Article

Punk is just a state of mind: Exploring what punk means to older punk women

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Abstract

What does punk mean to older punk women? And how are such understandings interwoven with experiences of ageing and gender? The complexity in defining punk has been noted and it has been suggested that this complexity in part results from punk's dislike of being labelled/categorised. Drawing upon interviews with 22 self-identifying older punk women, this article considers how they conceived punk as 'a state of mind', exploring the four shared punk values seen to comprise this: DIY, subversion, political consciousness and community. An unpacking of these values in terms of what they might 'look like' and how they are put into action by the women highlights the considerable roles ageing and gender play.

Keywords

ageing, gender, identity, punk, subculture

Introduction

The complexity in defining punk has been noted (Sabin, 1999) and it has been suggested that this complexity in part results from punk's dislike of being labelled/categorised (Beer, 2014). Yet defining punk retains discussion throughout subcultural literature. Exploring participants' constructions of what punk is contributes towards a greater understanding of how they then construct a punk identity. Such discussions, however, have a tendency to contribute to the marginalisation of particular groups within punk. Stewart (2019) raises, for example, the continued marginalisation of LGBTQIA individuals, people of colour and disabled people within punk. This article will explore how punk had become a 'state of mind', and what this entailed, for another marginalised group within punk – older punk women. First I will consider relevant literature and demonstrate how, despite increasingly exploring the lived experiences of women, punk

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scholarship continues to render older punk women largely invisible. After detailing some methodological context I will introduce the changing nature of the women's defining of punk before exploring a set of core values raised: DIY, subversion, political consciousness and community. Through a discussion of these values I highlight the role of both ageing and gender in how punk is defined and how punk identity is constructed, contributing previously marginalised voices to ongoing academic discussions.

Punk, youth, gender

Commonly, punk was theorised as both a male-dominated subculture and one which was youth centred (Hebdige, 1998) yet there is now growing recognition of the presence of women within punk. Additionally, the association between punk and youth has begun to change with research on older punk fans within the wider context of post-youth subcultural work (Andes, 2002; Bennett, 2006; Bennett & Hodkinson, 2012). This reflects an increasing academic interest in the ageing popular music audience more generally over the last 20 years (Bennett, 2018). Rather than understanding such individuals as 'clinging onto their youth' or 'refusing to grow up', a cultural ageing perspective on this phenomenon can serve to show instead that such youth cultural identities can 'provide the basis of more stable and evolving identities over the life course' (Bennett, 2018, p. 49). Informed by such an approach, and indeed this academic justification, there has been some consideration of the ageing punk (Bennett, 2006, 2012, 2013). However, the limited inclusion of older punk women in such research samples or attention to gender analysis means knowledge produced can be critiqued as being 'malestream' (Gurney, 1997; Oakley, 1998). Existing theoretical and conceptual understanding of punks fails then to consider the interaction between ageing, gender and subcultural affiliation. This leaves various questions unanswered concerning what punk means to older punk women, what role punk plays in their everyday lives and their identification, and how punk has intersected with their experiences of gender and ageing.

Initial work by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) conceptualised youth cultures, or subcultures, as bounded, homogeneous groupings of committed youth (Hall & Jefferson, 2006; Muggleton, 2000) and this is where punk as a topic for academic enquiry really emerged (Hebdige, 1998). The concept of subculture utilised by the CCCS has been critiqued as holding little relevance to current youth culture (Bennett, 1999) as well as for the absence of girls/women in its analysis (McRobbie with Garber, 1991). There has been an increased focus on females within subcultural literature more broadly since the critique made above, including research on girls/women in Goth (Brill, 2007), metal (Hill, 2016), hip-hop (Vasan, 2011), rave (Pini, 2001) and skateboarding (Pomerantz et al., 2004). There is also now a growing body of research focusing solely on punk women (some of which is highlighted below) or considering gender in punk more broadly (Hanson, 2017; Liptrot, 2014; Sharp & Threadgold, 2020).

