OH AGEISM UP YOURS! FEMALE PERSPECTIVES OF AGEING AND PUNK IDENTITIES ACROSS THE LIFECOURSE

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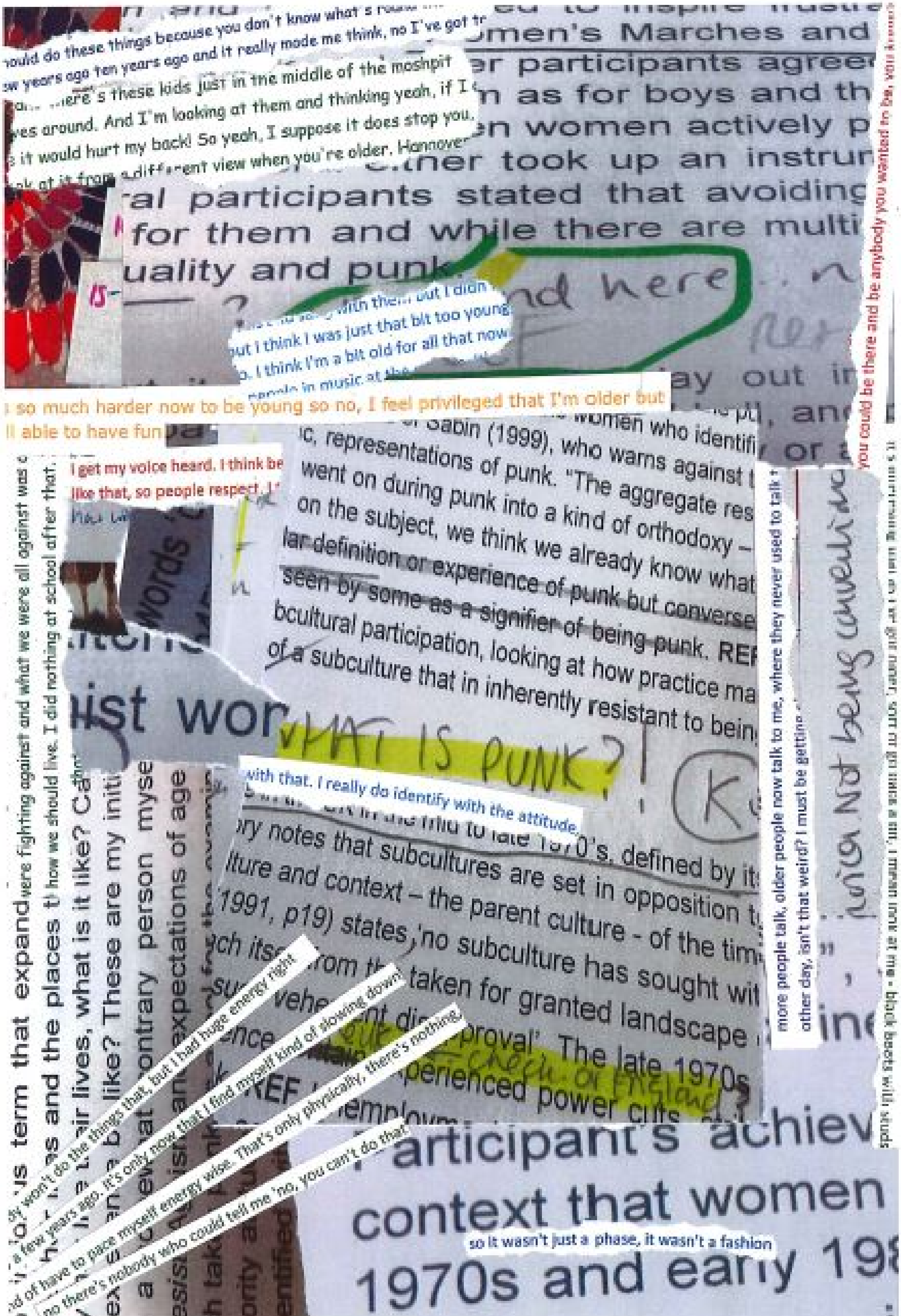

would do these things because you don't know what's round
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not being conventional
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Participant's achiev
context that women
so it wasn't just a phase, it wasn't a fashion
1970s and early 198

Abstract

The experience of ageing is relevant to everyone. Yet, older people in western societies are subject to cultural expectations that influence the way they act, look and spend their time. Ageing women are subject to gendered expectations throughout their lives, with the expectation to be 'age-appropriate' expanding beyond appearance to incorporate the way that older women live their lives and the places they go. If ageing means that women are meant to restrict the way they live their lives, what is it like? Ageism and expectations of age are powerful, but there are parallel influences. The study takes the legacies and influences of punk culture as a tool for the examination of age. As a subculture characterised by an anti-authority attitude, and a resistance to convention, women who identified with punk may be better equipped to resist conforming to wider cultural expectations of ageing. The study takes a feminist, qualitative approach to explore the experiences of women aged fifty to sixty-five who identified with punk, using the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology. Nineteen women were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and themes identified using thematic analysis. Five themes were identified: 'Everyday Ageism', 'The Punk Toolkit', 'The Feminist Toolkit', 'Work and Retirement' and 'Health'. The research concludes that the women in the study juxtapose their ageing experiences with a punk ethos, which remains of significance across the ageing lifecourse and is drawn upon, providing a sense of continuity. Moments of conformity occur across the lifecourse but do not disrupt an innate punk ethos. However, ageist cultural pressures remain powerful and this often results in a time-consuming inner narrative, negotiating ageist notions of 'age-appropriateness' with punk resistance to convention and conformity. Three concepts are introduced: the 'Punk Toolkit', the 'Feminist Toolkit' and the 'Ageist Forcefield', alongside recommendations for their use as practical tools in the ageing lifecourse, and to facilitate further research and reflective practice.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

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Thank you to the nineteen women that allowed me to interview them all around the UK, and whose experiences form the basis for this thesis – our conversations were the highlight before all the hard work really began. Poly Styrene must also be credited for inspiring the title of my thesis.

Talking through the research process has been a vital part of working out what to do and how to do it. My fellow research students have my gratitude for the solidarity. Elsewhere, my fellow age studies scholars and the *Punk Scholars Network* have given me both food for thought and some great nights out! Sam Lucas deserves a thank you for not only putting up with constant PhD talk, but engaging with it. Lastly, love and appreciation to Phil for his unwavering encouragement… and Poppy just because.

Contents

Introduction

‘Such is the denigration of old age that to call someone old in our culture is to insult them’ (Segal, 2014, p216).

The statement above forms the starting point of this research. We all age: the experience of ageing is relevant to everyone. Yet, older people in western societies are subject to cultural expectations that influence the way they act, look and spend their time. Older people are frequently characterised as a homogenous group (Cruikshank, 2013), no longer valued as individuals in the way that they could take for granted in their youth, no matter that ‘older age’ spans several decades. Expectations to conform occur across the lifecourse but the ones that older people are subject to, are constructed in particular, ageist ways. Ageing women are subject to specific pressures, their appearances as scrutinised as ever, but with the expectation to be ’age-appropriate’ (Blaikie, 1999; Twigg, 2007), an insidious term that expands beyond appearance to incorporate the way that older women live their lives and the places they go.

If ageing means that women are meant to restrict the way they live their lives, what is it like? Can expectations of ageing be resisted, and what might *this* experience be like? These are the initial reflections that inform this research. Nonetheless, as a somewhat contrary person myself, my thoughts immediately stray to the women who *resist.* Ageism and expectations of age are powerful (Gullette, 1997; Gilleard & Higgs, 2009; Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Martin et al, 2015) but there are parallel influences, when women construct their identities in older age. My research takes the legacies and influences of punk as a tool for the examination of age. As a subculture characterised by an anti-authority attitude and a resistance to convention, whether appearance or lifestyle, I explore whether women who identified with original era punk may be better equipped to resist expectations of age and to reject pressures to blend in and conform, if they do not wish to do so.

My research takes a feminist, qualitative approach to examine the experiences of nineteen women aged fifty to sixty-five, who identified with original era punk culture. The study explores their ageing experience and its potential integration with punk identity, using the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology (Twigg & Martin, 2015) to do so.

Structure of Chapters

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter One introduces the cultural and theoretical context of my research. Chapter Two introduces the design of the research project. Chapters Three to Seven are dedicated to the analysis of my findings, the five themes identified through thematic analysis of nineteen interviews. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, using the research findings in Chapters Three to Seven to respond to the research questions.

Chapter One introduces the cultural and theoretical context of the research, fostering an analytic understanding of the ageing experiences of older/midlife women who identified with original era punk. Many of these terms - 'midlife', 'original era', 'identify' - are open to interpretation, and clarification of the meanings within this thesis can be found in Appendix A. Chapter One reviews the literature pertaining to the research area and examines a spectrum of literature and research relating to ageing and the lifecourse (Katz, 2014), feminism, punk and subculture, weaving the subjects together to better understand the context of participants' experiences. The key theoretical framework of this research is cultural gerontology, which comprises a body of theories that enable age to be examined through the lens of culture, looking at how the depiction of older people contributes to the *experience* of age for the women in my study. At the same time, I draw upon ageing studies, which Katz notes (2014, p22) may be used to 'critique the practices by which current forms of knowledge and power about aging have assumed their authority as a form of truth'. This is explored in detail, alongside an examination of competing theories of age. A review of the literature on punk, subculture and 'ageing subculturally' leads to a synopsis of the existing research on 'ageing punks', highlighting the lacuna that justifies the research. Chapter One in its entirety

both informs the direction of my research and shapes the research questions, on which the research study is founded. These are:

Research Questions

(1) What is the meaning of 'punk' for older women in the study?

(2) What is the ageing experience for women in the study who identified with UK punk cultures?

(3) What is the impact of punk, if any, on the ageing lifecourse for these women?

Chapter Two introduces the design of the research project and aims to illuminate my personal experience of putting together a research project that was dependent upon the contributions of nineteen women, who volunteered their time and insights and who provided the entirely enjoyable context of honing my expertise of thinking and talking *with age* (Jennings & Gardner, 2012). Chapter Two draws on Chapter One, using the theoretical and cultural context of the research to provide the epistemological justification for the research project. The chapter explains the theoretical perspectives that inform the research process, outlines the feminist, qualitative methodology and method, and provides a detailed account of sourcing participants, collecting data through interview, the process of transcription and thematic analysis. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research process and of being a researcher. Chapter Two outlines the five themes that resulted from the data analysis and these are explored in the following five chapters.

Chapter Three, 'Everyday Ageism' responds to my second research question, revealing through its title that the ageing experience for women who identified with punk is not one that escapes ageism. 'Everyday Ageism' explores the ageism that the women in the research experience, observe and perpetuate. Incidences of ageism are detailed, from the outright to the subtle and pervasive. The insidiousness of ageism (Bytheway & Johnson, 1990; Gill, 2008) is underpinned by the difficulty many participants had with recalling incidents of ageism. Yet experiences of ageism *did* permeate interview recollections, even if not immediately recalled, or immediately recognised as ageism. Chapter Three introduces the concept of the 'Ageist Forcefield' to explain the dissonant sensation that seems to suggest that an older woman should not be somewhere, even

though she cannot easily recognise the influences that lead her to feel this way. The Ageist Forcefield functions as an invisible barrier surrounding certain shops and social spaces. It is difficult to categorise its reach because by its nature, it cannot be seen to be measured. Within Chapter Three, both the meaning and the impact of punk is drawn out through participants' resistance to age stereotypes and age expectations, cultural pressures that are at odds with the meaning of punk.

Chapter Four, 'The Punk Toolkit' explores why the meaning of punk might be at odds with ageist expectations for participants and in doing so, contributes to the first and third research questions. For the exploration of the meaning of punk for older women, plus the impact of punk on the ageing lifecourse, Chapter Four uses one of the interview questions "If you could take one thing from punk and pass it on, what would it be?" The answers to this question and the discussions that result, provide useful material for this thesis, alongside participants' descriptions of the punk ethos and its meaning in their lives. Chapter Four collates the facets of punk that make up the punk ethos and/or are important to participants and conceptualises them as a 'Punk Toolkit'. The Punk Toolkit comprises values, attitudes and practices that participants use across the lifecourse, a *personal* toolkit with which expectations for conformity and restriction in older age (Gullette, 1997; Gilleard & Higgs, 2009; Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Martin et al, 2015) can be resisted. The chapter explores this, including participants' examples of imagined use in older age. Chapter Four includes an examination of the 'moments of conformity' that occur in participants' lives, particularly early motherhood. For the women in the study, these moments of conformity do not disrupt an overall punk ethos.

Chapter Five 'The Feminist Toolkit' builds on the themes of Chapter Four, with a feminist focus. This chapter looks at how the women in the study use the inherent feminism of their personal punk ethos and this is conceptualised as the 'Feminist Toolkit'. Using a feminist eye to examine how participants experience both punk and an ageing lifecourse *as a woman,* this chapter provides material to answer all three research questions. The Feminist Toolkit takes specific aspects of the Punk Toolkit and examines them for their potential to critique and challenge misogyny, sexism and the pressure of gendered expectations in a patriarchal culture (Firestone, 1979; Lorde,

1984; Greer, 1999; Ahmed, 2017). Most, but not all participants identified themselves as feminists and this is explored. Chapter Five also examines the egalitarianism of punk culture through participants' experiences and considers the effect of gendered expectations on these women's lives, including career choice and whether to have children. The experiences of women who chose to be child free, a term that is defined in Appendix A and discussed in Chapter Five, triggered discussion of gendered roles and expectations and the impact on identity and lifestyle. In common with Chapter Four, this chapter uses the Feminist Toolkit to consider the ongoing impact of gendered expectations on the ageing lifecourse.

Chapter Six, 'Work and Retirement', takes account of the ageist cultural landscape of Chapter Three, considers the practical tools provided by the Punk and Feminist Toolkits and asks, with the juxtaposition of these three features, what is the experience of work and retirement for the women in the study? By analysing these features in the context of work and retirement, the chapter further explores the female ageing experience and the impact of punk on the ageing lifecourse to answer the second and third research questions. Chapter Six examines the influence of the punk ethos on work choices and career decisions. It then explores the impact of ageism and age expectations on the experiences of both jobseeking and being in work as a midlife woman. Work is identified as a positive part of the lifecourse for many participants. Nonetheless, exploration of the prospect of retirement makes the restrictions of work evident and this is explored within the chapter. For the majority of participants who have not reached pension entitlement age or retired from work, retirement is discussed in relation to both hopes and fears, and this provokes discussion of the cultural messages of ageing that inform participants' expectations of retirement. The financial landscape of retirement (Asquith, 2009; Grech, 2013; Carney & Gray, 2015) is identified as a significant concern.

Chapter Seven, 'Health', concludes the thematic analysis chapters and does so in a comparable vein to Chapter Six, exploring the female experience of the ageing lifecourse, armed with the Punk and Feminist Toolkits. This prompts exploration of the second and third research questions and does so through the following subjects. Chapter Seven asserts that health issues cause participants to confront age, and this

evidences the ageing experience of the women in the study, highlighting the potentially ageist correlation between ill health and ageing. The Feminist Toolkit can be discerned in participants' accounts of gendered healthcare experiences. In this chapter, participants discuss the bodily changes, injuries and illness they encounter across the lifecourse and reflect on the way that they adapt and change in response. This facilitates exploration of changing identity and lifestyle, as the women in the study make changes, or consider making changes to the way that they live their lives and practice subculture, integrating bodily changes into an ageing lifecourse. This is illustrative of the ageing experience for women who identify with punk culture. Chapter Seven examines the gym environment as a place where stereotypes about the ageing female body may be perpetuated and challenged. Health is explored in relation to punk, as a challenge to be met with the creativity and adaptability provided by the Punk Toolkit.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, drawing together the themes identified within the analysis chapters and summarising how the information can be used to provide answers to the three research questions. It does this by exploring each question in turn, drawing together the themes for a conclusion to the thesis. The chapter also examines the implications of the research findings and considers how the findings can be deployed for further research, in discussion and activism regarding ageing, and as a point of reflective learning in social care and social work practice with older people.

Chapter One: The Cultural and Theoretical Context of the Research

Providing a context for this study, Chapter One introduces the cultural and theoretical context of my research. The focus of this thesis is the ageing experiences of midlife women who identify with original era punk, and this chapter's review of the literature weaves ageing, feminist and subcultural approaches together, to underpin the research project. Chapter One is divided into four main sections. Section (i) Ageing and the Lifecourse, Section (ii) Perspectives of Feminisms Across the Lifecourse, Section (iii) Punk, Subculture and the Female Experience, and Section (iv) Intersections of Subculture and the Ageing Lifecourse. This chapter clarifies how existing literature and research, alongside the lacunae that I identify, informs the direction of my research project, and culminates with my research questions.

