


Please cite the Published Version

Jenkinson, JK  (2015) Dress, Music, Gender and Emotion: Methods for exploring lived experience of women in post-war youth culture. In: Fashion and Gender Symposium, 01 May 2015 - 02 May 2015, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Publisher: University of Minnesota

Version: Accepted Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/490/>

Usage rights:  In Copyright

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

**Dress, Music, Gender and Emotion:
Methods for exploring lived experience of women in post-war youth culture.**

Jo Jenkinson, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

The intersections of fashion, music and British youth culture have received extensive coverage. Although gender is central to the debate, the participation of women in youth culture is often marginalised and not explored in depth. It is difficult to hear women's experience above male-dominated music and fashion-image stories; the aim of the research introduced in this paper is to establish a method capable of uncovering women's voices in post-war youth culture. This is a pilot study leading to the methodological approach that will be adopted for a more detailed project: 'One of the Boys: Female Attitude, Emotion and Experience in Northern British Youth Culture'. The project seeks to identify women who rejected a typically feminine appearance, exploring the relationship between their choices in dress and music, and their concepts of gender and self. The method envisioned for analysing and understanding women's personal narratives will focus on the dynamic interplay between oral history, photography, documentation of personal wardrobes, and web-based data.

The inclusion of women in postwar subcultures has not gone unnoticed. However, the literature has been biased towards women's passive participation in subculture, as girlfriend or fan rather than protagonist (Garber and McRobbie 1976). The male-dominance of post-war youth history remains largely unchallenged. However, recent research by Shehnaz Suterwalla (2013) has contested conventional presentations of female roles through the use of oral histories, a method Suterwalla describes as 'listening between the gaps of traditional sources' (2013:168). Through the conversations with the women in these marginalised cultural groups we get a sense of how it felt to take part, and the role dress played for these women. Suterwalla (2013) uses the terms 'real life' and 'ordinary', observing disconnect between the stereotypical image of the London Punk for example and the reality of the actual woman for whom the look was a sustainable part of everyday life. The importance of the everyday is reinforced by the work of Maura Banim and Alison Guy (2000) who acknowledged that few theoretical approaches addressed the experience of wearing clothes in daily life, and how the women live with or through their clothes; in summary, how women come to understand themselves through clothing. Similarly, Sophie Woodward's (2005) wardrobe interviews investigate the way women combine individual garments to create a personal look. Her interest lies not in the individual garments but in the way outfits are assembled and how the clothes feel. 'What goes together is taken in terms of what feels right' (2005: 21). These 'up close' methods of research promise a greater understanding of the lived experience of dress and offer possibilities for insight into how the women being studied actually felt, especially how their dress and music choices shaped their experience and emotions.

Much of what we understand about gender and youth culture comes through the analysis of photography. Not only through styled fashion shoots in published fashion media but through documentary photography and film footage. Ken Russell's photographs of London 'Teddy Girls' featured in *Picture Post* (1955) are widely cited as post-war counter-fashion, but recent interviews with the subjects (Dawoud 2013) suggest that previous assumptions are flawed, as the women were partly styled by Russell, diminishing the authenticity of the photos as documents of ordinary lived experience. As authentic lived experience is central to this project, family 'albums' are seen as a more profitable source of visual information, while offering insight into time and

place through their materiality as cultural artefacts. The 'What We Wore' project (Manandhar 2014) takes a fresh approach to the documentation of subculture, collecting personal snapshots from an open pool of participants through engagement online and public scanning events. In contrast to the male-biased urban settings of the most publicised images of youth subculture, Manandhar's participants are often shown in domestic surroundings. This spatial aspect of gendering has been explored through Sian Lincoln's (2012) ethnographic research into youth culture and private space, having points in common with Woodward's (2005) observation of dress in the bedroom environment. These snapshot images have more to say about the emotions and experience of everyday female existence and suggest a means for avoiding gender stereotypes in the study of dress, music and youth. Manandhar's (2014) project used the web not only to document the history of dress and subculture but also as a tool to attract participants. As identifying participants is an important issue for the proposed research similar digital tools will be explored as a means to disseminating the personal images and soundtracks of women's lives whilst potentially aiding purposive sampling.

The research presented here is a first step in unpicking what led some women to dress on the fashion periphery, and whether their involvement in particular youth music cultures was active in shaping their sartorial choices. It seeks an understanding from the inside, examining the hidden soundtracks of young women's lives rather than more public, event-oriented music interactions. How do these soundtracks heighten the experience of dressing, and how does this interaction provide an emotional background to the gendered self? This paper presents the results of the first pilot study, and evaluates potential research methods in terms of exploring the disruptive elements of youth culture, and questioning what we know about women's responses to and interaction with clothing and music.

- Dawoud, E. (2013) 'Who were the Teddy Girls? Teenage Film Blog' [online] [Accessed 05 January 2015] <http://www.teenagefilm.com/archives/archive-fever/who-were-the-teddy-girls/>
- Garber, J. and McRobbie, A. (1976) 'Girls and Subcultures' in: Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds.) *Resistance through Rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. London: Hutchinson, 209-22.
- Banim, M. Guy, A. (2000) 'Personal Collections: Women's clothing use and identity,' *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9:3, 313-27.
- Lincoln, S. (2012) *Youth Culture and Private Space*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Manandhar, N. (2014) *What We Wore: A People's History of British Style*. London: Prestel.
- Suterwalla, S. (2013) 'From Punk to Hijab; Women's embodied dress as performative resistance, 1970s to present,' in: Partington, M. and Sandrino, L. (eds.) *Oral History in the Visual Arts*. London: Bloomsbury, 161-69.
- Woodward, S. (2005) 'Looking good: Feeling right – Aesthetics of the self,' in: Kuchler, S. and Miller, D. (eds.) *Clothing as Material Culture*. Oxford: Berg, 21-39.