Where academia does focus on female punks rather than female punk musicians, the attention is usually framed by the fact these punks/punk musicians are seen as a minority within a masculine subculture (in terms of male participants outnumbering females and punk being seen to rest upon particular notions of masculinity) (Griffin, 2012; Leblanc, 2002; Roman, 1988). Leblanc's (2002) research considers how punk 'girls' negotiated

gender within a subculture which is typically, as noted above, coded as male (in terms of the themes, behaviours and so forth). Leblanc (2002) argues the punk subculture is masculinist; for example, male punks outnumber females and the codes/norms of punk are heavily masculine. In addition to this, male dominance occurs through male punks' expectations of and interactions with female punks – through things such as abuse, chivalry and sexual pressures – all of which involve contradictions being placed on punk girls (Leblanc, 2002). Exploring how punk males' relations with punk girls construct the masculinism of the punk subculture in these ways allowed Leblanc (2002) to see how this in turn affected the punk girls' constructions of femininity and punk identities. She found that punk girls challenged dominant, or mainstream, culture by identifying as punk and additionally challenged the masculine norms of the punk subculture by combining discourses of femininity with those of punk – they adopted established, masculine punk style yet juxtaposed this with feminine aspects in both their style and behaviour (Leblanc, 2002).

In addition to scholarly work analysing punk and gender there has been a significant body of literature more recently which explores gender and sexuality within punk (Sharp, 2019; Sharp & Nilan, 2015, 2017). Despite this, there remains a lack of literature on 'post-youth' punk women, with research focusing predominantly on punk girls/women in their teenage years or twenties. Samples therefore either err on the side of younger punks and/or analysis concerning ageing is limited or non-existent. Leblanc (2002), for example, focused on those she termed 'punk girls' and this is reflected in the demography of her sample with only two participants out of 40 being aged 30 years and above. Overall then there has been limited scope for considering the relationships between punk, gender *and* ageing.

Methodology and methods

This article draws upon qualitative data from 16 semi-structured interviews (one paired) and five email interviews with older punk women, totalling 22 participants. Here I will justify some of the methodological decisions taken and also highlight, albeit it fairly briefly given space, the feminist underpinnings of this work. Qualitative methods were deemed suitable as I wanted to explore participants' understandings of the social world (Bryman, 2004). The sample was acquired through a call out for volunteers online and word of mouth, though some snowball sampling also emerged from this. The initial criterion for inclusion was 'punk women over the age of 30 years old' and potential participants could decide for themselves whether they fitted this description to avoid any imposition of what was considered 'punk'. Bennett (2006) noted some difficulties in reaching older punk women in his research, musing that perhaps their fandom had become a highly personal, and therefore more private, issue. I did not experience similar difficulties in gathering my own sample of women. It is possible that being a woman helped in this process, though it would not be something I could say with certainty.

The research methodology was informed by both feminism and inductivism. Feminist methodology might only be characterised by the way it is 'shaped by feminist theory, politics and ethics and grounded in women's experience' (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2006, p. 16). Part of my rationale for conducting research on older punk women was to

provide a marginalised group with a voice; reflecting how feminist research commonly focuses on women's and other marginalised groups' lived experiences (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004). A feminist-informed methodology also involved addressing questions around power dynamics throughout the research process (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004). An inductive approach, for example, allowed for themes and foci to emerge from the participants rather than the researcher being 'taken for granted as the knowing party' (Nagy Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 12). Strong reflexivity was also engaged in throughout the research process (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004).

The need for reflexivity was additionally important in this research due to my position as an insider. There are various examples of insider research involving punk (including Leblanc, 2002; Taylor, 2011) and as Sharp and Threadgold (2020) note there exists extensive writing on techniques of insider research amongst music subcultures more broadly. Since childhood, punk has been an important facet of my identity; indeed, my own involvement in punk was fundamental in choosing to explore punk academically. Reflexivity around this featured across the research process and I was made aware of both the benefits and also the pitfalls that insider research could pose. Thus my dual identity as both an insider and a researcher demanded a reflexive approach throughout the research process so as to balance potential benefits with potential difficulties (Hodkinson, 2005).