Section (i): Ageing and the Lifecourse

This section establishes a context for the study of ageing by considering what is meant by and understood by, 'older age' and 'middle age'. It introduces the age range in this thesis. 'Third age' is introduced as an alternative term to middle age, but also as an ageing theory. The concept of 'lifecourse' is briefly explored. I employ theories of ageing to explore how ageing is perceived and consequently experienced in the UK. Beginning with early theories of loss and dependency, this section then explores 'successful ageing', and finally 'cultural gerontology', the body of theories which provide a framework to this research. Cultural gerontology is used to examine the pervasiveness of ageism, the challenge of being an ageing woman in an ageist society and finally, two specific experiences of ageing, which serve as 'markers' of age: the menopause and retirement. Having explored the experience of ageing for its multi-faceted possibilities, the section closes with a final theory of ageing, 'transageing', which seeks to illuminate the complexity of integrating identities and experiences across the lifecourse.

Defining Older Age

The World Health Organisation definition (2012) of an old *or* older person is sixty-five years plus. However, in accepting this definition, one could still reasonably ask, “older than whom?” or “old compared to what?” The choice of terms such as ‘old’ or ‘older’ is linked with cultural perceptions of what it means to be old and the connotations of the words (Freixas et al, 2012; Duffy, 2017). The thesis opened with Segal’s (2014) warning of the negative connotations of ‘old’. Emphasising this, the word ‘young’ is commonly used to express a desirable state of being, in opposition to the undesirable state of being old (Gullette, 2015). Calasanti (2007) asserts that the term ‘older people’ is ageist, due to its inherent rejection of the word ‘old’, and ‘older’ has also been described as a euphemism for old (Cruikshank, 2003, p141). However, boundaries of age are subjective definitions and experiences and it would be impossible for me to state (on behalf of all the participants in my research) where ‘old’ begins. Therefore, within this thesis ‘older’ reflects the subjective experience of ageing and is my chosen term.

Defining Middle Age

Similarly, as older age is challenging to define, so ‘middle age’ becomes open to interpretation. Changing boundaries of age can be discerned in ageing studies literature; Hepworth & Featherstone’s text ‘*Surviving Middle Age*’ (1982) refers to forty-five as middle aged. Middle age, a subsection of older age, is defined by the World Health Organisation (2012) as age fifty plus and this appears to be a commonly accepted definition. An alternative term is ‘midlife’ and this is my chosen term in this thesis, used in tandem with ‘older’, implying as it does, a *place* that someone might find themselves being middle aged in. This, I feel, establishes the cultural context of ageing.

Writers such as Calasanti & Slevin (2006) have observed that work on ageing often focuses on middle age at the expense of older years. The concern that middle age is examined at the expense of older years raises the consideration that middle age is relatively acceptable in lifecourse terms, a place of ‘relative safety’ (Copper, 1988) in comparison to older years, valued for its potential to distort discussions about the experience of *all* ageing.

The focus of this thesis *is* middle age, arguably a gateway for experiences of ageing, and consequently of value for cultural gerontology and ageing studies. Gullette (1997) notes a dichotomy whereby age boundaries within middle age rise all the time, yet people are ‘aged by culture younger all the time’ (p4). Middle age’s relevance is illustrated by the way that events that happen in midlife are pathologised, rather than being seen as commonplace events that also happen at other times of life. As Gullette (1997) asserts, events that could happen in midlife, such as the death of a child or unemployment, are not really about midlife. The phrase ‘midlife crisis’ reveals a cultural view of middle age as something negative. Gullette’s perspective (1997) is that the ‘crisis’ occurs in having to deal with midlife when it is shaped by culture and a decline narrative. This is explored further in the sections ‘Loss and Dependency’ and ‘The Influence of Cultural Gerontology’.

The Third Age

Laslett (1989) introduced the term ‘third age’ to describe the life period after work and childcare responsibilities have ended. It is commonly used to describe the period of time following retirement from work, which if early retirement is taken, has the potential to begin in midlife. Third age theories respond to representations of older age as a desolate place where activity and learning end, by challenging this stereotype. The third age, therefore, is portrayed as a time of opportunity and development, typified by the introduction of the ‘University of the Third Age’ (U3A) in 1982, which challenged the correlation of age with declining intellect (Hockey & James, 1993). Gilleard & Higgs (2000) note that the construction of a third age identity is reliant on a differentiation between a working life and retirement and requires ‘deliberation and planning – the active construction of a ‘post-work’ identity' (p38). As explored later in this section, a clear-cut division between work and retirement is increasingly difficult to achieve. The ‘culture’ of the third age (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015) relies on the experience of retirement as one of affluence and freedom, both for the economic ability to relinquish work fully and rely solely on a pension, but also in the correlation of the third age with ceaseless activities, which often require economic resources.

Third age theories have been criticised for their relationship with consumer culture, which is not of interest to everyone (Katz, 2001) and which excludes as many people as it includes because, as Asquith states (2009), neoliberal discourse does not take into account the many factors affecting economic security, the emphasis being on individual actions. Consequently, many older people simply do not have the material affluence to take advantage of third age style lifestyles (Katz, 2001). The function of the third age can be further illuminated through an examination of the 'fourth age', which Higgs & Gilleard (2015) have described as a 'social imaginary'. The fourth age is a period of ageing, often incorporating illness and frailty, when old age is no longer seen as subjective. Interpreted this way, the concept of the third age has the effect of 'othering' older age, but with moveable boundaries: the third age is acceptable precisely because there is a separate almost unimaginable category beyond it, of fourth age (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015). While the fourth age, in terms of the age range and circumstances of my participant group, does not form part of this study, the concept of a 'social imaginary' is resonant, informing participants' experiences of midlife and expectations of age, and this is explored within this thesis.

The Lifecourse

'Dividing life experience into stages is as old as the study of age and ageing' asserts Laslett (1987, p134), noting that stages do not necessarily collate with a number of years, and may be lived simultaneously, depending on the stage of achievement in a person's life. Yet Blaikie (1999) notes the complexity of taking a lifecourse approach to examine ageing, advising that there are numerous factors including finances, employment and relationships, that impinge on the notion of the lifecourse progressing in a linear fashion. This suggests that positioning the lifecourse as a set of goals to be achieved is excluding and unrepresentative of many people's experiences. Halberstam (2005) offers the terms 'queer time and place' to illuminate the diversity of experience that the lifecourse encompasses, when removed from its 'middle class logic of reproductive temporality' (p4). This thesis discusses the lifecourse in rather more simplistic terms, and my use of the term 'ageing lifecourse' within this thesis offers some clue as to its focus. Within this thesis, both 'lifecourse' and 'ageing lifecourse' are

used to describe chronological progression across the lifecourse, the experience of *getting older,* in whatever shape or form this may take, and distinct from achievements.

Theories of Ageing

Loss and Dependency

Some theories of ageing, such as the 'Decline' model or the 'Adversary' model (Bytheway, 1995) have positioned older age as a time of loss and dependency, a depiction that continues to persist, and underpins widespread narratives about ageing and ageist attitudes. These theories position ageing as a purely biological fact, the medicalisation of which has led to the correlation of old age with loss, ill health and dependency (Bytheway, 1995), although Hockey & James (1993) remind us that 'dependency' can happen to anyone at any stage in their lifecourse, its meaning encompassing a spectrum of situations. The finality of 'dependent' however, invokes a life where the only possibility is to be in need, where its depiction somehow precludes the possibility of reciprocity, of having something to offer, of being a person of value. Such a description depicts older age as being characterised by loss of agency, loss of ability, the falling away of friends and family – whose relationships are henceforth characterised as being inequal, as if the older person cannot possibly be great company, interesting or fun. Instead, older people are framed as 'rarely of interest in themselves, as human beings relating to much younger non-relatives, outside their normative and legal framing as family members and recipients of care' (O'Dare et al, 2017, p13).

The tendency for old age and illness or disease to be studied at the same time has led to the subjects being correlated (Cruikshank, 2003). The narrative of decline stems from a model of ageing characterised by loss, and by things in life getting worse (Bytheway, 1995). However**,** resisting a narrative of decline soon runs into a parallel problem, conceptualised by Marshall (2015) as 'post-ageist ageism', which 'embraces anti-ageist sentiments at the same time as old age is constructed as something to be resisted' (p214). This dichotomous stance can be detected in rejections of ageism in general, alongside individual attempts *not to be* that (old) person. Cruikshank (2013) notes a pattern in gerontological research, whereby older people frequently express

gloomy views of the health of older people in general, whilst perceiving themselves a healthy exception. Whilst I share Cruikshank's view that this is a pragmatic response to ageist notions of decrepitude, this distancing device does sound isolating.

Successful Ageing

Marshall (2015, p210) goes on to identify two broadly contradictory representations of ageing as either (a) decline, risk and likely dependency, or (b) health conscious, fit, 'sexy', adventurous consumers who take care of themselves. Put like this, the latter definition of course sounds tempting and this is the model of 'successful ageing', its popularity visibly reproduced via 'theoretical paradigms, health measurements, retirement lifestyles, policy agendas, and antiaging ideals' (Katz & Calasanti, 2014, p1). The earliest use of the term 'successful aging' was by Havighurst (1961), whose discourse supported both activity theories, 'successful ageing means the maintenance as far and as long as possible of the activities of middle age' *and* disengagement theories, 'successful aging means the acceptance and the desire for a process of disengagement from active life' (p8) used around retirement and described a wider range of older people's experiences than previously imagined. Despite the absence of females in the male-gendered language of Havighurst's article, the possibilities inherent in his articulation of 'successful ageing' resonate, alongside Havighurst's proviso that 'persons with different values of life in the later years will have different definitions and theories of successful aging' (p12). Havighurst's wording implies that middle age itself is not an area for concern, or for cultural expectations and this surely reflects the different cultural landscape of the time. My thesis sits in a different cultural period, encompassing participants' experiences from the late 1970s to present day, with particular focus on the experience of ageing in much more recent years in the twenty-first century.

Rowe & Kahn (1987; 1997; 1998) introduced a more medicalised definition, in which the spectrum of experiences perceived as successful were lost (Katz & Calasanti, 2014). Rowe and Kahn acknowledged the influence of lifestyle and other factors on people's experiences of age but nonetheless maintained that successful ageing (as an outcome) necessitated (a) forestalling disease and disability, (b) maintaining physical

and mental function, and (c) social engagement (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p38). The concept of successful ageing has itself been largely successful but its widespread representation in the media is problematic. Katz (2001) predicted a twenty-first century of 'unprecedented, positive aging' (p27), this image sustained through a barrage of positive media images of activity, autonomy, mobility, choice and wellbeing, his prediction confirmed through numerous representations in newspapers, advertisements and on the television. Marshall (2017) asserts that the rhetoric and visual representations of successful ageing perpetuate the idea of an older age characterised by normative, gendered heterosexuality, which is not everyone's experience. Equally, Hepworth & Featherstone (1982) hold the media responsible for promoting a stance that dismisses realities of ageing, particularly the view that 'the body naturally and inevitably runs down with age' (p6), meaning that the spectrum of older people's experiences is not reflected in the media. While definitions of ageing that rely on narratives of loss and dependency are to be challenged, the experience for many is that the body usually demands more attention as we age (Hillyer, 1998) and changes connected to ageing require a person to adapt.

Criticisms of successful ageing emphasise the binary nature of the theory, ergo if some people's experiences are defined as 'successful', then the people who do not meet this definition must be 'unsuccessful'. A successful old age is essentially one of maintaining youth – health, fitness, appearance and activity and as Calasanti & Slevin (2006) note, these are predominantly considered to be women's concerns, with 'age passing' (Copper,1988, p14) the desirable consequence of being perceived as 'young enough'. Sandberg & Marshall (2017) critique the concept of successful ageing for its suggestion, especially through visual representations, of a strangely homogenous older age. As authors such as Calasanti & Slevin (2006) and Marshall (2015) have asserted, successful ageing depends on the binary of other 'unsuccessful' agers, yet Sandberg & Marshall pinpoint not only the neoliberalism but the inherent heteronormativity of the successful ageing approach: 'those who are too queer, too disabled, too demented or too poor to reap its rewards' (p8). Equally, people who age *with* a disability are excluded from 'success' (Chivers, 2017).

It has been argued that the successful ageing narrative focuses on individual responsibility for ageing and neglects to address imbalances in society and social policy that affect older people. Asquith (2009) argues that successful ageing can only happen with social and policy support in place, noting that the discourse unfairly locates successful ageing in a place of individual responsibility, a neoliberal approach. Successful ageing is more easily achieved with economic and other resources, such as gym memberships, that are not affordable to everyone. Asquith's point (2009) is that the lifestyle changes that are needed to promote successful ageing – social connectedness, social productivity and good health rely on *lifelong* habits. The failure of successful ageing discourse to take account of social and cultural influences puts it in opposition to cultural gerontology, which will be discussed in the following section.

The Influence of Cultural Gerontology

Cultural gerontology is a body of theories of ageing and a way of looking at age, the theoretical framework that I use within this thesis. Cultural gerontology responds to earlier theories by interrogating underpinning assumptions and themes and considering how these inform the way that older people are treated and talked about, impacting on their experience of age. This new approach promised a more explorative and often autoethnographic approach to talking about age, with authors such as Gullette (2003) and Cruikshank (2008) incorporating this approach. Consequently, this section forms a large part of this chapter, taking a journey through perspectives on the ageing experience, an exploration of the impact and reach of ageism, and the experiences of being an ageing woman.

Early social gerontology tended to examine the unmet needs in older people's lives but failed to reflect on how older people themselves experience their lives (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). If the definition of 'gerontology' in the Oxford Dictionary (2018), 'the scientific study of old age, the process of ageing, and the particular problems of old people' is considered, then the issue becomes clear: age and ageing are positioned as problems to be solved, rather than merely the experience of getting older and this is a short leap to constructing older people as inherently problematic. I suggest that the 'particular problems of older people' could be easily narrowed down to one problem –

ageism - and this bears closer examination. Copper stated ‘ageism, not aging, oppresses us’ (1988, p3) and recognition of this theme is threaded throughout cultural gerontology and ageing studies, the more recent proclamation of ‘fear ageism, not ageing’, the prelude to Gullette’s anti-ageism manifesto (2017, pxi) which asserts that ageism has not retreated in the intervening three decades. De Medeiros (2017, p1) provides a more holistic definition of gerontology, ‘the study of old age and later life (however either are defined)…it occus within multiple contexts, under multiple conditions and is shaped by factors that are personal, political, cultural, geographic, historical, societal and economic’.

Cultural gerontology responds to both de Medeiros’s definition and Copper’s statment, asserting that old age is represented by a spectrum of experiences, each equally valid, and casts an interrogative gaze on representations of older people. Twigg (2015) states that the central tenet of cultural gerontology is ‘the recognition of the way that culture is constitutive of social relations and identities’ (p253) and has been of increasing importance in recent years. Ageism itself can be analysed through the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology and this is a useful and important starting point. Once applied, the startling reaches of ageism can be noted, detectable in the way that older people are talked about and related to, and in age stereotypes that depict older people as a homogenous group with easily identifiable shared characteristics, no matter that older age spans several decades. Gullette (2000) queries generalisations about older age being applied across several decades, noting the frustration that this inspires in the recipients of unjust labels. The assumptions that underline ageist thinking can be seen in newspaper headlines such as ‘the grey tsunami’ (Raposo & Carstensen, 2015) and news reports on the alleged impact on health services of an ageing population. News reports of this type correlate age with illness and dependence and create a *fear* of ageing.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, a fear of ageing might be understandable in the context of ageism: older people are represented as laughable, shameful and stereotyped through easily accessible forms of culture including birthday cards, advertisements and other forms of media (Bytheway, 1995) and these negative

representations are hard to avoid. Ageism is inherent in all permutations of the media including advertisements, which tend to reflect ‘stereotypical expectations about behaviour and characteristics linked with older people as a social group’ (Ylänne, 2015, p370). Language is a powerful tool of oppression and Cruikshank (2003) notes the inherent ageism when an older person’s everyday abilities are responded to with surprise, e.g. ‘*still* creative at...’, or ‘*still* assertive at…’, suggesting that expectations for older people reduce across the lifecourse. Ageism can equally be discerned through the very absence of older people, with images of the younger self frequently used in obituaries and in author photos in books (Cruikshank, 2003), the subsequent erasure consigning older people to ‘optical oblivion’ (Gullette, 2017, p24). A young photo suggests the concealment of true age for the fear that age simply does not look good and might discourage sales. Youth, therefore, is always positioned as the preferable choice. Tellingly, the examples outlined above suggest that all people, all ages, are aware of the favouring of youth and cultural gerontological perspectives help explain how this can flavour everyday interactions.

