸. Here Ann

starts with a general three part list, and then builds on it with a list of three more specific examples: 'not...that violent...I don't steal...I don't do drugs' and then: 'I...don't go robbing things and bashing old ladies and taking heroin'. Listing these behaviours together indicates a broader class of things that Ann does not do, backing up her contention that she is 'gentle' and not evil or criminal in any way. By listing these behaviours together Ann also makes the point that the assumption made about her group is that they are generally bad in many ways. The specific extreme examples specifically serve to ridicule these assumptions.

The Goth interviewees also spent some time countering the idea that they are evil, violent or dangerous. Georgina's story about 'normals' in a pub trying to start a fight constructs her group as peaceful and the others as violent. Gerald uses a similar story to disprove the idea that Goths are violent.

Gerald

Um, again this is, something someone else has said to me um, they were, so wherever, wherever it was they came from they had, sortof a club, well basically there was sortof your typical dancey club, on one side of the road and, an alternative metal club on the other side, on one night and um, invariably every, every night when the clubs kicked out the police would show up, and end up arresting loads of people, and, they'd always arrest, all the metallers, and stuff, and, this regardless of who's fault it was, and in, in the um, police van as they drove them back coz they never, actually, um prosecuted they would just drive them to the station let them go, and so this person goes, 'why is it you always arrest us you, never actually, sortof, prosecute or anything you just literally drive to the station and let us go again', the policeman turned round and said 'coz that's what the public expect to see'.

Gerald begins this story quite vaguely: he does not know where the club was, and defines the storyteller as 'someone else'. However, at the end of the story he uses active voicing, even though it is unlikely that either he or the person who told him the story could remember exactly what was said. This active voicing displays clearly that even the policeman is aware that the public perception of alternative 'metallers' as violent is wrong. This could be seen as an externalising device, since it puts the words into the mouth of a policeman, someone in authority with experience of violence²⁹. Also, the story suggests that it would be easier

for the policeman to accept the public perception of metallers as violent, since this would accord with him taking them to the station. The fact that he admits the true reason for his actions makes his statement even stronger, and more likely to be accurate.

Speaking about prejudice often led the interviewees to question whether they dressed as they did 'for attention' or 'to get a reaction'. Here it seems that they were countering a discourse often used against them: that they are only Goth in order to get a reaction, or that the Goth appearance is attention-seeking. Georgina and Gerald both counter this argument by stating that they get more reactions from people they know when they wear non-Goth clothing. Carrie and Su, however, both admit that to some degree they do like getting a reaction from people. Nonetheless, they argue that this is not the reason why they do it. It is something that has happened and they have decided that they might as well see it positively.

When talking about coping with prejudice, Su, Carrie, Gerald and Nikki all admitted that they partly aimed to get a reaction from people by dressing as they did. At other points, however, they suggest that they wear Goth clothes to divert attention from other aspects of their appearance. Georgina used dark clothes to disguise her tallness. In her case it seems that dark clothes enabled her to fade into the background. Gerald may have done something similar. He likes the fact people are commenting on something he can change, rather than something he cannot. Carrie says that one reason she wears Goth clothes is so that people attend to them rather than to her weight. Therefore the clothes are worn to 'get a reaction', but she only wants this reaction to prevent people reacting in the way they used to in school.

Georgina

Yeah so I'd just go for nondescript clothes and black was just sort of pretty nondescript really (laughs) erm and **then** I mean people then started calling me a Goth cos I'd always wear black.

Gerald and Carrie

Carrie: I think that, certainly w, youknow when I was in school and when I, had um, when I was being bullied quite a lot, um, it was to do with my appearance, and, youknow being, fat or being, ugly or whatever um, and then, when I, now that I wear this sort of stuff, I know that if I'm walking down a street, most people don't have time to think anything more than, 'she's a Goth' or, 'she's a freak' or,

and that sortof, negative, thoughts I can deal with a whole lot better than them thinking that I'm fat.

Gerald: They they they're commenting on something that you can go home and change, out of, it's something that you can literally change and, be, I dunno **normal**, by, literally almost clicking your fingers.

D. Understanding Prejudice

Interviewees also spent some time trying to explain and understand the assumptions made about them. The Goth interviewees explained the prejudice they experienced in three main ways: the fact that Goths are not part of the 'social norm', insecurity/fear on the part of their abusers, or their desire to 'look good'.