My research, though taking much inspiration from grounded theory, would be considered a 'weak' version of it (Gibson & Hartman 2014). Whilst theory was grounded in the participants' perspectives (Gibson & Hartman 2014), characteristics of grounded theory, such as theoretical sampling, were not wholly employed nor was 'openness' fully achieved (an insightful account concerning the difficulties of realising complete openness has been provided by Hodkinson, 2009).

Ethical clearance was granted from my affiliated academic institution. Though anonymity is considered part of ethical research practice, Downes et al. (2013) acknowledge how this might be problematic with research concerned with DIY cultures (e.g. punk). Due to the activist nature of some DIY cultures, research participants might wish to be known or named and the 'practice of imposing pseudonyms and removing identifiable information can undermine participant labour, power and agency' (Downes et al., 2013, p. 108). Such a position is also in keeping with feminist thinking and my participants were therefore asked if they wished to be anonymous. More participants than not said they wished to be named.

The following sections will now draw upon these interviews in discussing how punk was defined by the participants. Firstly the notion of 'changing definitions' will be considered and how punk had become a 'state of mind' for the women I spoke with. Then the set of core punk values which the participants identified – DIY, subversion, political consciousness and community – will be explored with consideration given to the role of both ageing and gender.

Changing definitions

A change emerged from most of the interviews in the way the women *had* defined punk compared to how they *now* defined it – a stronger sense emerged that punk was now

largely a set of values for most of the participants. Of course it is the case that what is being compared here is how they now define punk in comparison to what they believe to have been their definition of punk during their initial involvement – this therefore involves reflection on their part and it could be said what is revealed are their constructions of this rather than the reality. But that is not to say this is any less important. In the case of Andes' (2002) work there was also this notion of reflection, with participants reflecting back to when they were first made aware of or exposed to punk. That aside, what could be made of why these changes in defining punk took place amongst the women I spoke to? One suggestion may be that the change in definition is merely the result of longevity and that how punk is perceived by participants merely changes over time, arguably as they become more 'submerged' into it. Suzy spoke of it becoming less 'superficial' for example. This relates to the sense of internalisation of 'punkness' over time, with things which formed part of initial definitions of punk (e.g. the aesthetics) slipping away as the values and beliefs become more important and therefore central to how they define punk. Such an internalisation was demonstrated too by the older punk men who comprised Bennett's (2006) sample whereby participants shifted from externally communicating their punkness (e.g. through clothes) to punk becoming a lifestyle of ingrained ideas and beliefs.

For women who had once defined punk as involving a particular aesthetic or style, the move away from this aspect in their definition of punk seemed framed within ageing generally. When talking about a 'punk' way of dressing Jess stated you 'did all that when younger' as if this was something you just did whilst growing up rather than committing to. Ces also linked an overly punk way of dressing to youth, expressing that whilst when you were young it was felt necessary to use your clothes to say who you were and what you listened to, that was no longer necessary. These ideas concerning punk style and youth might also be representative of broader expectations concerning appearance and ageing with particular things being suitable when you were young. These ideas are illustrated by Milly:

> . . . when I was dressing punk an' I thought that's what you had to do an I really enjoyed it and I loved the style . . . but as I got older I just came to realise that I didn't want to dress like that anymore and to be honest I think, 'cause I'm 51 now, and I see women my age dressing in tartan mini-skirts and things and to be honest I think they look silly . . . I sound really judgemental . . . if women my age want to wear a short skirt with fishnet tights or stocking then it's up to them. Personally I choose not to because I don't think it looks right somehow.

The changing nature of the women's conceptualisation of punk with it becoming viewed as a 'state of mind' again may be seen in light of Andes' (2002) punk career model but also Haenfler's (2006) work on older straight-edgers (a sample consisting of both women/men but predominantly of men). Haenfler (2006) considers how, at the start of their sXe careers, youth go to great lengths to adhere to subcultural rules regarding style and fashion, but that this over time changes and sXe becomes a lifestyle underpinned by a philosophy. Similarly, in Andes' (2002) last stage, 'transcendence', punks are concerned with expressing an ideological commitment to the subculture rather than adhering to accepted understandings of punk behaviour (e.g. dressing according to a punk style).