Cruikshank (2003) introduced the concept of ‘hyper awareness of age’ (p173) to explain the differences in interactions between people of similar ages and people of different ages, noting that ‘old’ does not feature as an identity when two older people are interacting, yet permeates consciousness when a thirty-year-old and sixty-year-old are talking. Cruikshank notes that hyper awareness creates expectations of difference in intergenerational interactions, whilst concealing the similarities. Similarly, ‘age ordering’ (Bytheway, 1995) describes the process of assessing whether the way people look, speak, or live their lives matches with expectations for their age. Both are evidenced through the media practice of categorising people into generations, pitting them against each other and creating conflict. If older people are not seen as individuals, it is easier to blame ‘them’ as a group for perceived injustices. For example, Gullette (2000) notes that the categorisation of age groups such as ‘baby boomers’ and ‘generation Xers’ enables the blaming of one so-called generation by another, leading to an ‘age war’, warning that the terms should be used with caution. This theme is supported by Hamad (2017), who introduced the concept of ‘toxic intergenerationality’ (p170) to explain one consequence of age segregation, in whichever form the segregation takes. Bearing this

in mind, the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology enables age to be examined through the lens of culture, noting that the way age and older people are talked about, depicted, or disregarded, contributes to their experience of age.

A peek through the lens of culture illustrates that midlife is not exempt from the influence of culture and ageist characterisations. The term 'midlife crisis' was coined by Elliott Jacques in 1965 (Hepworth & Featherstone, 1982) and while his work related to artists in their thirties, the central feature of *the personal realisation of one's death,* resulting in a re-evaluation of achievements, remains relevant. Midlife re-evaluation can thus be responded to in two ways – either accepting life as it stands or working hard to achieve hopes and dreams that remain unfulfilled. Hepworth & Featherstone (1982) suggest that 'midlife crisis' can be experienced positively, a time for questioning and growth. It is arguably age itself that throws these decisions into the spotlight. Interpreting midlife actions, such as leaving a job to go travelling, or buying a sports car, as somehow dissonant, highlights the 'cultural imperialism' of youth (Laws, 1995, p113). These actions are interpreted differently in youth, perceived as youthful folly, or a sign of status, but age appropriate nonetheless. A midlife crisis is often perceived as a pursuit of 'youth', but when it is viewed as a protest against cultural restrictions of middle age, then the concept of 'crisis' can be viewed in this context. The fact that midlife changes how these actions are perceived, highlights the tyranny of 'age ordering' (Bytheway, 1995), the cultural preoccupation which forms the basis for ageism.

Being an Ageing Woman

Being an ageing woman in an ageist culture is a challenge that benefits from further exploration, as it forms the basis of my thesis. Ahead of Section (ii) Perspectives of Feminisms Across the Lifecourse, I begin this section by acknowledging the 'double jeopardy of sexism and ageism' (Sontag, 1972), exploring the dual standards of ageing that are applied to men and women. I consider the way that women's lives and bodies are scrutinised and held to ageist judgements as they age. The section concludes with an exploration of the concept of 'invisibility', a concept that incorporates the erasure of older women from wide cultural representation (Twigg, 2004; Woodward, 2006;

Gullette, 2017), the consequences of ageism but also the female experience of being sidelined in an ageist, sexist culture.

This must be preceded by a consideration of the construction of gender. My thesis is concerned with the experiences of women. Yet, the oppression of women extends beyond patriarchal designation as a second-class sex, to permeate how women are expected to live their lives *as a woman*, that is, the gendered expectations attached to their sex. Gender is, as Butler (1999) says, 'performative', referring to the day to day repetitive iterations that lead to a person being interacted with as male or female, and thus subject to further gender stereotypes, sexism and misogyny. Indeed, Butler (2004) warns that 'to conflate the definition of gender with its normative expression is inadvertently to reconsolidate the power of the norm to constrain the definition of gender' (p42) and this gives some sense of the power of gender as a potential constraint and disciplining force, whether these forces are external or internal.

It should be argued by sheer weight of numbers, as women live longer than men in all developed countries (Segal, 2013), that the experiences of older women are recognised and valued. Nonetheless, representations of older women, or the absence of them, tell a different story (MacDonald, 1986; Douglas, 2014). Older women are subjected to particularly gendered stereotypes, meaning that the experience of being an older woman is to be doubly disempowered, a 'double jeopardy of sexism and ageism' (Sontag, 1972). Calasanti (2008) states that 'old manhood is closer to womanhood than to the virility of masculine youth' (p156) in media representations of old age and this sharply demonstrates how an ascription of femaleness is considered a downgrade. Sontag (1972) states that whereas men's experiences qualify as wisdom, and their grey hair and lined faces are denoted as lending distinction, women do not benefit from similar correlations. Instead, women are judged on appearance, in such a way that their signs of bodily ageing are taken to signify deterioration. In addition to the double jeopardy of sexism and ageism, women are subject to a further dichotomy: scrutinised and found wanting if signs of ageing are visible, aiming to *obscure* signs of ageing is equally examined for its 'success' or 'failure' (Twigg, 2007).

The beauty industry positions ageing as problematic, and beauty products and cosmetic procedures perpetuate a myth (Wolf, 1991) that age can be 'fixed' (Holstein, 2006). Avoidance of the media is insufficient, as surveillance is everywhere, 'women's bodies are evaluated, scrutinised and dissected by women as well as men, and are always at risk of 'failing' (Gill, 2007, p150), potential 'failings' increasing across the lifecourse, as signs of age are censured.

The way that older women *live* their lives is equally scrutinised. Blaikie (1999) introduced the concept of 'cultural time' to describe one way that older people's lives are policed. When a woman appears 'age appropriate', reflecting the values and attitudes that are considered acceptable for her age, then she has conformed to 'cultural time' but this does not capture the experience of every ageing women. Sandberg & Marshall (2017) note the 'problematic ways that aging and imagined futures are intertwined with heteronormativity in contemporary western cultures' (p2), using the concept of 'hetero-happiness' to describe dominant ideals of successful ageing that exclude older people who are LGBTQ. Halberstam (2005) introduces the concepts of 'queer time' and 'queer space' (p161) to counter these narratives and to remind society that the experience for many people is that their lives are not afforded full representation. Halberstam equally resists 'not only the hegemony of dominant culture but also the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian culture' (p161), a reminder that expecting all women to fit tidily into mainstream forms of culture is inherently excluding.

Expectations for older women are not hidden, they permeate western culture, from folklore and myth to numerous representations in popular culture. They are so plentiful, it is a challenge to know where to begin – but we can start with the stereotype of the wise old woman, who portrays someone uncomplaining, who is not sick (Healey, 1986). While this functions as an exception to a decline narrative, it sets unrealistic expectations. Similarly, Woodward (2002) declaims the portrayal of old age as a time of wisdom, highlighting that wisdom in this form is portrayed as a quiet passivity and docile acceptance of life, effectively outlawing anger in older people and dismissing older people's voices. To resist being quiet and uncomplaining invites further disapproval. The construction of assertive older women as eccentric or mad is

perpetuated in the media. For example, I observe that older women on television who express their opinions vociferously or speak ‘too’ loudly are frequently dismissed as ‘mad’, even when the content of their speech is not controversial and Wilson (2014) warns that media representations of the ‘mad old woman’ ‘perform a powerful regulatory purpose’ (p8).

Are Women Expected to Retire from View?

When women are expected to quieten as they progress through the ageing lifecourse, then they become less present. The ‘invisibility’ of older women is a familiar theme in ageing studies literature (Gullette, 2017), through older women’s accounts (Twigg, 2004; Woodward, 2006; Gullette, 2017) and evidenced through the absence of age within earlier feminism and women’s studies (MacDonald, 1986), ‘as invisible and irrelevant in your classrooms as we are in the hostile male world – a world where we fight not only the same oppressions younger women do, but the oppression of ageism as well’ (p21). Challenges to the absence of ageing women have been made through the work of organisations such as the Centre for Women, Ageing and Media at the University of Gloucestershire in the UK, where this thesis has been produced and which received its initial funding for research by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in 2007, but older women continue to be absent from wider feminist representation, as Section (iii) will explore. Given that older women are not *actually* invisible, what does this mean? Irigaray (1993) suggests that women always experience difficulty in being heard because patriarchal themes embedded in everyday language defines women as object in relation to the male subject, making femaleness ‘not-he’ (p20) rather than something meaningful in itself. It could be said that women are made to feel invisible when other people fail to respond to them, acknowledge their existence, or value their contributions - whether verbal or physical. Gerike (1990) notes an avoidance of older people that manifests itself in a lack of eye contact, or as a recipient of a kindness that suggests the older person is ‘unintelligent, uneducated and incompetent’ (p39), the lack of eye contact meaning that older people, both women and men, simply are not seen (looked at).

Twigg (2004) summarises the experience for older women as being ‘socially invisible’ (p62), denied male attention, denied power, and no longer fully represented in media and advertisement images. Lesbian women can expect to see their lives absent from representation, as images of successful ageing that *do* proliferate in the media, focus on ‘enactments of normative, gendered heterosexuality’ (Marshall, 2017, p363). The concept of being invisible in older age also indicates a pragmatic reality that older people are less present in social settings, retreating further from view across the lifecourse and spending increased amounts of time at home. Could this be partly explained though a reduced interest in social activities, a dislike of noisy or crowded settings or for lack of motive? This explanation is not sufficient because older people are effectively excluded from public spaces in numerous ways, whether through spaces that are not designed with older age or disability in mind (Holland, 2015), or cultural perceptions of social spaces being for younger people, reinforced through ageist marketing. As Laws (1997, p91) notes, ‘age is associated with particular places and spaces’, and these are fewer than those associated with younger ages. Subcultural spaces are not necessarily exempt, as I will explore. The intersection of ageism and sexism comes into play within music venues, when research on spaces such as moshpits identifies them as ‘highly gendered’ (Downes, 2012, p219).

Woodspring (2016) challenges the oft-reiterated theme of the invisibility of older women, noting that in her own research, she has observed that older women always see, and acknowledge, each other. This of course begs the question “whose gaze is important?” and brings the issue of heteronormativity and misogyny into sharp focus. When age itself is seen as undesirable and intrinsically incompatible with attractiveness, then the withdrawal of the gaze, is indicative of a wider problem whereby the physical body is the only thing worth valuing in a woman. Twigg (2004, p60) notes the ‘long history of misogynistic discourse’ in which women are reduced to bodily characteristics and how this shapes ongoing discussion. There is a dichotomy in the way that older women’s bodies are judged. They are meant to remain unseen, concealed by clothing that lacks the shape of clothing for younger people. If this trend extended to younger women, then it could be a welcome freedom from body judgement, although Leblanc (2008) notes that internalised standards of appearance

means that women and girls judge themselves and their peers equally harshly. Yet older women find that their bodies are the *only* thing that is commented upon about them (Woodward, 1999).

Furthermore, commentary such as ‘looks good’ is often qualified with ‘for her age’ (Cruikshank, 2003), a narrative tic that serves only to emphasise ageist attitudes. Therefore, to age and to appear ‘old’ are increasingly risky (Hurd Clarke & Bennett, 2015), the physical realities of ageing posing a serious challenge to older people’s sense of self and social currency (Hurd Clarke, 2010). As Twigg states (2004) the difficulty with discussing older women’s bodies is that it can appear not only demeaning, but a retrogressive step towards narratives of decline and biological determinism. Marshall (2012) attributes the growing sexualisation of the third age to the portrayal of ‘sexiness’ as an important means of maintaining the appearance of not being old. This suggests that older women are not perceived as attractive or desirable if they look like older women, and it should be noted that there is a significant time commitment involved in attempting the required levels of fitness, health and appearance maintenance in middle and older age (Katz & Marshall, 2003).

Myths and stereotypes about ageing often lead to women acting to disguise their age and attempting to maintain an illusion of youth. Appearance is the first thing that is noticed about women and grey hair is a universally understood signifier of age (Ward, 2015). Gerike (1990, cited in Rosenthal) noted that many women dye their grey hair for this reason, stating that dying hair is one of the easiest and most obvious ways of disguising old age that there is. This is a pragmatic solution to the issue of invisibility. Gerike notes that most people simply do not ‘see’ older people and eschewing the visual markers of age is a logical solution to marginalisation. The familiar comment ‘you don’t look your age’ epitomises an ageism that women experience frequently. Healey (1986) suggests that its intention as a compliment gives way to unease for the recipient over its meaning, the suspicion that this places the recipient as successfully ‘age passing’ (Copper, 1988). Older women confront their reflections, aware that cultural judgements are filtered through the disciplining ‘gaze of youth’ (Twigg, 2004, p65), an ageism that women may either reject or internalise (Calasanti et al, 2006).

Women who internalise the ageist compulsion to appear youthful have an impossible task ahead. Marshall (2012) warns against the impossible goal of 'ageless ageing' (p340), which requires lifelong hard work maintaining the body and appearance to fit a particular heteronormative model of success. There is a fine balance between age resistance and age denial and Twigg (2004) notes that it is not easy to pinpoint the feminist response – to distinguish between natural and unnatural ageing. Disrupting cultural expectations of age by either refusing to look 'old' or rejecting the imperative to 'be youthful' are therefore not straightforward. Nonetheless, the opportunity remains for older women to trouble conventions of appearance and lifestyle, if they choose to do so. The next section considers the processes and events that are strongly linked with midlife and older age and cannot be resisted in the same way.

Markers of Age

Markers of age are events or items so strongly associated with a particular age, that they serve to mark the age of the person that has or does them (Woodward, 2006). Events or items that retain a strong link with older age in the cultural imagination might be a free bus pass, or getting a pension, as they are universal. The following section examines two markers of age: menopause, a marker for midlife women, and retirement, a marker for women and men beginning in midlife and enduring into older age.

Menopause

The menopause is the time when a woman's periods cease and she is no longer fertile and this typically happens between the ages of forty five and fifty five (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/) making it a significant marker of female middle age. Segal (2013) notes that women have discussed both positive and negative aspects of the menopause and its function as a turning point towards older age for many years, despite opposition to the subject. Each woman's experience is different yet Hepworth & Featherstone (1982) observe that media representation of the menopause and the focus on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) position the menopause as optional, if a woman has the agency and resources to fight it, a message that is reflected in narratives of successful ageing and throughout cosmetic industry advertising. Sandberg (2013) states that 'the menopausal or postmenopausal body is

continuously represented as a problematic and lacking body, deprived not only of reproductive capacity but also of sexual desire and attractiveness' (p33). Irigaray (1993) argues that while menopause is often culturally defined as the end of a woman's life, which could be interpreted in terms of her childbearing ability, it equally functions as 'an opportunity to have more time for social, cultural and political life' (p115). Gullette (2002) makes clear the lack of value placed on women post child-rearing, as child rearing is primarily what women are valued for, and suggests that 'postmaternity' is used as a revolutionary feminist concept embracing the opportunities this freedom brings. Her suggestion is that this is a cause for activism, which might suggest that subcultural values of protest and dissent, described further in Section (iii), are of value here. As Grist & Jennings describe (2017), postmaternity not only provides an alternative to dominant narratives of either successful ageing or decline, but offers activism from the domestic sphere outwards, 'a valid way for women to empower themselves and also provide cultural narratives of potential for their adult offspring' (p18), with women *resisting* the caring role ascribed to them, as their children come of age.

Retiring from Work

Retirement functions as a common marker of older age and a potential change in lifestyle and circumstance. Retirement from work is commonly perceived as the transition point into 'old age' (Laws, 1995)**,** yet retirement as a marker is increasingly complex. Nonetheless, work and retirement increasingly co-exist, impacted by the financial crisis of 2008, meaning that the idea of a work-free third age is increasingly out of reach (Cahill et al, 2013). Although retirement has traditionally correlated with the receipt of a state pension, or at an earlier age with a private pension, the boundaries of retirement in the UK have significantly changed in recent years. Carney & Gray (2015) suggest that age should not be a factor in deciding whether a person is in or out of work, instead looking at the function of work in a person's life. It would seem that work is increasingly necessary for economic survival and Carney & Gray (2015) note that at the time of writing, state pensions in the UK are becoming less likely to supply a retirement income for the required number of years. Shifting boundaries of state

retirement age mean that in future years women will not be able to claim a state pension until at least sixty-eight years old and as Grech (2013) notes: 'the future of retirement is less certain as the outcome of pension reforms grows steadily more opaque' (in Gilleard & Higgs, 2013, p32).

Calasanti & Slevin (2006) assert that 'old people suffer inequalities of distributions of authority, status and money, and these inequalities are seen to be natural and thus beyond dispute' (p6), indicating that such statements bear closer examination, querying the underpinning assumptions. Domestic inequalities often lead to retirement inequalities for women. The expectation that women take disproportionate responsibility for household and caring responsibilities endures, and this, at the expense of paid work, puts them at an economic disadvantage later in life. A paucity of working years means that a significant proportion of older women have not accrued sufficient National Insurance contributions to qualify for their state pension as expected, meaning that they are dependent on partners (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Laws, 1995). Women are also likely to fall victim to the gender pay gap (Bates, 2014; Criado-Perez, 2019) and to have accrued proportionately smaller private pensions. When in work, persistent gender-based pay differences mean that women are disadvantaged, with black and minority ethnic women even more so (Katz & Calasanti, 2014). Many women now face not being able to retire from work at the age they anticipated, which requires psychological and practical adjustment. Blaikie (1999) notes that a tendency for some women to *return* to work in midlife indicates a relationship between retirement and dependency that is not straightforward, and this could be related to the experience of midlife as a time of re-evaluation and change.