Ann

I do feel, I mean obviously being Goth you kindof get rejected don't you, aren't part of the social norm.

Gerald

I always say they're just, looking for something to sortof, put themselves one up on, their mates and stuff, so, it's weird, I always, sortof justify in my head some kindof inferiority complex, they're always, coz they're not, secure in the group or something and they just need to try and, show off say look 'I've done, this' and all the rest of it.

Gerald also states that people are 'invariably scared by what they don't understand', and Adam suggests an element of homophobia in people responding negatively to Goths, since male Goths dress up and wear make-up.

Carrie also constructs prejudice against her group as seemingly more acceptable than other types of prejudice since she *chooses* to be Goth.

Carrie

Yeah I think it's it's, much more accepted as well, it's **OK** for them, to do this to us because we made the choice to dress like this, that's what it comes down to.

Gerald and Carrie go on to argue that prejudice against Goths is seen as more acceptable than homophobia or racism because of this element of choice. This issue of whether Goth identity is 'natural' or a

matter of choice came up several times. The assumption here is that prejudice is less acceptable when it is directed at people who have no choice about their appearance or lifestyle. This echoes discourses about sexuality: some anti-gay campaigners argue that homosexuality is a choice, and some gay-rights activists counter that it is an 'innate' condition. A strong discourse in Western culture at present seems to be that things with biological origins are somehow more 'real' than products of socialisation or cultural norms. Some of the interviewees argued that being Goth was not something that they could help since it is the only way they feel comfortable or 'right'. This discourse may be used because it counters the claim that Goth identity is chosen, and the prejudice that such a claim could legitimise.

Gerald and Carrie

Gerald: walking back yesterday in that light blue shirt and stuff from work I felt like a right tit, I feel **so** awkward just, wandering around it's just, it does feel **wrong** on me, which is bizarre most people th, just don't understand that, as a concept and stuff but, it just, feels awkward it doesn't feel right, I sortof, I mean when I went down for the interview actually I mean I saw a reflection of myself in, in um, sortof window wearing exactly the same and I didn't recognise myself, there was a couple of seconds before I twigged it was actually **me**, and stuff so

Carrie: yeah I I, totally understand that coz um, when I went to [holiday abroad] last year, and, it was, really too hot to wear what I'd normally wear, um, so, I had to change to wearing green sortof kaki type stuff and, you know a few, a few years before, I did wear, quite a lot of, of kaki but um, it just, didn't feel **right** and, once I'd, um, once I got to [city] and I tried on, some, stuff in a, in a Goth, fetish type, store I really, didn't wanna take it off again, coz, it just, it does feel wrong and I just feel I look very unattractive wearing, that as well, coz that's just, I don't know it's weird but.

Gerald: there was no sortof **conscious** decision involved there.

Georgina also talks about being comfortable in Goth clothes, and her feelings of anxiety when her mother would not let her wear them. Overall, the Goth interviewees often say that they could not easily dress in any other way, for example when they talk about maintaining their identity

in future. Also, many of the interviewees say that they have tried to fit in with the mainstream and failed, often at school. This failure is presented as another reason why they could not be anything other than 'other'.

Like the Goths, the Pagan interviewees explained the prejudice against them in terms of general ignorance and fear of difference. However, they also spent some time exploring prejudice in historical terms. They laid a lot of responsibility on early Christians who labelled Pagans as 'evil'. Ann, Daisy and Nikki all describe how early Christians renamed the Pagan god Pan as Satan. They call this a clever ploy to convert Pagans to Christianity. They also talk about accusations of child sacrifice as being a similar technique used by Christians to demonise Pagans, which remains in jokes and fears about Pagans today. As in previous quotes, the interviewees depict Christianity as authoritarian, structured and hierarchical, and construct Paganism in contrast to this as free and open.

Ann

Witchcraft isn't really linked to Satanism

[Interviewer asks: so why did, why do people make that connection]

the church, when they came over to this country they said 'right then, you're a Satanist' because um, Satan is **Pan**, anyway so he's he's a major Pagan god, um, so that's where they get it from it it's just bred into people, people just think, that's what it is now because, I mean the church did a good job of it then really didn't they, I mean if you're going to come over what's the best sales pitch ever, say 'what you're doing now, paganism is, evil, and that you're all gonna, **burn** for eternity for believing in that so believe **ours** instead and give us money, and you'll be alright' (laughs).