Whilst the majority of participants' initial interest in punk had been grounded in the associated music (and some had initially adopted what they perceived as a punk style), there was this sense then of their punk identity having moved beyond that – punk had become an attitude, a way of thinking. Whilst I have noted already that this notion of punk becoming a 'state of mind' for my participants seems to mirror Bennett's (2006) findings amongst his sample of older punk men, what comprises these ideas and beliefs is only fleetingly considered by Bennett (2006). If punk is commonly conceived as a state of mind, attitude or way of thinking, what exactly is the nature then of this? A set of core values emerged from my participants: DIY, subversion, political consciousness and community. Given the geographical spread of the women interviewed these values can be seen as constituting core values of punk, rather than merely the core values of a particular punk community/geographical scene (a logic also employed by Moran, 2010). As Bernhard (2019) found too, geographical diversity amongst participants can be coupled with 'comparable details of insider knowledge' (p. 20); highlighting too the relevance of a concept such as 'scene' when conceptualising punk in recognising its translocal yet connected quality (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

'Do-it-yourself' or 'doing-it-yourself' (DIY)

A number of participants referred specifically to ' DIY' as a core punk value and DIY as a core punk value has been noted in numerous academic texts (e.g. Beer, 2014; Glasper, 2014; Moran, 2010; O'Hara, 1999) with some even referring specifically to punk as 'DIY punk' (e.g. Griffin, 2012; Moran, 2010). DIY stands for 'do-it-yourself', or 'doing-it-yourself'. The DIY ethic is grounded both in the values of autonomy and community or 'collective independence' (Martin-Iverson, 2014, p. 187) and this notion of DIY possessing both independent ('you') and collective elements was reflected in the accounts of my participants. Related to this is the suggestion from O'Hara (1999) that DIY is built upon ideas from anarchism concerning individual responsibility and cooperation in enacting change. Both of these can help in understanding what at first glance would have appeared to be a contradiction in terms of the individual/collective notion emerging from my participants' accounts of DIY.

Overall there was a sense that DIY involved being proactive and here the idea of individual responsibility was evident. As Sam said: 'if it's not there and you want it, make it yourself'. Further elaborations did, however, bypass just the literal making of things, e.g. 'zines or craft, including other creative activities such as writing and playing music, or getting involved in political activity as a means of 'making things' happen. This breadth of examples of how DIY could be enacted is interesting when considering existing consideration of DIY punk, as some accounts (e.g. Hannerz, 2015; Martin-Iverson, 2014; O'Hara, 1999) have tended to concentrate on DIY in the context of music (be it playing in a band or putting on gigs). As illustrated by some of the women in my sample, however, DIY does not necessarily have to be within the context of musical endeavours.

A way that DIY could translate in different ways outside of a music context involved crafting. Lindsey and Sam, specifically, raised their engagement in handcrafts in their interviews and this can be unpacked further in relation to the DIY value associated with

punk. One of the photos Lindsey provided prior to her interview showed a collection of cushions and she elaborated on this when we spoke:

> . . . so the stuff on the picture – some of that was made by me, some of it was made by other people . . . that sort of craft thing of making stuff myself, like, I never buy cushions; why would you buy a cushion when you can make one? [laughs] [Also] if I do buy something . . . crafty then, you know, I'll try to buy it from somebody who's doing it for themselves, . . . stuff that doesn't come from a big shop or whatever, I try and support people who are being independent.

This can be read as demonstrating a more traditional and/or general conceptualisation of DIY: DIY as being about doing-it-yourself in the sense of just the making of things, the use of hand skills. It demonstrates too the opportunities provided by DIY to resist capitalist mass consumerism (Stalp, 2015; Winge & Stalp, 2013). This comes through particularly in Lindsey's comment concerning the supporting of, for example, independent (e.g. not mass produced, high profit driven) producers. Moran (2010) has considered how DIY within punk often comes as a necessity, resulting from the low economic income of those involved. Lindsey's making of a cushion comes not out of necessity, however, but a reflexive decision to step back from mass consumption. Moran (2010) does acknowledge a link between low economic income and the relatively young nature of the participants in the punk subculture, so this serves to illustrate the importance of research samples including older punks as well as older punk women (Moran's sample was specifically eight punk men).