As noted above, the experience of retirement is often different for women, as they are disproportionately held responsible for tasks within the home (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000) and this does not end. Women are socialised into prioritising their home, but this work is not valued, and women can subsequently expect to be perceived as doing and contributing little to society. Meanwhile, responsibilities often expand to include looking after 'aged partners and parents' (Blaikie, 1999), while males are less likely to take on this responsibility. Blaikie's wording should be approached with caution: 'aged partners

and parents' do not need looking after because they are *old*, but because of specific support needs. Gendered expectations of caring endure into older age and the continuation of caring, in tandem with other expectations, shapes retirement for women, limiting social opportunities. Calasanti (2008) notes that retirement for women does not mean a cessation from work but observes that it is nonetheless experienced as a relative freedom, whereby household tasks can be fitted in at any time, rather than managed through a strict timetable. This is a peculiarly gendered kind of freedom.

Following on from the earlier discussion of 'invisibility', there is a relationship between work and visibility, or retirement and reduced visibility. A move from paid work to unpaid caregiving is also significant for women (Blaikie, 1999). Women are unseen because they are in the home, which contributes to the 'invisibilisation' of older women, the 'optical oblivion' that Gullette (2017, p24) refers to. Where *are* they? In the media, middle-aged female presenters have successfully sued the BBC for the termination of their employment due to age (Segal, 2013), highlighting the fact that older women are vanished from screens, while older men enjoy the continuation of their careers.

Within the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology, leaving work has further implications. Turner (1998) uses exchange theory to explain how older people are stigmatised as they become increasingly unable to 'reciprocate' by working or making financial contributions. Accusations of older people being unproductive and dependent are replicated in the media, presenting a duplicitous concern for the economic consequences of an ageing population. This positions older people not only as unproductive and dependent but as the cause of society's woes. Gullette (2000) captures the way that generational divides are reinforced by this type of reporting, noting that younger generations are led to feel that older generations are the very cause of their own employment and economic difficulties, with neoliberal society 'dominated by the values of highly productive, competitive youth' (Mendes, 2013, p182).

Turner (1998) argues that the degradation of age as a value, has led older people to be defined as superfluous and useless and to force retirement before their actual capacity for work is exhausted. 'Exhaustion' should be taken to indicate motivation and enthusiasm to work and to contribute expertise, rather than the ruthless alternative of

exhausting capacity to work. Seeking new work or re-entering work later in life is nonetheless a risky move, when ageism inflects prospective applications and interviews. I feel that the discourse of work and retirement demonstrates the complexity of defining cut off points or end dates for important parts of the lifecourse, lifestyle and identity, of which work is one such significant feature for many. This returns us to a consideration of continuity across the lifecourse and what this might represent in the context of ageing theory.

Transageing

Preceding sections have explored ageing theories, culminating in the use of cultural gerontology to explore the complexity of experience of ageing and ageism, especially for women. The dominant hegemonic narrative of age resistance prevails but begs the question: *does an enduring identification with youth always mean a rejection of older age?* The impetus to reject 'I don't feel my age' type statements as evidence of outright ageism seems simplistic. However, Moglen's concept of 'transageing' helps illuminate the complexity of the experience of ageing.

Moglen (2008) introduced the concept of 'transageing' to describe the integration of values and experiences across the lifecourse, and the transformation of these practices into an identity that is neither one age nor another. This concept applies a positive interpretation to the dissonant sensation of 'suddenly' confronting age, which Moglen had personally experienced via a moment of age recognition in her mirrored reflection. Her experience recalls Featherstone's concept of the 'mask of ageing' (1991), the dissonant sensation that an aged facade conceals the 'true person' beneath and a recognition that, to others, the aged facade tells a person all that can be known about that person – there *is* nothing beyond age. Jennings & Krainitzki (2015) warn that the experience of transageing should not be conflated with the binary of an 'authentic' inner self versus an unrepresentative aged face and indeed, Moglen's analysis goes further:

> Ageing need not be seen as the catastrophe of a moment, after all. It takes place across a lifetime that begins with conception and ends with death. It is a multiple, ambiguous and contradictory process, which provides us – continuously and simultaneously – with images of past,

> present, lost, embodied, and imagined selves. In shifting configurations, these images comprise the discontinuous yet persistent thread of our identities, which are not integrated, which are not merely split, and which can neither be reduced to nor separated from the limitations and requirements of the body (2008, p303-4).

Moglen's use of the word 'catastrophe' need not be interpreted as a sign of ageism and a decline narrative, but instead an acknowledgement that older age *is* often viewed as catastrophic, when the multi-faceted and dynamic possibilities of the experience of ageing and being old remain unknown. A transageing person therefore has the sense of being neither 'young' nor 'old' but being *between and across* identities. Transageing has been critiqued by Segal (2008) for potential ageism and neglect of feminism, Segal warning that there is 'a toxic sexism to cultures of ageing' (p315). Segal's concern lies with the thought that a 'continuation' of a younger self is inherently ageist, particularly when bound up in the idealisation of a youthful female appearance. In response, Moglen acknowledged the importance of a feminist perspective in transageing, to engage with and credit the 'social determinants of the ageing experience' (2008a, p326) and reinforced her intention that transageing is not understood as an individual mindset, but rather a shared understanding for all people, all ages. Jennings & Krainitzki (2015, p13) consider the use of memoir as a device to bridge 'young and old, past and present' identities, and this suggests that the collective memories and shared identity within subculture might form a tantalising part of an ageing lifecourse and identity. The following section wholeheartedly acknowledges the need for a feminist perspective in *all* ageing theory and responds with an exploration of feminist perspectives across the lifecourse.

Section (ii): Perspectives of Feminisms Across the Lifecourse

This thesis is concerned with 'giving voice' to older women who identified with punk culture in the UK and this is consistent with the approach of feminist standpoint research that will be explored in further detail in Chapter Two. This follows a precedent

set by Whiteley (1997), Bayton (1998) and Reddington (2007) who give voice to the experiences of female musicians, hooks (2000) who gives voice to the experiences of women of colour, and Stanley & Wise (1993) who advocate for feminist research methods. As the researcher, I am instrumental in representing the women in the research as accurately as possible, and a framework of feminism is necessary to complement ageing theories. As already discussed, ageing women are subject to a particularly gendered experience of ageing. Douglas's (2014) statement that by the time a woman is around seventy years old, she will have been exposed since childhood 'to negative and demeaning representations of older people, and especially of older women' (p39) is thought-provoking, when the internalisation of such cultural messages is considered. An analysis of the impact of feminisms is key to understanding how issues of ageing and ageism affect women.

De Lauretis (1990), cited in Skeggs (1995), states that experience is the basis for feminism. Simply put, feminism began when women began talking to each other about their experiences. Feminism is characteristically described in terms of 'waves' (Showden, 2009), which can be used to refer to the era in which a particular 'wave' was prevalent, or as Gill (2007) suggests, a *sensibility*. This section will discuss feminism from the second wave onwards, culminating in a critique of the terminology, which categorises women into generations, reflecting the hyper awareness of age described by Cruikshank (2003) earlier in the chapter.

Second Wave Feminism

The second wave of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's focused on consciousness raising (Snyder, 2008), epitomised by the slogan 'The personal is the political,' words that reminded women that their individual experiences are part of a bigger picture, consequences of being female in a patriarchal culture. This is an approach that feminist ageing scholars suggest could be usefully employed in ageing studies (Carney & Gray, 2015). Second wave feminists illuminated the way that patriarchy disadvantages women, and exposed domestic inequalities to a critical gaze, calling for the recognition of women's unpaid work within households. It also highlighted the importance of women entering so-called male terrain, doing things that only men were supposed to do

(Bayton, 1998), whether in employment or, important in terms of the focus of this research, joining a band. This period of feminism resulted in campaigns for equality of pay amongst wider expressions of political activism, including the Greenham Common Women's Peace camp (Snyder, 2008). Feminism remained reviled by many people and as Firestone (1979) asserts, a common reaction of the time towards discussion of divisive gender roles was 'you can't change that' (p37). Second wave feminists frequently rejected gendered expectations of appearance, encouraging women to think critically about bodily regimes, or to disrupt imposed ideas of attractiveness, 'To be worshipped is not freedom. For worship still takes place in someone else's head, and that head belongs to Man' (Firestone, 1979, p74). Segal (2013) observed that feminists entering their forties and fifties in recent years found adherence to this principle harder than in their younger years, when their youth had granted them an attractiveness that could no longer be relied upon in an ageist culture.

Third Wave Feminism Responds to Second Wave

Third wave feminism sought to ameliorate the alleged omissions of the second wave, seeking to include the experiences of women of colour (Humm, 1992), women with disabilities and older women (Laws, 1995), and lesbian women who felt that previous activism had not accounted for their experiences. Another viewpoint of this time is that the third wave sought equality, rather than an end to patriarchy, and this took the emphasis away from women's rights. Walby (2002) referred to this as 'gender mainstreaming' (p152), the result of media representation of feminism's goals as already achieved, leading to feminism being subsumed into an 'equal rights' narrative. Cruikshank (2008) notes that despite 1990's feminism acknowledging that ethnicity and class were embedded within gender, the impact of age was not similarly understood. Walter (1998) optimistically wrote about 'The new feminism', celebrating the achievements of (older) feminisms but stating that there was no longer a case for linking the personal with the political, or for a critique of dress, language or physical behaviour. Walter's rationale is that the interrogation of cultural and sexual behaviour has not led to change. Wolf (1991) provided a challenge in the form of her book '*The Beauty Myth*', which articulated the ways that images of beauty are used to regulate women's behaviour, alongside a widespread, misogynist view that women's faces and bodies

are inferior to males, especially if they are aged, and as such must be disciplined through consumer culture beauty regimes, 'the cult of the fear of age' (p106).

Piepmeier (2009) explored third wave feminism through the production of zines, and the lens of a feminist punk, 'riot grrrl' perspective. Piepmeier identified dichotomies within feminist messages in zines, which she felt were conveyed with a blend of 'the ironic and the sincere', and 'hope and cynicism' (p8), making it difficult to distinguish the message and I would suggest that 'grrrl' language risks alienating older punk women. Nonetheless, Piepmeier's assertion (2009) that third wave feminism not only encompassed race and ethnicity, as others have said, but retained a 'comfort with contradiction and incoherence' (p9) offers an important point, and while this could be interpreted as diluted feminist commitment, it could equally be interpreted as a pragmatic way of viewing feminist challenges in late twentieth century consumer culture.

Lorde (1984) encapsulates her experience of embodying intersectionality as a black, lesbian woman, with the term 'sister outsider' and goes on to suggest that 'as women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to be on the most superficial aspect of social change' (2004, p859), suggesting that differences such as age, race, class and sex can be drawn upon as a source of creative change. This suggests the potential of the intersectional approach of third wave feminism, allowing a more nuanced understanding of the diverse realities of women's lives.

Fourth Wave Feminisms/Post-Feminism

The fourth wave of feminism is positioned in the twenty-first century and sits alongside alternative categorisations of post-feminism and anti-feminism (Gill, 2007). Functioning as a riposte to Walter's (1998) claim that historically, an interrogation of cultural and sexual behavior has not led to change, Laura Bates' 'Everyday Sexism' project, set up in 2012, suggests that sexism and misogyny continue to impact on women. Taking a stance via social media, the Everyday Sexism website (https://everydaysexism.com) provides a platform for women to share their experiences, whether openly or anonymously, with a Twitter feed (https://twitter.com/EverydaySexism) providing an alternative outlet. Feminist writer Bates' website states her aim to 'take a step towards

gender equality, by proving wrong those who tell women that they can't complain because we are equal. It is a place to record stories of sexism faced on a daily basis, by ordinary women, in ordinary places'.

It could be argued that Bates' endeavour set a precedent for a renewed sharing of stories, from a feminist tradition of consciousness raising, drawing attention to the absence of females on Wikipedia (Bates, 2016) and to the inequality in how male and female stories are written. In 2017, Tarana Burke began the #MeToo movement, a website (https://metoomvmt.org/) and Twitter feed (https://twitter.com/MeToomvmt.org) aiming to 'support survivors and end sexual violence', cataloguing incidents of sexual threat, bullying, assault and violence. While Burke has since asserted that she intended the movement to support survivors of sexual violence of any gender, the movement has nonetheless highlighted the everyday experience for women, most notably the everyday and continual tactics women resort to, to avoid the pervasive threat of unwanted sexual overtures from men.

Alternatively, post-feminism is articulated variously as an alternative to feminism, the newest of feminisms, and a way of looking at all feminism (Douglas, 2014). Indeed, Douglas explained her reluctance to use the term 'post-feminism' - she felt it undermines the women's movement and excuses the word 'sexism' *not* being used. After all, surely no-one would assert that 'post-sexism' is a thing. Negra (2008) asserts that post-feminism 'caricatures and distorts' feminist goals such as 'having it all', a dilemma that males do not share. Negra and Tasker (2014) highlight how the postfeminist language of individual choice comes at the expense of focusing on systems of gender hierarchy, with individual women requiring 'modification', rather than the systems themselves. They analyse the postfeminist position on women's activism as suppressing and stigmatising it. For example, Negra (2008) states that post-feminism has been strongly illustrated by a theme of 'retreatism', which is essentially marketed as a form of downsizing characterised by working from home, whether in small scale self-employment or childcare and looking after the home. Despite the positive spin, this firmly returns women to the domestic sphere, shepherding them away from the public settings, which feminism has had to work so hard for. The detrimental

effects of being excluded from public spaces and being dependent on men can be traced all the way back to Mary Wollstonecroft's (1792) 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', who is described (Humm, 1992) as developing the first full political argument for women's rights in Britain.

The Question of Generational Divides in Feminism

The term 'generation' is commonly used either to categorise peers who are born at a similar time, or to suggest a familial connection. However, the concept of generation also suggests divisions and a lack of continuity. Winch et al (2016) question its use in media discourse about feminism, observing that it is used in a divisive way, positioning divisions within feminism as the consequence of generational divides. Consequently, women of different generations are depicted as 'natural enemies' (Winch et al, 2016, p559). This representation perpetuates a divisive agenda and the language used to describe feminist movements are not necessarily used by the women themselves. This is comparable with the language used to describe categories of age, which was explored at the beginning of this chapter. This is a familiar trope, as waves of feminism are pitted against each other within the media, (Faludi, 1992) replicating the way that female relationships are often depicted.

Keller (2015) interviewed teenaged females who identified as being a feminist yet rejected being labelled as 'fourth wave'. She found that while these women identified differences from older feminists, most notably in methods of communication, they also identified with older feminists and feminism and their shared concerns. This echoes Harris (2004), who found that young women's current interpretations of feminisms are far more complex than postfeminist narratives of individualism and choice would suggest.

The concept of waves and generations is also disrupted by the intergenerational experience of women taking influence from subsequent waves (Wrye, 2009), meaning that waves overlap. Moglen's theory of transageing is an alternative perspective to the experience of integrating feminisms across the lifecourse. While not all women are feminists, there is an alternative categorisation which Pilchers (1993) refers to as the 'I'm not a feminist but...' phenomenon, incorporating an expression of feminist ideas

alongside a rejection of ‘feminist’ as an identity. Francis-White (2019) introduces ‘The Guilty Feminist’ podcasts with the aim ‘to discuss the big topics all 21st century feminists agree on, whilst confessing our ‘buts’ – the insecurities, hypocrisies and fears that undermine our lofty principles’ (https://guiltyfeminist.com/) and this acknowledges the potential complexity of identifying as a feminist. Whichever way feminist women describe their own beliefs, McRobbie (2010) asserts that feminism holds a different meaning for each woman, which does not reduce its potential influence.

Current Feminist Challenges

As the preceding sections have indicated, midlife women face the intersectional challenge of ageism and sexism in all aspects of their lives, from the domestic to the structural, no workplace or social space exempt. Progressions in social media have enabled the dissemination of a spectrum of views on feminism and feminist issues and while expressions of anti-feminism and misogyny are evident (Mantilla, 2013; Jane, 2014), so too is increasing awareness that feminist issues have not been resolved. Social media originated campaigns have led to the recognition of #MeToo, #Everyday Sexism, or the ‘gender pay gap’ as ongoing and pervasive issues affecting women in current times and these will be discussed in the following pages. Yet, social media also evidences how women’s resistance to patriarchal structures and misogyny often meets denial, resistance and hostility (Bates, 2014).

Sara Ahmed’s ‘*Living a Feminist Life’* (2017) clearly sets out current issues, culminating in a ‘Killjoy Manifesto’, itself a response to being labelled a ‘feminist killjoy’, that sets out a strategy for change. Ahmed (2017) articulates an understanding of the multiplicity of issues facing girls and women in current times. This amounts to a modern-day consciousness raising, with Ahmed formulating a manifesto for change in response. Ahmed understands how patriarchy and sexism compel females to occupy the world differently, and in a lesser way, than males. Ahmed (2017) describes the process of gendering and how becoming a girl is about experiencing your body in relation to space, typified by the experience of being on public transport, whereby women withdraw their bodies in order to allow men space, a process that is not reciprocated. Ahmed notes that the more women accommodate men in this way, the less space they have,

describing this as ‘gender: a loop tightening’ (2017, p25). This is an interpretation that can be applied to any age and this is important. Narratives of invisibility in the lives of older women can easily become personal un-shared experiences, barely encountered as an issue, until they are shared and queried. As stated at the beginning of this section, feminism began when women began to share their experiences and this continues to hold true.