A discourse that came across very clearly in the Pagan interviews was this use of history to justify their beliefs. All the Pagans traced their religion to ancient roots. Here they are drawing on a wider social discourse, which assumes that age confers authenticity. Such an argument is often used, for example, by those in favour of meat-eating or fox-hunting. Like the discourse of being 'scientific', the discourse of 'antiquity' serves to justify and legitimise beliefs or behaviour.

One fascinating aspect of this discourse was this way in which interviewees told the history of Paganism as the story of a group of persecuted outsiders. This echoes the stories they tell about their own

persecution. It seems that the historical discourse legitimises their own experiences, making them part of a group who have suffered for centuries. Perhaps the historical background also helps to justify their adherence to the group. Interviewees make comparisons between witch-burning and the Jewish holocaust and between the Christian taking of Pagan holy sites and white Australians stealing aboriginal sites. These links serve to construct Pagans as a group who have a right to redress after years of persecution.

3. Conclusions: 'The Other Society'

My interviews with Goths and Pagans identified many similarities between the two groups. All the interviewees said they were perceived as Satanic, evil or freakish. Both Goths and Pagans were also aware of their role as 'outsiders'. They spoke about prejudice from 'people' and 'them', suggesting that they feel that most of society perceives them negatively. The interviewees identified themselves in contrast to the 'mainstream' and the 'norm', generally constructing this as rule-governed, inflexible and intolerant, whilst their group was free, open-minded and accepting. The Goths generally constructed their identities in contrast to 'normal' people of their age who followed fashion and trendy music. The Pagans constructed their religion in contrast to Christianity, which they described as part of mainstream culture. It appears that members of both groups have responded to accusations of 'otherness' and 'difference' by embracing these qualities as positive. This process is evident in both the personal histories told by the interviewees, and their wider discourses about the history of their groups.

The idea of otherness involved some interesting contradictions. When relating experiences of prejudice, the interviewees often used 'normalising devices', constructing themselves as 'ordinary people' under attack³⁰. At other points, however, they constructed the 'norm' as something they wished to evade. Such behaviour is typical of people in general: most of us use different rhetorical devices at different times, when we are trying to create specific effects³¹. The discourse of being an 'everyday person' encourages other people to sympathise with our situation, whereas the discourse of being 'different' emphasises our individuality and uniqueness.

Another aspect of 'otherness' that the interviewees had to negotiate was the possible criticism that they, themselves, were being intolerant or making assumptions by generalising about 'norms' or 'the mainstream'. Most of them either justified this by using discourses such as 'they label us' and 'they are the dominant group in society'. Alternatively, they mentioned that they had friends who were normal or Christian.

It appears, then, that the idea of otherness is a major theme in the self-construction of members of both groups. It is not surprising perhaps that Su and Adam, two of the Goth interviewees, have set up a group at their college called 'the other society'.

Notes

- 1 Chesters, 2001.
- 2 For example, Busman, 1990, 38; Sullivan, 1990, 24.
- 3 Whitworth, 1999, 5.
- 4 Smith, 1999, 12.
- 5 Hooper, 2002, 2.
- 6 Wright and Millar, 1999.
- 7 Elcock, 2001.
- 8 logosresourcepages.org/pagen.html
- 9 www.demonbuster.com
- 10 Elcock, 2001.
- 11 Tajfel and Turner, 1979.
- 12 Wetherell, 1996.
- 13 Baumeister, 1996.
- 14 Widdecombe, 1993.
- 15 For example, Kemp, 1993.
- 16 Elcock and Adair, 1996.
- 17 Chesters, 2001.
- 18 Edwards and Potter, 1992.
- 19 Wooffitt, 1992.
- 20 Wooffitt, 1992.
- 21 Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998.
- 22 Wooffitt, 1992.
- 23 Wooffitt, 1992.
- 24 Jefferson, 1984.
- 25 Baumeister, 1996.
- 26 Elcock and Adair, 1996.
- 27 Tajfel and Turner, 1979.
- 28 Jefferson, 1991.
- 29 Edwards and Potter, 1992.
- 30 Jefferson, 1984.
- 31 Potter, 1996.

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Notes on Contributors

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