Making things demonstrates that idea again of being proactive and doing things for yourself (and others). Sam linked this too to speaking out about social issues and engaging in political action:

> . . . I've done bits of what I call craftivism as well . . . [Locally] a drunk driver had crashed into [some] railings and gone into this wall and for months it'd just been left with like temporary railings on and it's a busy corner an' I just thought they're just not bothering to fix it so then one night, in the middle of the night, me and a friend and my son went down . . . and I crocheted tons and tons of flowers and we just (this entire section of fencing) covered it in flowers and ribbons.

Acts such as these identified by Sam challenge the notion of such activities being reserved for the private sphere (Stalp, 2015). What Sam describes can be seen as a form of 'yarn bombing' whereby crocheted or knitted items are used as a form of graffiti, as part of a protest activity (Wolfram Cox & Minahan, 2015). Using domestic handcrafts (such as crocheting, knitting, sewing) more generally as a form of resistance or subversion has emerged within third wave feminism (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Stalp, 2015).

It is worth highlighting the overlaps here with the activism of riotgrrrl. Riotgrrl can be seen as a punk feminism, emerging in response to sexism within American punk scenes in the late 1980s with DIY as a core value (Downes, 2007). It proposed an alternative way of engaging in feminist activism; advocating everyday DIY cultural subversions which could take the form of music but also the creation of art or the making of 'zines (Downes, 2007). Both Lindsey and Sam's accounts demonstrate the DIY value being materialised

through crafting. Since the industrial revolution, domestic handcrafts have been predominantly associated with women (Scott & Keates, 2004) and Stalp (2015) notes that activities such as sewing and knitting are seen as feminine, practised mainly by ageing women in the private sphere. Most of my research participants were aware of common societal stereotypes of older women and critical of them. Seeing their engagement in craft activities through a punk DIY lens allowed participants such as Lindsey and Sam to offer some resistance to such stereotypes. It might be argued then that instead of merely engaging in reflexive complicity (through a more private expression of punk DIY coded as traditionally feminine) they were actually engaging in defiant labour (Sharp & Threadgold, 2020).

Subversion

Subversion was referred to both directly and indirectly by participants but the source of power/authority that the subversion was aimed at could be conceptualised differently. For some subversion comprised of wider/mainstream society (participant's term) being conceived as the authority to undermine, as demonstrated by Sam when talking about DIY as a subversive tool – 'you don't always have to toe the party line, you can do your own thing'. This was echoed in other interviews including Sharon who spoke of 'not being afraid to get up and do something, not being stopped by the rules of society'.

For one participant, subversion was conceptualised as undermining the power/authority of other punks. Punk 'others' were used as a reference point and seen as representing the existence of a typical way to be or do punk. 'Doing your own thing' for Naja was doing something different to what she perceived punk others as doing. Speaking about a popular punk event and her choice of clothing, Naja said:

> I'm not gonna wear what the rest of them wear and I'm not going to do what the rest of them do. Because that's what they all do at [event] 'cause they're all 'punks'. So I'm gonna go do something different.

Some saw DIY as a tool for subversion. This could again be evidence of DIY being concerned with individual responsibility. Political awareness and involvement was a recurring theme across the interviews (discussed further below) and perhaps it could be said that this political awareness or consciousness too was a tool for subversion, as Rebecca illustrated – 'anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-transphobia, anti . . . the systems that keep those things in place and doing things to dismantle those systems'. Such points highlight how these four punk values could overlap and weave into each other.