Section (iii): Punk, Subculture and the Female Experience

This thesis is concerned with the experiences of older women who identified with punk culture. The first two sections have explored the cultural landscape of being an ageing woman in the UK, alongside feminist perspectives across the lifecourse. This section explores punk culture, to establish an understanding of the influences that women who identified with punk may have experienced. If I introduce the word ‘punk’, *punk music* may immediately come to mind, but it also incorporated a look, an attitude and values and in their entirety, these indicate Thornton’s (1997) tentative description of subculture as ‘groups of people who have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups’ (p1), making punk a ‘subculture’. The relationship between cultural and subcultural studies, fandom, and music audiences is explored in relation to their influence on this study.This section begins with a contextualisation of punk in the UK, using the literature on subculture to explore the nature of the punk experience, the facets that inform the punk ethos, and its potential relevance to the women who identified with punk. This leads to an exploration of the female experience of punk, from its origins and across the lifecourse.

The Challenge of Defining Punk

Sabin (1999) warns against the internalisation of multiple, narrow and nostalgic, representations of punk: ‘The aggregate result of this has been to solidify our notions of what went on during punk into a kind of orthodoxy – i.e. whenever we approach a new piece of writing on the subject, we think we already know what it meant’ (p2). Many accounts of punk in the UK date it back to 1976 (Sabin, 1999). However, my research is not concerned with *specific* dates, which are often correlated with the idea that there

can only be one timeline and therefore one authentic experience of punk, but instead relies on participants' personal interpretations of 'original era'/1970s punk. This strategy avoids perpetuating narratives of authenticity, which often work to exclude people who do not fit subjective ideas of 'punk'.

Before exploring punk further, I return to the backdrop of cultural studies, which emerged in the 1950s, studying culture in relation to individual lives (During, 2001). Hall (2001) notes, 'no cultural studies book has been more widely read than (Hebdige's) *Subculture:The Meaning of Style'* (p441). Yet cultural studies functions as an umbrella for several areas of study, including subculture, fandom, and music audiences. These areas overlap and interlink. For example, Duffett (2013) notes that identification and practice are both parts of being a fan, these elements varying for everyone, and this suggests commonalities with subculture research. Punk in this thesis is discussed in terms of subculture but could alternatively be viewed through the lens of other fields of study.

Nonetheless, punk came to prominence in the UK in the mid to late 1970s, defined by its music, look and attitude (Hebdige,1991; Reddington, 2007; Haenfler, 2014). Despite the London-centric nature of the narratives around punk, especially the most *visible* aspects of punk, it undoubtedly reached other areas of the country. Greenwald, referring to American punk 'the more suburban, dull and culturally isolated the locale, the more likely it was to have a strident local scene' (2003, p17) could equally be applied to the further reaches of the United Kingdom. Keenan (2017), writing in The Guardian newspaper online, about being a young punk in Scotland, described 1978-1986 as an era full of possibility, 'which would now be referred to as post punk but wasn't then'. Reddington (2016) also queried the conflict within narratives about punk, which run the spectrum from describing punk as a short-lived London-centric phenomenon, to 'a blueprint for subcultural activities in hotspots all over the UK' (p96). This indicates how the narrative of punk has narrowed to become a vivid yet containable story. This would lead us to believe that there was a beginning and, more importantly, an end, that people who claimed to 'practice' punk after the late 1970s were not 'authentic' punks. Yet Reddington's and Keenan's accounts amongst others

show that this interpretation excludes many people that identified with punk and many that continue to identify with punk today.

There is a considerable area of study about music audiences and while this work draws on the writers who contribute to the genre, this is not an area of work that the thesis contributes to. Bennett (2006, 2018), Gregory (2009), Smith (2009), Bennett & Taylor (2012) and Hodkinson (2013) juxtapose an understanding of music audiences with an analysis of the impact of age and this work is pertinent to my own. This is predated by earlier studies of music audiences including Thornton's (1995) work on club culture and Weinstein's (2000) work on heavy metal, all of which relate to specific music genres, alternatively described as subcultures.

Subcultural theory notes that subcultures are set in opposition to a 'parent culture' and an understanding of the culture and context – the parent culture - of the time is useful in contextualising punk. As Hebdige (1991, p19) states, 'no subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the taken for granted landscape of normalised forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval'. Alternatively, Fiske (1992) describes fandom, and therefore the experience of *being* a fan as 'the accumulation of unofficial or popular cultural capital whose politics lie in its opposition to the official, dominant one' (p30). This reading emphasises the gains to be made by being a fan of an alternative culture, in whatever form this takes and perhaps an element of approval *seeking,* the question of whose approval is being sought being pertinent. The late 1970s in the UK were notorious as a time of political turbulence. Britain experienced power cuts, strikes and the introduction of the three-day working week. Unemployment was high and young people at that time faced bleak prospects (Spencer, 2005). For women, despite the emergence of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, gender expectations remained rigid (Faludi,1992). The heteronormativity of the 'parent culture' meant that resistance could extend far beyond a simple rejection of mainstream culture, epitomised by Halberstam's (2005) 'I plunged into punk rock, music, clothing and rebellion' (p316), in relation to a concurrent embrace of queer culture. Taylor (2012) queries the concept of an 'illusive parent culture' (p2) altogether, asking how music and

scene participation contribute to a sense of self, both individually and as part of a community.

There are wider contexts to punk, and it is often described as a reaction against the music industry of the time (Hebdige, 1991). Bands had grown in status and power to become stadium filling monoliths, and arena concerts created a physical distance between performer and fan that reinforced the chasm, 'spectacles of mass fandom to serve their own interests' (Duffett, 2013, p10). The punk antidote to corporate music was to remove the boundaries between performer and audience (Hebdige, 1991) This move suggests the reflexive potential of the music audience to influence performance and therefore their own experience. Indeed, Tsitsos (1999) notes that slamdancing or moshing reflects the crowd's affection for a band. In practical terms, the change in dynamic meant punks created music without waiting for a certain level of expertise before playing gigs. Practically, the ethos of punk, which will be discussed shortly, also meant that affluence was not necessary to take part (Bayton, 1998) which gave it the egalitarianism that had become absent from other genres. With resourcefulness, anyone could participate, with borrowed or improvised music equipment (Reddington, 2007). Clark (2005) stated that the aim of punk's anger encompassed the commodification of rock and roll, 'the establishment' and hippy counterculture. Haenfler (2014) delved further into the question of what punk is, rather than what it *is not* by highlighting the necessity of questioning what subculturists actually do and how *they* make sense of their lives. In the same way that an exploration of the experiences of women requires an understanding of feminism, so an exploration of punk experiences requires an understanding of subculture. Punk cannot be examined in a vacuum and subcultural theory is the key to exploring the question that Haenfler posed.

Subculture Research

This section asks what is meant by 'subculture', explores its function and meaning for members and identifies the shared subcultural features in punk which create its ethos. Haenfler (2014) produced a 'working definition' of subculture: 'A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices and objects, and a sense of marginalisation from or resistance to a perceived

‘conventional’ society’ (p16) and certainly this references the necessity of the parent culture to rebel against. In punk, a shared subcultural identity enables members to recognise each other, whether from appearance or through shared practices. Haenfler’s emphasis on *diffuse* highlights the fact that there is no actual membership for subculture, no one pays a fee and joins, and this definition encompasses people whose attachment to subculture ebbs and flows throughout the lifecourse. Nonetheless, Hebdige (1991) notes that there has always been conflict in subculture between ‘originals’ and those who adopt it later or focus only on style. This suggests a hierarchy within subculture but perhaps one that disadvantages no-one because, as Hebdige also observes, people use subculture differently, along a spectrum of participation.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) became prominent in the 1970s following an account of post-war working-class youth (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004) and subsequently, further studies of culture and subculture. This can be considered in the context of the time, when notions of youth and teenagers were relatively new. The first publications ‘*Resistance through Rituals*’ (Hall & Jefferson, 1975) and ‘*Profane Culture*’ (Willis, 1978) were published ahead of punk, although Willis refers to ‘punk rockers’ in the endnotes, describing them as ‘a phenomenon still to be properly unfolded’. *Profane Culture* examined two separate subcultures, hippies and motor-bike ‘boys’. Willis’ depiction of single biker women as ‘conforming more closely to the masculine norms and patterns of interaction’, and ‘less attractive’ (than the attached women) suggests that females distanced themselves from stereotypes of femininity to be accepted in these subcultures, but in doing so were judged, the researcher revealing a misogynistic gaze, failing to challenge the representations of women but instead presenting them as fact (McRobbie & Garber, 1997; Huq, 2006). Jenkins (1992) observed that media fandom has provided a response for women observing close ties between male writers and male fans, and this illustrates the agency that fans have, to challenge such narratives. Whether defining themselves as fan, subculture member or neither, the women in the study may have engaged in punk practices, armed with a similar awareness of gender. Whiteley (1997) noted that the

supposedly counter-cultural values of the 1960s did not extend to challenging the patriarchy and that women in these cultures were defined as being subordinate.

CCCS focused on social class as a defining feature of subculture, interpreting it as a collective reaction of 'working class youth, to structural changes taking place in British post-war society' (Bennett, 1999, p600). However, subsequent writing on punk has dismissed the association of punk with working class (male) youth as simplistic and unrepresentative, failing to acknowledge the full spectrum of experiences within punk culture. Being a fan and gaining 'unofffocial' cultural capital neither enhances career or produces upwards class mobility (Fiske, 1992) and this reading of punk resonates, in its resistance to cultural norms of materialism and mainstream culture. What seems absent from these accounts is a sense of enjoyment from subculture. Haenfler (2014) suggests the concept of subcultures as 'leisure spaces', the purpose of which is to have fun.

Reddington (2007) also observed that academic work on subcultures has veered towards a 'one size fits all' (p153) definition, which excludes women and girls. McRobbie (1980), a CCCS member herself, noted masculinist bias in early subcultural work, which focused on male defined issues and public spaces, which inherently excludes wider definitions of participation. McRobbie (2000) noted later that depictions of subculture as resistance to and escapism from the mundanity of family and work, routinely exclude *examination* of home and family, contributing towards the erasure of women from subculture history. Gregory (2009) noted the function of both ageist and sexist norms in influencing when female ravegoers choose to distance themselves from the scene, illustrating how the pressure of such norms may encourage conformity.

Haenfler (2014, p10) summarised early subculture studies as having an overarching emphasis on class but advised that CCCS have subsequently criticised subculture analysis for previous omissions including (a) lack of attention to women and girls' experience, and (b) excessive emphasis on and misreading of style, which as previous sections have illustrated, is an aspect of the surveillance that women, subcultural or not, are always subject to. My thesis makes a contribution that addresses the absence of women in subculture research, while avoiding undue emphasis on subcultural style.

Nonetheless, in subculture, style represents more than just an aesthetic, and Haenfler's assertion about the purpose of spectacular style (2014), that it sets members apart from normal society, and establishes a particular subcultural identity, suggests that style becomes increasingly important. What is clear is that subculture means different things to different people, and as Muggleton (2000) states, critiques of subculture writing often incorporate an element of hierarchical authenticity, a tendency to plead "but *you* don't know. *I* was there!", as if there can only be one true account of punk. This thesis offers several more accounts of punk, from the perspective of ageing women.

(Safety) Pinning Down the Ethos of Punk

This chapter has acknowledged that there is not a simple definition of punk. Nonetheless, punk is a recognisable subculture in the cultural consciousness, with shared values and interests for its members. These values and interests combine to form an ethos that is reflected in the spectrum of literature about punk. Together, three aspects form the punk ethos and this forms a framework for the analysis of the meaning of punk within this research project. Members can pick and choose between these elements, bricolage-style (Hebdige, 1991: explanation in the following paragraph), selecting and shaping the ones that are most meaningful to them to create an individual punk identity. This echoes Jenkins (1992) description of fans as 'cultural nomads' (p39) who ascribe different meanings to objects from the dominant or popular culture.

DIY Ethos

Punk's DIY ethos embraced the idea that anyone could have a go at anything (Reddington, 2007), and that music and creativity were for all, not just a select few. Applying a DIY ethos to vocals meant that the lack of a 'nice' singing voice was no longer relevant and the willingness to make noise was enough. Savage (1991) described anti-consumerism as a forgotten aspect of punk. Nonetheless, anti-consumerism can be detected in the DIY ethos, particularly its use of bricolage. The process of bricolage (Hebdige, 1991) involves the combination and re-making of various cultural objects, for example taking a safety pin and making it into an earring or incorporating household items such as a toilet chain or bin liner into clothing. This process (Hebdige, 1991) extends to music and artwork and has become a recognisable

emblem of punk in the use of collage on album covers and in zines. It can also be seen in the artwork that I created for this thesis.

Anti-Authority Attitude

Punk is associated with a questioning attitude that epitomises the anti-establishment feeling that characterised the culture (Sabin, 1999; Leblanc, 2008), expressed through protest and dissent at individual and community levels. Examples include attending anti-capitalist demonstrations or being vegetarian. Rock against Racism (1978) and the lesser known Rock against Sexism concerts (1979), both used punk music as a tool of political activism to convey messages of dissent. It could be surmised that for some punks, an anti-authority attitude embodies an aesthetic or tactic, rather than an expression of real political disengagement. Punks were not known for the approachability of their look or their expression, and this can be partly understood as a protective measure against the vitriol that punk could attract (O'Brien, 1999). Photos of punks frequently showed a lack of facial expression and Hebdige (1991) related this to a rejection of being categorised, or of capitulating to the demands of others. As explored earlier in this chapter, cultural expectations of age provide potential areas for resistance in older age.

Unconventional Appearance

The 'spectacular' look of punk is easily identified – eye-catching, confrontational and visibly different to 'normal' appearance. The DIY ethos informs the unconventional and individual ways that punks might dress. Brightly dyed hair, a shaved head, a spiked or Mohican hairstyle, or any combination of the above were all looks that punks might display. Creative and bold 'anti-fashion' make up (Bayton, 1998, p65) challenged notions of the purpose of cosmetics. A participant in my research described carrying a kettle as a handbag and this illustrates the playfulness and subversiveness of punk culture. Equally, other punks downplayed appearance as part of their resistance to mainstream culture, favouring unobtrusive, practical, dark coloured clothing. Hebdige (1991) noted that it is the distinctive look attached to subculture that first gains people's attention. It is only when this has occurred, that secondary attributes such as behaviour

are noticed, and henceforth linked with the look, which returns to another part of the punk ethos, the anti-authority attitude.

Being a Punk Woman

As stated at the beginning of Section (iii), my research is concerned with the experiences of older women who identified with punk culture. Sections (i) and (ii) have explored the significance of being an ageing woman using ageing studies/cultural gerontology perspectives and feminist perspectives. Section (iii) has explored punk and subculture, identified a punk ethos, and now uses punk and subculture literature to explore the female experience of punk from its origins and, as we approach Section (iv), across the lifecourse. The section concludes with a short examination of the factors that might influence punk practice to fluctuate and evolve over time.

The experience of women *making* punk music is significant because this provided inspiration for participants in this research. Prior to punk, the participation of women in music was characterised by a lack of female representation other than vocalists (Bayton, 1998). Reddington (2007) argues that much punk writing gives a false impression of the experience of punk for many women, describing a 'world within a world' (p2) of female performers that could provide a comprehensive history of punk, without reference to male punks. Indeed, Reddington's book, '*The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era'* provides an antidote to the previous omissions of both the female experience and contributions to punk culture.

Punk changed the way that women participated in music and as punk progressed, the number of female instrumentalists significantly increased, inspiring future generations of young women (Bayton, 1998). Female performers are subjected to a higher level of scrutiny than male performers (Downes, 2012) and held to higher standards, with any slip of perfection held as evidence of incapability. Spencer (2005) stated that when female punk musicians made music, they did so against a background of female oppression, meaning that they practiced subculture with no precedent, a total lack of encouragement and the dismissal and derision of a disproportionately male music industry. These factors are amongst many pragmatic considerations that have served to discourage women from participating in music scenes as music makers (Cohen,

1997). Punk did not bypass these judgements but the low threshold for participation meant that punk women were able to see males demonstrably unable to play or sing competently (Reddington, 2007) and considered the criteria for participation differently. Progression in the music industry is another matter and O'Brien (1999) noted that female bands were treated less seriously than male bands and consequently denied the same opportunities, while the punk DIY approach has been criticised as 'derivative, inadequate and immature' when employed by women (Downes, 2012, p215). Punk women also found that their general conduct was held to a higher standard than male punks (Raha, 2005).