Holding punk values could be a way of engaging in subversion within the context of social and physical ageing. Although there was acknowledgement of societal expectations around age and/or gender, some women were subversive in their defiance of these expectations:

> Most women knocking on 50 don't sleep in the back of vans on tour with their musician boyfriend in their down-time, nor do they go to punk gigs with people of all ages or go on marches or protests . . . it's not peculiar to punk women, of course, but mostly women my age tend to not do those things. (Morag)

It could be said that identifying with punk in itself is subversive for women as it could be seen as an alternative to what is referred to as normative femininity. This is the most valued form of femininity, involving characteristics such as beauty, humility, kindness, sexual desirability, sexual moderation and softness (Svahn, 1999 cited in Elm, 2009). Indeed Liptrot (2014) found that the punk women in her study were often attracted to punk initially because they saw it as transgressing conventional boundaries of femininity. Research of course has questioned, however, the degree to which such transgression can actually take place within a masculine space such as punk (Leblanc, 2002; Sharp & Threadgold, 2020).

Related to this, a number of the women I interviewed considered their dress to not adhere to societal expectations, e.g. what would be appropriate under normative femininity. The common markers of punk dress (Sklar & DeLong, 2012) have been argued as masculine by Leblanc (2002) and therefore punk dress could be a way of resisting or subverting normative femininity. The majority of my participants did not consider themselves to 'dress punk' however they largely recognised their dress as non-mainstream or 'alternative'. Adopting non-mainstream dress just generally, punk or otherwise, is not something 'nice girls' do, therefore resisting norms of femininity which include being good and non-controversial (Fox, 1977). Equally hair choices such as bright colours or styles such as Mohicans or Mohawks challenge normative feminine ideas concerning beauty in terms of hair (Wolf, 1991):

> When I cut my dreads off I, you know, bleached my hair and dyed it red and stuff and I've had it red ever since . . . I don't think I'm ever going to be kind of um a twinset and pearls kind of . . . woman. (Naefun)

Another area in which this operated was in terms of employment. Lindsey and Naja, for example, highlighted the importance of being engaged in work which offered some degree of flexibility or changeability. Naja did not see her job as a typical '9 to 5' and allowed her to travel, whilst Lindsey said of her work that: 'it's very easy to, um if you're in a place you don't like you can get out . . . you're not tied down, it's very escapable'. This could be understood further through a subversion lens whereby wider/mainstream society is conceived as the authority to undermine. Blatterer (2007) notes that a marker of adult status is stable full-time work therefore the engagement in work which is flexible or changeable can subvert the normative expectations concerning adulthood felt by the women.

Naja described her job as allowing her to rebel in a more acceptable way compared to what she saw as the type of rebellion typical of her youth:

> You rebel in different ways. I find it quite rebellious when . . . I'm the only woman and I think it's punk [when] I'm the only woman that goes [to specific worksites] on my own, with a bunch of men . . . they have to do as they're told. Because I'm in charge of them and I have to look after them. Now I think that's pretty punk . . . It's pretty scary . . . it's an adrenaline rush.

Naja had acknowledged in her interview how she was unable to rebel in the same way she had done whilst a young punk, yet she still needed to experience the same adrenaline

rush felt in her youth. The type of work she now did allowed her to rebel in a way which was in keeping with the expectations of adulthood/the expectation to engage in paid work. The very nature of the work afforded her that adrenaline rush whilst allowing her to rebel against societal expectations concerning what was expected of her as a woman.

On the topic of rebellion it is worth noting some of the complexities concerning this as an expression used by the participants and that of 'subversion'. Punk's rebellious quality was often cited as key to participants' initial attraction to it and they constructed rebellion as an activity or mindset of youth. When unfolding their punk biographies, women used new ways of describing this rebellious quality of punk: there was a move to understanding punk through terming it as subversion – rather than rebellion – though arguably the same qualities were being described. So the way participants were conceptualising subversion and rebellion mirrored each other – the only difference was the terminology being used and this association of rebellion with youth. By situating rebellion as a characteristic of youth, or adolescence, this allowed most of the women I spoke with to position themselves as different to their rebellious youth selves, e.g. different in the sense of having since transitioned into adulthood. Participants' characterisation of rebellion as tied to a particular period of the life-course echoes wider discourses which posit adolescence as a period of rebellion (Henderson et al., 2007), signalling an internalisation of the common age narratives we are exposed to from an early age (Gullette, 1997). 'Subversion' as a concept allowed them to negotiate, however, such punk ethos into adulthood. This was one way most of the women I spoke with demonstrated the process of 'learning ageing' (Gullette, 1997); evidencing their internalisation of age norms associated with adulthood.

Political consciousness

The relationship between punk and politics has been well documented and, more specifically, the adopting of anarchist principles within the punk movement (O'Hara, 1999; Worley, 2017) or left-wing politics more generally (Phillipov, 2006; Worley, 2017). As previously noted becoming (more) politically aware or conscious and/or getting involved in politics was a common theme that emerged from the interviews and could be considered another core punk value. For some participants this emerged over time. For example Briony said she had 'gone from thinking about it [punk] as being in a musical sense and then . . . more of an active political sense', whilst Suzy noted she now took 'more notice of the politics and ideals that bands sing about in their songs'. For Sharon, however, this appeared to be something which had been constant throughout since her first exposure to punk:

> . . . to me it feels like a real freedom to still have the same attitude, it still means the same to me in many ways, it is still the whole anarchy thing about it, taking responsibility for yourself, not being afraid to get up and do something, not being stopped by the rules of society . . . and that's to me still the essence of that, in some ways that hasn't changed.

Sharon's quote above also shows the interlinked nature of punk values, as I have already suggested above. Sharon here references DIY ('not being afraid to get up and do

something', 'taking responsibility for yourself'), subversion ('not being stopped by the rules of society') and politics ('the whole anarchy thing about it').

The most prevalent feeling amongst my sample was that politics was just built into and part of a broader punk ethos; it came as 'part of the package'. This was more implicit in the women's narratives where participants talked about politics being important to punk with no reference to these politics being located in music/lyrics, for example. Lindsey illustrated this when I asked her what she would say punk meant:

> It definitely comes back to DIY . . . that's about self-reliance I suppose and kind of knowing your own mind as well, just sayin' 'ok, what do I think about this and what can I do about it?' . . . Whether that's getting involved in politics or, I don't know, being a writer or playing music or making stuff yourself. All of that comes into it.

Again, there is the intersection of punk values – DIY and politics. For Lindsey the DIY principle was at the core of what she believed to be punk. Along with this is the assumption that embracing this DIY value would potentially mean becoming more politically active, based on the notion of punk entailing some kind of political consciousness.

Whilst participants often referred to particular political outlooks as tied to punk, only a minority labelled such an outlook as anarchist and it was more common for more generalised political affiliations to be made. This might reflect an unwillingness of punk (and by that virtue, then, punks) to label or categorise themselves or indeed things more widely. In their paired interview, Christine and Kristianne spoke at length about their confusion over and dislike of labels and society's/individuals' use of them. It is also worth noting how they saw an embrace of labels as done more by youth. Another argument is that this generalised reference to politics is a reflection of the particular biographies of the women I spoke to. It may not be a coincidence that 'anarchy', 'anarchism' or 'anarchist' were terms voiced by women who had lived through punk of the late 1970s and therefore felt able, or comfortable, using such language.

The more generalised political affiliations which emerged from the women's discussions concerned the linking of punk with leftist or left-wing politics or, more broadly, fighting social injustice, e.g. anti-racist, anti-fascist views. Most of the women talked about this directly. Lindsey highlighted this as something which had never changed for her:

> Social justice and just, you know, anything to do with equality – I think it bothered me then and then it bothers me now and I don't think that, well, I hope it doesn't change to be honest.

Animal rights and environmental concerns were recurring themes in terms of the political stance of punk – something again anarcho-punk specifically has been linked to. Jess, for example, spoke of running stalls for a conservation society at punk shows whilst Naefun spoke of the local vegan community she belonged to and how veganism and punk were often linked:

> It's kind of an integral part of the punk community I think, the whole veganism aspect. I'm not saying every punk in [location] is vegan or vegetarian because absolutely not, but I think it is a

key part of kind of that sense of identity and community around the whole kind of like animal rights and veganism issue.