Hebdige (1991) states that subculture is about 'noise' and in this context, aiming to be heard, is a significant factor for women in punk. Female punk vocalists used a range of timbres and vocal styles to get their point across, including chanting, shouting and screeching, which served to create a 'declamatory' style that emphasised their displeasure with the issues that they articulated (Reddington, 2007). It could be deduced that punk vocal style was especially functional for females whose voices are softer than males, producing a sound that could not be ignored. Attempts to silence female voices could be discerned. Mark Perry created his first copy of punk zine '*Sniffin' Glue*' in July 1976, and reviewed an album with the proviso "I've always hated girl bands, singers, etc. Rock n Roll's for blokes and I hope it stays that way", (Reddington, 2007). The album was by a female band (The Runaways).

Bayton (1998) noted that female performers of all types are more likely to be perceived as 'puppets' of the music industry than males, regardless of the reality of their input. Presenting an image and sound that is not traditionally 'pleasing' could be interpreted as one way of avoiding that claim of inauthenticity. As Reddington (2007) asserted, punk women made music that was *from* women, not *for* men. Female punk bands also wrote about issues affecting women at the time (Cross, 2014). This was an important narrative, whereby punk women vehemently articulated their discontent, underscoring their words with an appearance that reinforced their agency to do as they pleased. Despite the integration of anti-sexist and questioning narratives, Raha (2005) notes that many women in the seventies punk scene rejected being labelled as either feminist or

punk, preferring to construct an identity of their own making, and some punk women perceived feminism as just another set of rules (Reddington, 2016).

Punk culture encompassed more than music making and women were crucial to this (Downes, 2012). Writing about subculture, McRobbie (2000) notes that escaping from the family, and its pressures to conform to being a 'nice girl', remains the first political experience for girls, an example that the personal *becomes* the political. Solidarity could be found in being part of a 'girl gang' in punk (O'Brien, 1999). Differences in how females and males are socialised are central to understanding gendered experiences (Fine, 2010) of subculture participation. McRobbie (2000) observes that young girls have less freedom than boys, due to parental fears for their daughters' wellbeing, 'reputation' and its consequences. This cuts across all classes and ethnic groups and comprises both material and ideological constraints (Bayton, 1998). When female subculture participation is limited by stricter parental controls than males (McRobbie & Garber, 1980), girls must organise their 'cultural life' in different ways. In the original punk era, young women often needed either to directly challenge their parents' authority or to incorporate punk into their lives in a way that was more easily achievable (Bayton, 1998; McRobbie, 2000). Examples of this were listening to records, making music at home or maintaining a conventional appearance until away from the parental eye.

Cogan (2012) described the UK punk scene as 'the site of numerous contradictory and often retrograde attitudes of many punks at the time towards gender' (p122). To be a feminist, or to query gender roles were unconventional activities, and punk women who identified as feminist risked censure (Reddington, 2007; Reddington, 2016). Hill et al (2019, p5) state that 'going to a live music event may mean direct interaction with dangerous misogyny' and this occurs across settings and genres. For women that chose to embrace an unconventional appearance, the look of punk transgressed feminine ideals in multiple ways, including the gendered expectation that a woman should 'get ready' to go out, that her natural self will not suffice. Many punk females rejected conventions of appearance, using unconventional hair and make-up to disrupt ideas of 'natural' beauty (Bayton, 1998). Consequently, punk women often experienced

censure for their so-called transgressions. O'Brien (1999) noted that 'for many punk women, the streets became a battleground, as if by dressing in a certain way you gave up your 'rights' as a woman to be respected and promoted' (p193). Other experiences of punk were far less reliant on appearance as a form of expression in punk. As Reddington stated (2016), 'the women in the punk subculture were visible and vocal, making their presence felt on the streets' (p92), not just as musicians, but as artists and writers too.

Fluctuating and Evolving Punk Practice

The latter days of the *original era* of punk, although the idea of an end-date resists consensus, have been linked to the commercialisation of punk culture, which included mainstream news articles linking punks to domesticity and respectability (Hebdige, 1991), the gendered nature of which women may have been trying to escape. As Reddington (2003) found, for punk women 'there was a frustration with the idea of growing up to be a 'lady with all the implications associated with such a destiny' (p243). Moore (2005) states that the commercialisation of alternative cultures dilutes the boundaries between deviance and normality, advising that the disapproval of authority figures and mainstream culture makes subculture much more appealing to its participants. Thornton (1995) agreed, stating that 'youth resent approving mass mediation of their culture but relish the attention conferred by media condemnation' (p154). If subculture has seemingly, against its will, integrated with the parent culture, punk culture may indeed become less tempting. As Clark (2005) says 'an unusual hairstyle just cannot buy the outsider status it used to' (p229). I would qualify this: more than ten years on from Clark's claim, mohicans, body piercing, full sleeve tattoos and retro styles are utterly mainstream and no longer function as a signifier of a kindred spirit, with subcultural interests.

Clark (2005) suggests that the best way for subculture to avoid being co-opted by mainstream style is to have *content*. This directly relates to the punk ethos, which was outlined earlier in this section, shared values and principles that can meaningfully hold subculture members together. Indeed, Clark (2005) observed that the anarchist frameworks of punk have not died but have instead spread into social groupings such

as rave culture and traveller lifestyles, not to mention anarcho-punk itself. This suggests that punk *cultures* remain active, with punk evolving and resisting definition as it has always done. Haenfler (2014) notes that the boundaries between subculture scenes can be porous, preventing the easy identification of distinct groups by people outside the groups. On the notion of the mainstreaming of punk, O'Brien (1999, p197) remarked that 'what survived though, and continued to evolve long after the mediated version was pronounced dead, was punk's meaning for women' noting punk's impact on the way women operate in wider culture. This thesis adds to this body of literature through its exploration of punk 'meaning' for women across the lifecourse.

Section (iv): Intersections of Subculture and the Ageing Lifecourse

This final section brings together the preceding sections, to consider the intersection of ageing and subculture. It begins with a reminder of the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology and how this can be used to examine the ageing experience. The section then outlines one piece of research (Bennett, 2006) that brings together punk and the ageing lifecourse yet neglects to include women. With this omission in mind, this section explores in detail intersections of punk and ageing for women, identifying potential conflicts and possibilities through a re-examination of the punk ethos, setting the context for the analysis which follows in the thesis.

The Influence of Cultural Gerontology on Ageing Subculturally

At the beginning of this chapter, the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology was used to explain how expectations of age affect how older people are perceived and treated (Twigg & Martin, 2015), and how this contributes to their experience of age (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). The influence of ageist expectations, of being 'age appropriate', often leads to personal acts of altering appearance (Twigg, 2004) and lifestyle (Katz & Marshall, 2003) to become acceptable. For someone with punk identity, this might mean toning down appearance, or not attending punk events, perceiving that they are exclusive to younger people. Cultural gerontology suggests that young people share these thoughts. As Copper (1988, p8) warns, 'the rebellious

young share signals of their mutiny with other women of their own age. They have not thought about the possibility of a rebellious old woman'. However, aspects of culture have progressed and Jennings & Gardner (2012), using their own experiences of continuing gig and festival attendance, counter that the vast size of the current ageing population means that there is no longer a consensus of what ageing should be, and nor should there be.

The Research so Far

The intersection of ageing and punk has been explored in one study to date, with Bennett (2006) drawing on wider studies of music audiences (Calcutt, 1998; Tsitsos, 2012) that pinpointed age in what he called 'a pathological discourse that is gradually beginning to find its way into discussions of ageing generations who, it is claimed, refuse to 'let go' of their youth' (p221). Bennett (2006) interviewed fifteen male 'ageing punks' aged thirty five to fifty three for his research, which took place from 2002-2003, with a sample from East Kent in England. Bennett did not aim for a male only sample and explained that the East Kent punk scene seemed predominantly male, that no participant had a female 'ageing punk' as a partner, nor did many know any. Two interviewees suggested a female for the research, but neither resulted in an interview. Bennett's research found that ageing punks are often able to identify a fellow punk by appearance, recognising subtle markers of punk style such as the cut of a jacket or a button badge. Bennett found that the subtleties were less visible to him and perhaps it is the context that helps to provide the clue; on occasion the research took place at punk gigs.

Bennett (2006) found that punk had a wide impact on participants' lifecourses. The values participants associated with punk informed their work choices, leading them to seek less conventional opportunities, to choose the autonomy of self-employment or favouring work such as social care that had a specific purpose or value they identified with. One participant's quote "I often think that work is the last vestige of the unimaginative" (Bennett & Taylor, 2012, p240), suggests that the DIY ethos is applied to the pragmatic challenge of earning a living. These findings are valuable but they do

not speak for the experience of being an ageing *female* punk, the lacuna that justifies my research.

Subculture and the Ageing Lifecourse: The Female Experience

'*For most of human history, identity has been regarded as synonymous with the culture a person was socialized into. Identity was ascribed rather than chosen'*

So said Gilleard & Higgs (2000, p24), suggesting the term 'cultural abundance' to describe the number of choices ageing individuals have. Subculture provides a distinctive identity, one that through its identifiable style, proclaims the owner's affinity with a particular culture and its values. However, subculture is not exempt from expectations of ageing. As discussed earlier in the chapter, subculture tends to reproduce the norms of 'straight society', in subcultural terms the 'parent culture' and this includes both age and gender divisions (Brill, 2009). The image of subculture is primarily that of youth culture, and that can be partly understood by an emphasis on youth in all aspects of society. However, as Bennett (2006), and Bennett & Taylor (2012) have demonstrated, participation often endures across the lifecourse. Participation itself is subjective, as a spectrum of participation in subculture encompasses those who are dedicated to the culture, which manifests in all aspects of their life and at all times, and those who engage with subculture as a 'hobby', for example taking a punk identity for the weekend only (Hebdige, 1991; Haenflaer, 2014). Haenfler (2014) states that as subculturists age, they carry some of their subcultural ideas and practices with them. The literature so far seems to encourage an area of exploration: if older women retain their punk identity or values, what shape does this take as they age?

The first step towards exploring this question is to examine competing influences in many women's lives, beginning with a consideration of social values during the punk era. In the 1970s, female older age remained associated with domesticity and convention, absent from the feminist consideration that Section (ii) explored. As Gilleard and Higgs (2007) note, 'those who had grown up in the youth privileging mass culture of the 'long' sixties, who had been told that people over thirty had nothing to say

that was worth listening to' (p17) began to either deny and/or resist older age, but women becoming 'old' in the late seventies were not in time for this cultural change.

Punk's resistance to domesticity and the emphasis on practising subculture in public spaces, relied greatly on whoever remained *in* the home. Women within punk experienced a familiar patriarchal narrative in heterosexual relationships, as O'Brien (1999) describes: 'men were unreconstructed when it came to girlfriends, expecting women to be seen and not heard' (p136). Nonetheless, the punk ethos engendered a questioning outlook which could be turned to conventional gender roles. Punk women may have questioned the desirability of parenthood and the way that parenting and family life is typically negotiated but cultural expectations create pressure. Punk gave young people 'a chance to establish some control over their own lives, which given the political and social climate of the time was a challenge' (Spencer, 2005, p187), and considering that 'control' could be applied to all aspects of the lifecourse, punks may be equipped to resist the ageist pressure to fade into the background. It is this element of control that could shape how older women who identified with punk live their lives, and this will be explored later in the thesis.

The experiences described by Reddington (2007) and O'Brien (1999) in earlier sections suggest that female punks often needed to draw on resilience and confidence to challenge boundaries and resist convention, as the all-seeing eye of patriarchy meant that they seldom went unchallenged. This might translate into a tool for the ageing lifecourse. I speculate that the absence of ageing punk women in Bennett's research (2006) can be partly attributed to divided gendered practices in ageing lifecourses, the research setting of punk gigs exemplifying the practice of a male who continues his lifestyle uninterrupted, while a female partner reshapes her own lifestyle in response to parenthood and domesticity, a continuation of gendered expectations which influence participation in subculture (Haenfler, 2014). In older age therefore, it could feel difficult to *re-engage* with subculture after an absence enforced by parenthood and other responsibilities (Hodkinson, 2013). As Smith (2009) noted, regardless of their intention, older participants in a music scene may be perceived as deviant purely by the fact of their age, asking whether it might be considered 'a greater form of supposed

sociocultural rebellion than it was in youth?' (p437). Children may also influence the experience of older age in a way that is unexpected: Fairhurst (1998) describes the ways that children and young people contribute towards the notion of age appropriateness, by sanctioning and commenting on their parents' appearance, letting them know when parents have transgressed what is culturally acceptable. Hockey & James (1993) take this further, stating that older people continue to be judged by their adult children, particularly in terms of whether they are growing old 'gracefully', which I suspect is not applied to a subcultural image.

A subcultural appearance in older age is judged more harshly in women (Holland, 2004). Subculture and rebellion are perceived as rites of passage that should be grown out of. Nonetheless, the experience of subcultural identity indicates an understanding of what it is like to stand out in a crowd, and of using appearance to make a statement. This may create an ease with maintaining visibility that helps counter expectations of ageing. Conversely, Bennett (2015) has noted that research to date in 'youth culture' and ageing has revealed ageing itself as the catalyst of newfound confidence both personally and in public space. Reddington (2007) noted that in the aftermath of punk, the unselfconsciousness and gender-neutral style of female performers began to peter out. This suggests that, without the solidarity of punk culture, punk women began gradually to filter back into mainstream roles and gender stereotypes. Overweg's (2017) research on the clothing choices of older women in the fashion industry suggests a similar trajectory. She found that older women described a common path, whereby they experimented with fashion when younger, establishing a unique style, but finally focused on a streamlined style, confiding that they used clothing to give shape and structure, as they felt that ageing bodies and faces could no longer be relied upon to do it for them. This suggests an internalisation of misogyny and ageism. Expressions such as 'mad cat lady' or 'mutton dressed as lamb' express a clear warning against standing out in older age. Ageism shows in the way that spectacular style is construed as eccentricity or madness if the wearer is older and Twigg (2007) further describes the increasing harshness with which 'lapses' of dress are judged as a person ages, unbrushed hair or mis-aligned buttons for example, being taken as symptomatic

of ‘social and moral decline’ (p295). This highlights a pressure to invest in appearance in older age, to avoid such juxtapositions and ageist judgements (Ward, 2015).

As explored earlier in the chapter, retirement is a significant marker of social age, and the influence of subcultural identity can be explored in relation to its impact on work, but also in relation to the expression of identity and lifestyle in retirement. Hockey & James (1993) state that the strong link between work and identity means that when employment is reduced through age, whether retirement or redundancy, this can be problematic. Loss of identity may stem from loss of structure, title, status, professional identity, values and purpose or a combination of these things. Subculture may have an effect. When sense of identity is linked to wider concerns than professional identity, and subcultural identity plays a part, then loss of work may not be concerning. Bennett & Taylor (2012) found that the punk ethos often results in unconventional work, or income being generated creatively. If another opportunity is around the corner, then loss of work could arguably be less problematic and the prospect of unrestricted leisure time, just another opportunity.

Changing Perspectives in Subculture?

Knowledge and experiences across the lifecourse can change perceptions of how subculture operates. Changing perspectives along the lifecourse may reflect shifting priorities, changing lifestyles or tastes, or even re-evaluation of the desirability of past experiences. MacRae, in Hodkinson & Deicke (2009) suggested that in subculture research, generalised statements about the inclusiveness of subculture are often undermined or contradicted by wider information, suggesting that the sunny glow of nostalgia might inform research participants’ recollections. Smith (2009) commented that subcultural theory overstates both ‘the difference *between* groups and also the homogeneity *within* groups’ (p429), suggesting that sophisticated analysis is needed to go beyond superficial accounts of subcultural participation. In relation to accounts of women’s achievements in music cultures, Withers (2015) also warns that nostalgic accounts ‘should remain critical’ (p137). In subculture, inclusivity is often correlated with the notion of authenticity and questions of who does not get to *belong* in subculture. Haenfler (2014) reminds that authenticity is a social construction, only considered

relevant by people who think it important, and therefore irrelevant to everyone else. Indeed, Haenfler suggests that the concept may become tiresome in older age. Bennett's (2006) research would seem to support this view, with a positive perspective that older subculture members no longer have anything to prove and can participate in subculture in whichever way they are comfortable, for example watching gigs from the back, rather than getting involved in the melee at the front. Nonetheless, this leaves unanswered questions, particularly around the gendered experience of being a woman in punk, the spectrum of principles that are absorbed (or not) and the expression of these principles across the lifecourse, bearing in mind the specific challenge of being an ageing woman in an ageist and youth focused society.

Age Dichotomies in the Punk Ethos

This section has considered the intersections between subculture and the ageing lifecourse for women, and there are multiple possibilities. I now return to the three components of the punk ethos; the DIY ethos, anti-authority attitude and unconventional appearance, and consider how each aspect may interact with the experience of age.

DIY Ethos

The DIY ethos made punk egalitarian and exemplified a 'can-do' attitude, a strategy for creating a way when a solution is not straightforward. It would seem that the DIY ethos could extend across the lifecourse. Skills that allow the smooth running of a household and its finances are often admired in women, with female thrift positioned as a solution to economic difficulties, and as a female solution to male challenges (Negra & Tasker, 2014). This demonstrates how women are frequently expected to adapt and solve, no matter the cause, and this surely reflects the use of bricolage. The DIY ethos would suggest that punk women are potentially familiar with creatively strategising to solve problems, creating something unique in the process. However, cultural gerontology highlights how characterisations of women as passive endure throughout the lifecourse, including Rosenthal's (1990) summary of ageist assumptions that women are subject to, which includes charges of being unproductive, dependent and timid. Such characterisations potentially affect older women's belief that they can do

something new, or that they should make themselves noticed by doing so. Ageist expectations are powerful but ageing women who identify with punk, with their experience of finding or creating their own way, and of being seen, may be equipped to deviate from the expected path.

Anti-Authority Attitude

Examples of an anti-authority attitude, such as protest and dissent, can be highly visible activities. They often, though not always, take place away from the home in the spaces that older people, and especially older females are not expected to inhabit, as discussed in Section (i). An anti-authority attitude can also be perceived as *vocal,* and this conflicts with cultural representations of older age. The depiction of old age as a time of wisdom is framed as quiet passivity and acceptance and leads to older people being silenced (Woodward, 2002) when the injustices of older age actually invite challenge. The effect of this is to prohibit dissent, anger, or questioning voices from older people. Conversely, punk encourages dissenting voices against mainstream values, so it can be seen that the construction of 'age appropriate' quiet wisdom is in conflict with subcultural values. Older people can also expect to have to work harder to have their activism or protests taken seriously. Hockey & James (1993) assert that this is another aspect of ageism in the media, using the example of the news reporting of a middle-aged woman demonstrating against inadequate security on an army ground to illustrate their point. In the newspaper they refer to, the 'incident' is reported humorously, although this would be political activism at any age and should be portrayed seriously as such. The experiences of being visible and vocal, of being unafraid to challenge, could be usefully deployed against ageism.

Unconventional Appearance

Resisting the expectation that you blend into the background as you age is not straightforward, and this is especially so for women, whose appearance is subject to scrutiny throughout their lives. Woodward (1999) has stated that ageing women are subject to the dichotomy whereby their bodies and appearance are expected to be unseen, yet these are the only things about them that are discussed. Older women,

whose experience of ‘invisibility’ is well documented, find their daily lives affected, seemingly slipping from view, not expecting or receiving equal attention to those younger. Women who identified with punk experienced people openly staring at or insulting them, ‘as if by dressing in a ‘certain way’, you gave up your ‘rights’ as a woman to be respected’ (O’Brien, 1999, p193) and the experience of rejecting expectations of appearance may be usefully transferred to an ageing lifecourse. Hebdige (1991) noted the use of a purposefully blank expression in punk subculture and this can function as armour against the judgement of others, bolstering self confidence in everyday situations. An ageing lifecourse might benefit from these punk tactics of resistance, with older women expecting to be seen and heard, and disregarding any disapproval if they do not ‘fit in’.

Summary

Chapter One has demonstrated that ageing women in the UK are subject to cultural expectations that influence the way they look, act and spend their time. A feminist overview suggests that women’s lives are policed through patriarchal structures and this has the effect of shaping opportunities for women to conform to gendered expectations. Women may resist or reject ageist and sexist expectations but cultural pressures are powerful and the reach of ageism so pervasive that ageing women cannot help but be aware of them.

Narratives of punk promise optimism. The punk ethos equipped the women who identified with it to resist expectations and to defy conformity, in appearance, attitude and lifestyle. The limitations of Bennett’s (2006) research mean that there are unresolved questions around how ageing punk women live their lives. This chapter has considered the potential conflicts between ageing and the punk ethos but nonetheless tentatively concludes that there is the potential for women who identified with punk to use these principles across the ageing lifecourse. To closer examine the ageing experience of older women who identified with punk, the three research questions that have emerged through engagement with the ideas discussed above will be explored further in my analysis (Chapter Three to Seven) and conclusion (Chapter Eight). The research questions were introduced at the beginning of this chapter and Chapter Two

explores the development of my research design, the methodology that informs the study and the practicalities of undertaking the research.

Chapter Two: Research Design

Introduction

This chapter aims to illuminate the research process. Beginning with a description of the research context, I hope that the reader can understand the facets of ageing, being female and being punk (although not necessarily *a* punk) that captured my imagination as a researcher and how these seemingly disparate elements fit together to form the basis for the thesis. The chapter proceeds to explain the theoretical perspectives that inform the process of doing research, the research 'scaffolding' (Crotty, 2005) which builds from epistemology to theoretical perspective, methodology and finally, method. Discussion of the method leads to a profile of the participants in the research, and an explanation of the interview process. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of my experience of data collection, transcription and analysis. Again, the detail aids the reader in understanding the research process, and how the resulting analysis chapters came to be shaped and conceptualised as they appear in this thesis. This is completed with a short reflection on the impact of the researcher on the study.

Epistemological Justification

My research aims to find out about the ageing experience of women in the UK who identified, and may still identify, with aspects of punk. This aim is achieved through an exploration of the experiences of women aged fifty to sixty-five, who identified with original era punk. 'Middle Age', a subsection of older age, is defined by the World Health Organisation (2012) as being aged fifty plus and this is the age range that is examined in this thesis. The terminology I use within this thesis, including 'identify', is clarified in Appendix A. Older people in western societies are subject to cultural expectations that influence the way they act, look and spend their time. This is particularly problematic for older women and it is nuanced by class, race and ethnicity. Cruikshank (2008) talks about the interplay between gender, class and ethnicity and notes that the introduction of age is another facet of identity to negotiate in older women's lives. Cultural gerontology enables age to be examined through the lens of culture, looking at how the depiction of older people in western societies contributes to their experience of age. Twigg & Martin (2015) state that the central tenet of cultural gerontology is 'the

recognition of the way that culture is constitutive of social relations and identities' (p353) and has been of increasing importance in recent years. Older people are stereotyped through all forms of media (Bytheway, 1995) and these negative representations of age are hard to avoid. Ageing women are policed by means of a continual flow of cultural messages that permeate every aspect of their lives, in relation to the concept of 'age appropriateness', introduced in Chapter One, and through expectations that age should dictate their ageing lifecourse. Middle age is not exempt from this, nor from restrictive expectations of appearance, behaviour and leisure pursuits.

As Chapter One stated, cultural gerontology asserts that old age is represented by a spectrum of experiences (Gullette, 1997; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Twigg & Martin, 2015) each equally valid. As one participant stated in her interview for this study, "we don't all hit fifty and then we're all one type of person. Well, we never were throughout our lives, so we certainly are not going to be in old age". As discussed earlier in Chapter One, this summarises the focus of my research, which considers that subculture might offer an experience of non-conformity that endures across the lifecourse. The subculture of punk came into being in the UK in the late 1970s, notorious for its anti–authority attitude, DIY ethos (anyone can have a go at anything) and the unconventional appearance of those associated with it (Hebdige, 1991; Spencer, 2005; Haenfler, 2014). O'Brien (1999) stated that punk helped to shift gender boundaries, as prior to this, women were rarely represented in music if not a singer. Reddington (2007) also notes that the literature on punk fails to represent the spectrum of experiences of the women involved in it. Bennett (2006) undertook research with 'ageing punks', his difficulty with locating female punks to interview resulting in a purely male sample. Bennett's research suggests that punk identities, lifestyles and practices endure into 'middle age', providing an alternative to the narrow view of 'ageing' that public discourse holds. Nonetheless, the experience of ageing female punks has remained unheard.

This thesis asks (by means of the research questions), if women who identified with punk retain a spirit of non-conformity, what shape, if any, does this take in older age and how does it shape their experience of ageing? Ageing women may accept or resist cultural and ageist messages about how they 'should' live their lives but the

insidiousness of these cultural messages mean that this is not an easy or straightforward task. Punk may offer some insight. As a genre that advocated a DIY, non-conformist approach to music, lifestyle, and appearance, punk may have had a lasting impact for the women in the UK influenced by it, potentially their ability to resist conforming to wider social expectations of age. These concepts led me to generate the aforementioned aim for the study, *to find out about the ageing experience of women in the UK who identified, and may still identify, with punk,* and I explored this using the research questions outlined in Chapter One.

Research Foundations

My research sits within the interpretivist paradigm, which as Seale (2012) states, frequently 'involves a search not for facts, but rather for meaning' (p24) and this encompasses research approaches that focus on 'the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and cultural life' (p573). In this thesis, participants' 'social and cultural life' extends beyond the impact of punk, to consider the impact of ageism and the experience of being an ageing woman on all aspects of a social and cultural life. The epistemological framework of cultural gerontology also reminds us of the inter-relationship concealed in Seale's description - society and culture play their own part in influencing the nature of people's participation. Equally, Holstein & Gubrium (2005) pay attention to the subtle interplay to which interpretive practice attends, 'it's the time and places of these *whats* - the *whens* and the *wheres* - that locate the concrete, yet constructed, realities that challenge us' (p484).

The interpretivist paradigm and the inherent search for meaning within this thesis, fosters a constructionist approach to the research. The meaning of constructionism is defined by Crotty (1998, p42) as 'all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context'. This tradition values the participants of the research, their experiences and interpretation of *their* world. Put more simply, my approach begins with the experience of one older woman who identifies with punk, my first participant, aiming to see the ageing experience as she makes sense of it (Seale, 1998). I

eventually collate the experiences of all the women in the study to potentially draw wider conclusions about the ageing experience and this befits the feminist foundations of this research, which I will discuss in the methodology section.

Methodology

The interpretivist tradition and constructionist approach inform the feminist standpoint of this thesis. Feminist research recognises gender as socially constructed and therefore as a basis for organisation of the social world, and includes 'consciousness raising' as its motivation, along with a concern for ethics and an intention to empower women and change inequality and power relations through new research that challenges inequality (Cook and Fonow, 1986; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Letherby, 2003). My research aims to examine intersectional inequalities, focusing on the impact of ageism and sexism. Olesen (2005) contextualises consciousness raising, asserting that 'women are located structurally in changing organizational and personal contexts that intertwine with subjective assessment to produce knowledge' (p238). This makes the researcher's responsibility clear. As Maynard (1994, p24-5) states, 'Feminism has an obligation to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone'. With the aim of avoiding representations which 'render invisible the different categories of women of varied ethnic, sexual and class (and so on) locations', Appendix D provides a table with participant details including self-defined class, heritage and occupation, allowing the reader to add context to participants' stories, without disrupting the flow of the thesis. (Letherby, 2003, p134).

Method

I identified participants by purposive sampling (Mason, 2018), using a snowball approach (Miles et al, 2014), although as I will explain, the reality of recruitment was rather more diverse. Although I'm not a punk myself, I am nonetheless a mid-forties feminist woman who loves punk music, situating me just a shade away from my own research criteria. I will also declare my professional background as a social worker, which informs my understanding of social justice and discrimination, not least in relation to age and ageism. Possibly unsurprisingly, I have friends and acquaintances who *do*

meet my criteria, so I began by making notes of a few women I knew who I thought might fit the study. I required two characterising variables from my sample and these were (a) women aged fifty or above, who (b) identified with original era/1970s punk in the UK. I found that the subject of my research seemed to capture people's imaginations. Whenever I discussed my research, whether in academia or outside, people often volunteered that they might know someone who would fit my criteria. I noted the names of anyone who volunteered such information and at the point that I was ready to seek participants I made contact, asking if they might be interested in taking part or could pass the information on. I did not provide detailed information at that point but made it clear that should people respond, I would provide further information, including an information sheet and a consent form if someone decided to go ahead.

Two acquaintances agreed to be interviewed. I emailed them information sheets (Appendix B) and consent forms (Appendix C), advising that they were under no obligation to participate and that interviews would be recorded, transcribed word for word, but anonymised. This was reassuring for several women, especially if their work necessitated a professional image, and I do not recall anyone advising that they would prefer to be named. I explained that I would take a copy of the consent form for us both to sign before the interview. Both of these interviews went ahead and despite each participant suggesting that they could put me in touch with another potential participant, this did not lead anywhere. Several other leads also did not result in an interview and one acquaintance declined on the basis that she would feel too self-conscious. On Facebook, I was already a member of a group called 'OAP Gardening Group', the 'OAP' standing for 'Old Age Punks' and I posted a request for participants, using the same language as contained in my information sheet. Although this post was soon removed by the group's moderator for not conforming to posts about gardening, this was a successful strategy. Five women replied before the post was removed and two recommended an acquaintance, leading to seven successful interviews. Other participants were recruited via people who were aware of my research and either passed on my contact details or, with permission, passed details to me. The last four participants were recruited at events that had a punk connection. In the earlier stages

of research planning, I aimed to incorporate participant observation (Seale, 2012) into my method and attended one punk festival, one music festival and two punk films, hoping to gather data from both films and audiences. Whilst the data that I gathered supported my research interviews, it did not provide sufficient information to benefit the research. What they did provide however, was access to further participants.

The 'Nice n Sleazy' punk and ska festival which takes place in Morecambe, a town in Northern England, led to one further interview taking place, and the 'Women's Work' festival in Belfast, Northern Ireland, which celebrates women in music, had a punk exhibition and this led to my final three interviews.

Participant Profile

I interviewed nineteen women aged between fifty and sixty-five years old, who identified with original era/1970s punk. Four participants had retired and of these four, two were in their fifties and received a pension for health reasons. Two participants in their sixties had also retired, one for health reasons but shortly due to receive her state pension, and the other because she had reached the age of entitlement for her state pension. All participants lived in the United Kingdom, with three participants living in Northern Ireland, two in Scotland, one in Wales and thirteen in England. One participant identified herself as being of Jamaican and Indian heritage. Both Scottish participants identified as white Scottish and differentiated this from being British. Two Northern Irish participants identified themselves as being Northern Irish, the other as Irish. All three were white. One English participant specified white European and the others identified as white British.

Appendix D provides a guide to all the participants in the study, including the details outlined above, alongside the household, relationship and social class details that these women identified. All names used are pseudonyms. As we discussed these details, Ellen told me that she reclaims the word 'spinster' to describe being an older single woman, aware of the existing sexist connotations of the word. Class proved an ambiguous factor. One participant described herself as 'bohemian – which transcends class'. Eight participants stated that they do not have a class, five considered themselves working class. The remaining five considered themselves middle class,

after some consideration and this often reflected the idea of social mobility through profession. All non-retired participants worked either for an employer or were self-employed, including one participant who home educated her children.

Interviewing

The feminist principle of 'giving' voice' (Reinharz, 1992) was at the forefront of my interview process. For me, this meant that there was a possibility that participants might not answer all potential research questions or discuss all research areas. I was prepared for the possibility that participants could bring their own agendas to an interview, or that elements of the discussion could be emotive or upsetting for unforeseen reasons, meaning that an adaptable approach to interviews is ethical and egalitarian. After all, the purpose of 'open' questions is that they are not restrictive or predetermined - anything the participants respond with is valid material (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). My belief is that steering participants towards desired subject areas is acceptable up to a point, but there is a balance to be maintained and it was important that I did not veer into frequent interruptions, which disrupt the participant's contribution.

I used semi-structured interviews because they are a classic qualitative method for obtaining information and fit the principles of feminist research, one of which is giving voice to women through their active involvement in the construction of data about *their* lives (Graham, 1984). The structure enabled me to prompt participants for their thoughts on facets of ageing, punk and identity. However, this format also provides space for participants to share their experiences and to guide the interview towards themes that represent their own experiences, including aspects that I may not have considered. I was conscious that many people feel an element of nervousness about being interviewed, even if they have agreed to do so, and making the experience feel like a conversation with an interested person, rather than with an interviewer, with all the connotations of job interviews that this brings, was integral to this. O'Reilly (2012) notes that research questions are just one facet of an interview informing the response, other factors being body language and the interaction between interviewer and interviewee and I held this in mind, drawing on existing social work skills that have proved fruitful in the past.

Ahead of interviews I made notes of the kind of questions that I wanted to ask, aiming for questions that could be incorporated naturally into a conversation without sounding too formal. My research diary reflects the challenge this posed to me, for example this entry from September 2017: “(my supervisors) thought list of questions came across as structured rather than semi, and should be more of an aide-memoire, rather than definitive list. I’m finding it difficult to work out whether questions will prompt answers that help answer my research questions or not. Not quite sure why it’s so difficult to get to get to grips with.” This entry explored my concern that if I did not somehow formulate the perfect research questions, I might miss out on useful data. Consequently, I developed questions to use as an aide-memoire if an interview did not appear to be capturing the themes that I was hoping for. I arranged these in an order that seemed to have a logical flow. After meeting participants, completing consent forms and chatting briefly, I began each interview with the same question:

- What drew you to punk?

I found that this question functioned well as an icebreaker. At times, the challenge was to encourage participants to focus on their experience of ageing because with several participants the subject would often return to early punk, no matter how the question was framed. This might suggest that ageing is viewed as a dull subject, especially when juxtaposed with punk. The other subject areas were:

- Identity changed as you got older?
- Punk ethos?
- (Was punk) Different for women?
- Domesticity and childcare
- Do you think about ageing?
- How is it? Hopes. Fears.
- Do you feel pressure to conform?
- Retirement
- Have you ever had a moment when your age has stopped you from doing anything? Thought ‘no, I’m too old’...