Punk as linked to feminism emerged through a few of the women's accounts. Briony, when speaking about her initial entry into punk, said how this had resulted because of moving away from the metal scene as 'there's quite a lot of misogyny and attitudes towards women are not really good there' (argued too by Vasan, 2011). This implied that punk offered more of a feminist ethos in terms of gender relations and views of women.

Community

Community was predominantly seen as bound up with the DIY value, e.g. helping others, DIY as a group effort. There was also a sense that community more broadly and the maintenance of a sense of community was important to punk. Kristianne, Morag and Naefun saw this sense of being part of a wider community as part of their initial attraction to punk:

> What I liked about punk was . . . I felt like I belonged somewhere. (Kristianne)

> It meant a sense of belonging – of being part of a wonderful family of angry, disenchanted youths. (Morag)

> What initially drew me to the punk scene was about that sense of community and that sense [of] mutual respect for people . . . [it was about] like-minded people who share similar attitudes and similar values. (Naefun)

Naefun above draws upon the idea of the punk 'scene'. This concept of scene was used by 14 of the research participants (just over half of the sample) though two of these used scene in a non-punk context. This idea of scene is inextricably linked with the idea of community and one cannot be understood without the other. A punk scene could be conceptualised in terms of geographical location but punk scenes as generated through the collective musical efforts of people (which were not always conceptualised as tangible/ geographically located) was the more common understanding of 'scene', with 11 women using this understanding. O'Connor comments that 'When punks use the term "scene" they mean the active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity' (2002, p. 226). For five of the women I spoke to scene encapsulated the idea of a wider group of people who shared the same values. Here, scene is not just something contained within a particular geographical space but it is also being used synonymously for a community of people who have something in common – the idea of fitting in suggests this. This again raises the need to conceptualise punk in a way which recognises its translocal yet connected quality (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

Reflecting more broadly on the idea of community and these values described above, there could be a sense here of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2016) – that you could feel part of a wider group regardless of never meeting all of those group members. The way the term scene was sometimes used by the research participants could support

this. A difference here, however, is the way punk women felt there were indeed wider punk values which they shared with other group members whilst Anderson's (2016) community members do not necessarily have anything in common. Like the Goths in Hodkinson's (2002) research who experienced a sense of collectivity through stylistic practices, behaviours and values, it could be said the punk women I spoke with also experienced a sense of being part of a wider punk community through shared values.

Conclusion

Given the geographical spread of the 22 women I spoke with, the identification of four core common punk values amongst them demonstrates the significance of using the concept of scene (Bennett & Peterson, 2004) when speaking on contemporary punk. This article has unpacked these four core values, discussing what they might 'look like' and how they are put into action by older punk women whilst highlighting the roles ageing and gender play. Whilst then there was a commonality in values, it should also be clear from the discussion that how these values could be interpreted or acted upon could at times be diverging, supporting the value of a life-course approach to understanding gender and ageing.

My discussion noted a felt change over time in how many of the women I spoke with conceptualised punk, which sits with the proposition of understanding punk as a career (Andes, 2002) and career being a process (Becker, 1966). Examining punk women's past biographies as well as the present provided a deeper understanding of the relational nature of the attitudes and behaviours currently held/displayed and how (being) punk can be better understood as an unfolding, continual process (Emirbayer, 1997). This can be seen particularly with the value of subversion whereby conceptualising punk as involving subversion rather than rebellion allowed most of the women to then position themselves as having transitioned into adulthood.

The literature discussed at the start of this article demonstrated how limited current analysis of punk, ageing and gender is. The importance of considering how punk is conceptualised through a gender lens has been highlighted in this article; offering a more nuanced understanding of the lived experience of punks, particularly when ageing is taking into account as well. This research is therefore a contribution to a significant discussion in punk studies and part of a building scholarship concerning ageing punk women.

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