- Health
- Listened to/noticed
- If you took one thing from punk to pass on, what would it be?

The words above were written in a small notebook that I took to interviews. I found that I could refer to this without looking too formal. University regulations dictated that all interviews must be conducted in a public place. Therefore, prior to all interviews, I advised all participants of this requirement, and suggested that they choose a reasonably quiet cafe or other venue where we could meet. This worked for all but one participant who, shortly before interview, advised that she could not leave the house due to her work as a dog sitter. The interview then took place at her home. Other interviews took place in cafes, pubs, two workplaces, a women's centre, a music centre, a punk festival and a train station, each lasting one hour on average. One participant chose to have a pint in the pub before midday in the spirit of punk. She shortly confessed that it had gone to her head and emailed afterwards to say that she had to lie down when she got home, which may well have encapsulated the experience of being an ageing punk woman! Two interviews were in places that were unexpectedly noisy on the day but did not affect the dictaphone's effectiveness. Nonetheless, it meant that I needed to concentrate harder than usual on participant's words.

Towards the end of interviews, I opened the notebook in front of us on the table. This had a dual function. Firstly, it often prompted further reflections from participants. Just as importantly, it made the research process more transparent for participants. I learnt not to end interviews too quickly, as participants often disclosed further information once the dictaphone was switched off. Often, casual remarks were revealing and this might illustrate Whyte's point (1993, p303) that 'one has to learn when to question and when not to question as well as what questions to ask', reminding the interviewer that interesting data can arise when there is a space for it to do so. Some of my questions could be construed as biased towards a negative experience of ageing. For example, 'have you ever had a moment when your age stopped you from doing anything?' and 'do you feel pressure to conform?'. However, my understanding of the insidiousness of ageism, alongside my experience of interviewing, gained through my professional

experience as a social worker alongside the research undertaken in my Masters, suggested that if I did not ask specific questions of this type, then interviewees would talk about ageing as if personally unaffected by issues of conformity and age expectations. I interviewed two friends, one after the other and when the first participant greeted her friend, she expressed her dismay at talking about ageing. Another example is that participants who stated that they had not experienced ageism, would refer to an example immediately afterwards. On these occasions, I would use the dictaphone if the participant wanted to contribute further. These experiences also highlighted the insidiousness of ageism, whereby ageism is experienced as a normal experience, rather than noteworthy, and this is addressed in my analysis.

Data Collection and Transcription

I recorded interviews using a dictaphone and uploaded them onto my computer, transcribing each interview as soon after the event as possible. I used 'Express Scribe' software to transcribe interviews word for word and frequently listened to words and phrases several times over, to ensure that I captured participants' words accurately. During the transcription process, it also became apparent that there were moments where I had missed some of the content of a participant's speech because the transcription revealed information that I would have followed up, had I heard it clearly. This demonstrates the impact of failing to hear an interview clearly. On the occasions that I could not hear a word accurately, I recorded this in the text in parentheses, as I did not want to risk altering the inferences of the text. Nonetheless, the absence of a word inevitably influences the inferences of the text and calls to mind Roberts' (1997) warning relating to multi-lingual transcriptions, 'How can the voices of informants be heard in the way they wish to be heard?' (p169). I had to listen particularly closely to the Northern Irish participants, as a mixture of unfamiliar accents and turns of phrase meant that words were not always apparent on the first hearing. This highlights how, with familiar phrases and situations, it is easy to anticipate words. However, I feel that this also highlights the risk of expecting to hear words before they have been said and my research diary captures one moment of realisation from November 2017: "have noticed a tendency to assume *my own* patterns of speech when transcribing. It's a good job I always rewind and relisten if I'm not certain because this has happened a lot, and

it does change what is being said". I found the process of personally transcribing interviews invaluable. Hearing the tone of a participant's speech allows for a deeper understanding of the participant's viewpoint, than reading transcribed words. In turn, this began the process of noting themes in the data.

As transcriptions were completed and anonymised, I contacted all participants to ask whether they would like to receive the completed transcript, so that they could advise me of any clarifications that I should make, add any information they would like to share or indeed, to withdraw from participation if they chose to. All participants were given the opportunity to receive their transcript by email, where document protections could be applied. I gave a deadline for responses, with timescales to complete my analysis in mind. All participants wanted to see their transcripts and these were sent by either email or Facebook, as chosen by the participant. Three participants responded with minor changes for me to make, and this related to my mishearing words on the audiotape. One example was my use of 'counsellor', when 'councillor' was intended. One further participant felt that identifying features remained in her transcript, for example names of venues. I was able to reassure her that I would not be using place names in my thesis.

Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis (Seale, 2012) to help me understand, classify and conceptualise my data. Nowell et al (2017) assert that 'qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible' (p1). That is to say, readers of this thesis require sufficient detail to surmise that, given the same data, they too would draw similar themes and therefore a comparable analysis. This adds to the perceived trustworthiness of the research process (Nowell et al, 2017). Within thematic analysis, I used the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser & Strauss, 2007), which allows for themes to evolve, as new information is discovered and compared. I began by reading through interviews and for each one, I noted the themes that arose *within* that interview, moving on to note themes

between interviews as they developed. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that researchers approach a data set systematically, giving full and equal attention to each item. With nineteen interviews to read, each containing between five and twelve thousand words, I found that my capacity to concentrate reduced as I progressed. My solution was to vary the order of reading, so that the nineteenth interview was not always the last to be read, and always to take notes. Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) noted that summarising each research event reflects 'the initial processing of the information by the researcher' (p86), providing the opportunity to discern the early emergence of potential themes. My experience reflected this assertion, as it appeared that piece by piece, themes within each interview collated and built, growing stronger with each interview, until themes resulting from collective interviews could be identified.

At this early stage, I identified twelve potential themes, which I narrowed down to eight themes, when closer examination revealed that some could be integrated. At this stage, the themes were: retirement; everyday ageism; moments of conformity; punk as consciousness raising/subverting gender stereotypes; the social imaginary of older age; being an individual eases pressure to conform in midlife; being in work as an older woman, and; health makes you confront age/doctors do not listen. I re-examined my lists of themes in individual interviews, to see whether these could be integrated into the eight wider themes. This served to remind me of the spectrum of nuances that I aimed to capture within the wider themes. I also searched through interviews, looking for further data to support these early themes, alongside data that acted as a counterpoint, noting the page and paragraph that I could find supporting information. This tactic heeds Braun & Clarke's (2006) warning that accounts that *depart* from the dominant narrative should not be ignored when coding.

Using printed transcripts, in different colours and fonts to aid differentiation, I began to cut out quotes and group them according to theme. This created a visual representation of my research. The scarcity of data within some themes soon suggested that I did not have sufficient evidence and the visual aspect was helpful in identifying my final themes. However, before this happened, I interviewed my final four participants. Following the same transcription process for these interviews, I sought data to fit the

pre-identified themes, keeping an open mind for new themes that these interviews may have raised. Aware that there were too many themes within my interviews to be successfully incorporated into my thesis, I began to consider how I could use the themes to answer my research questions and to tell a story about my participants' lives that would keep readers engaged. I aimed to capture DeSantis & Ugarizza's (2000) description of a theme as 'an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole' (p362). I observed that some themes could be easily conceptualised together, for example 'retirement' and 'work', meaning that I only needed to discard one completely. I identified my final themes and named the chapters thus, (1) Everyday Ageism, (2) The Punk Toolkit, (3) The Feminist Toolkit, (4) Work and Retirement, and (5) Health. When writing my analysis chapters, I made one stylistic decision that might look unusual within the thesis. Chapter Four takes phrases that women in the study use to describe their punk ethos and uses these phrases to form part of the 'Punk Toolkit'. When used in Chapters Four to Seven, I draw attention to their inclusion by *italicising* the words and making them **bold,** for example '***be an individual – don't conform***'. By using the words in this way, I aim to integrate the punk ethos throughout the thesis and also incorporate a touch of researcher bricolage (Hebdige, 1991). I also shortened participants' quotations as a result of supervisory discussion. My initial aim to let each chapter's narrative unfold in the words of the women in the study, gave way to succinct quotations. While this might seem in conflict with the concept of 'giving voice' (Graham, 1984; Reinharz, 1992), I made this decision because the chosen excerpts allowed the essence of participants' voices to remain, while making more room for the analytic discussion required of doctoral study.

Reflection on the Impact of the Researcher

I often reflected on the usefulness of the data, following interviews. However, as my data analysis progressed, I became aware that my initial reflections were sometimes incorrect. This led me to consider whose voice is privileged because as Gubrium & Holstein (2003) warn, the privileged position of the interviewer informs the selection and representation of interviewees' voices. I realised that interviews where participants

had a knack for an entertaining story, led me to perceive their contribution as more valuable than from less eloquent participants, as I will discuss below. Several participants had a skill for anecdote, and this captures the listener or reader's attention. Michael (2014) notes that anecdotes, or our thoughts about anecdotes, can be used as a way of interrogating the research process itself. Applied to my experience, my perception of some anecdotes as a focal point in my analysis, led me to question what the anecdote contained, that made it important. Conversely, this also enabled me to reflect whether, with more prosaic wording, I would value the content in the same way. As Michael (2014) points out, an anecdote brings together both the ordinary and extraordinary and in doing so, highlights the ordinariness of everything else, which, the research process revealed to me, is not necessarily an accurate reflection. By remaining conscious of my potential for bias, I believe that I avoided embedding it in my research. I additionally resolved the issue by analysing the *meaning* in participants' stories. This assisted me to draw every participant into the research.

I took care to interrogate the data for *all* the information that was there, rather than just the information that I hoped to find. While this might seem an obvious point to make, my awareness of researcher bias helped me avoid a common pitfall identified by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006), the unintentional fabrication of evidence caused by researchers 'seeing' data that they expect to find. It was therefore important for me to recognise the 'hopes' lurking in my consciousness, influenced by personal values. For example, I take ownership for the impact of my own feminism, which could have influenced me to seek evidence for, rather than evidence against feminism in punk. To address this, while I collected data that could be gathered under the heading 'feminism', I took care to include data that was anti-feminist. I also hoped to avoid focusing on appearance, thereby perpetuating the association between women and appearance, yet the subject permeated every chapter of my thesis, demonstrating the influence it holds on women's lives. The narrative of my research process responds to Nowell et al's (2017) concern, that when the researcher's assumptions or analysis process are opaque, then it is difficult for the trustworthiness of the research to be evaluated. Appendix D provides a table of participant details, so that the reader can get a sense of the women who comprise my research population.

Having set the scene for my research subject and provided an account of the minutiae of the qualitative research process, including interviews, transcription and analysis, I now move to my analysis chapters. Chapters Three to Seven will explore the research themes identified in this chapter, exploring each theme in relation to my three research questions, as outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

Chapter Three: Everyday Ageism

Everyday Ageism is the first of the five analysis chapters in this section, in which I discuss my research findings. It did not come to be first by chance: Chapter Three provides the cultural context of being a midlife woman in an ageist society, an experience which, when combined with the punk and feminist values explored in Chapters Four and Five, provides an underpinning for the experiences discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. This chapter begins by reminding the reader of the pervasiveness of ageism. The chapter then explores participants' experiences in relation to several tropes of ageing including midlife 'invisibility', 'age - appropriateness' and the internal narrative that such concepts foster. The impact of ageism is considered in relation to the places that midlife women go or do not go, activities that they do or do not do, and I employ the concept of the 'Ageist Forcefield'. Reader – you may not see it but you know it's there.

The Tyranny of Ageism and Midlife Invisibility

In this research project, participants shared experiences of ageism that varied from insidious to overt. Bytheway & Johnson (1990) observe that it is easier to catalogue incidents of ageism than it is to provide a definition and there is certainly no shortage of illustrative examples in the UK. Apart from the unashamed ageism of 'funny' birthday cards, where 'the message is clear: aging is bad, and we make fun of people who are getting older' (Nelson, 2011, p41), more subtle and pervasive ageisms permeate participants' lives. Ageism is present in the way that older women feel unwelcome in certain shops, bars and other social spaces, particularly when it is getting late and an unseen pressure suggests she should be tucked up with her cocoa. Ageism is in the 'age ordering of clothes' (Twigg, 2007), such as lists of 'what not to wear after 50' that permeate the internet, and it is woven throughout language. Freixas et al (2012) note that "gerontological language is deeply contaminated by the stigma of old age. The mere words 'old woman' are shocking because of the negative ideas with which they are associated" (p45). That is just one facet. The use of language is fundamental in the acceptance or rejection of discriminatory environments (Hawkins et al, 2001), so utterly

embedded that a woman can initially think she has received a compliment, “You don’t look fifty!”, later realising that it is an incognito ageist insult. While participants articulated their awareness of ageism and indeed voiced their rejection of the restrictions this imposes, I felt that they are nonetheless affected by ageist attitudes and expectations. This manifested itself in a number of ways throughout our interviews; from their own unthinking remarks that perpetuate ageism, or in their constant awareness of ‘age-appropriateness’, and of choosing whether to accept or resist it. Whichever way it surfaced, participants demonstrate that life as an older woman can be dichotomous: a life under scrutiny, yet strangely unseen.

> I am invisible because I am a middle-aged woman, I am invisible. A few months ago, there was a programme about spies. They took all the members of public and taught them surveillance, espionage techniques. And I said to someone, the best person to be a spy is a middle-aged woman because we are invisible. If you are a young woman you're going to get noticed because you are a young woman. If you are a little old woman, you are going to get noticed because you might be seen as sweet, lost, vulnerable, confused. Middle aged woman, you are invisible because you are not young enough to be a chat up, you're not old enough for someone to want to take care of you or look after you. You are invisible. (Ellen)

Ellen observes the ‘invisibility’ of being a middle aged/midlife woman, and the (espionage) possibilities this could theoretically offer. Ellen’s analysis draws attention to serious issues of how women are viewed at any age, and it is not as individuals with agency and power. Instead, they are viewed as youthful recipients for the (presumably) male gaze (Gill, 2007), or in older age, as recipients of altruistic acts. Take this away and midlife women are simply not viewed; their purpose is unclear. Taken to its logical conclusion, the unsettling premise is that an autonomous midlife woman is simply of no interest. If, as Woodward’s (2006) work on visual culture notes, older women can only be truly seen for themselves when both men and younger people are removed from the picture, the real-life equivalent is that older women are essentially the consolation prize, only noticed when other, more interesting people have disappeared. Participants articulated and understood the concept of being ‘invisible’ as an older woman, even when they did not think that the situation applied to them, and this indicates that the encroach of ageism does indeed begin in middle age. Participants drew attention to the concept of midlife invisibility in various ways and I encouraged the women I interviewed

to reflect on their understanding of the concept, thinking more widely than their individual experience. Michele related a conversation with a peer who expressed a feeling of midlife invisibility and reflected “I remember her words really clearly and I was thinking 'well, I've never felt that'”. Michele does not share these feelings and reflected that her peer’s circumstances of children having left home and not working contributes to a loss of role and identity.

Moglen’s introduction of the term ‘transageing’ (2008), seeks to communicate the value in one’s identity being neither one age nor another, but an integration of all identities and experiences across the lifecourse. This, she suggests, is to avoid the feeling of loss (of younger selves) translating into becoming ‘the lost object, closed to enlivening connection and dynamic change’ (p303). Segal (2008) critiques the theory’s potential ageism and neglect of feminism, suggesting that the idea of previous selves functions as nostalgia for an idealised past, acting as a balm for the reality of ageing. Participants’ experiences point to the necessity of maintaining a balance between the two perspectives. Whilst acknowledging that impact of previous roles and priorities on current identity can be positive if current identity is *fulfilling*, it would seem that when it is not, then the spectre of former roles and inevitably their loss can indeed end in the person becoming the ‘lost object’. Nonetheless, for other participants, the strong thread of subcultural identity and punk values appear to function in the way that Moglen describes. Essentially, if self-esteem is held within a role, rather than its underlying values, then the withdrawal of that role may be experienced as irreplaceable loss.

Work offers older women an alternative source of power, challenging gendered age judgements of men retaining power through money and status, while a woman’s alleged power lies in ‘youthful’ attractiveness (Twigg, 2004) and I explore the subject of work in Chapter Six. Otherwise, women’s culturally enforced sense of obligation towards caring and household tasks results in women being tied to lifelong roles as unpaid workers, enduring into later life (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000), a role which is little valued. If middle aged women are typically viewed as devoid of value and power, then job role may be significant not only in signalling value and identity, but in maintaining self-esteem. Several participants expressed their feeling that they do *not* feel invisible

because of age but feel that their personal circumstances, including force of personality and type of job, are contributory factors. It seemed to me that Michele's career as an academic and Heather's as a nurse mean that they are used to advocating for the resources they need and being heard. Bridget's design work at parties and Alex's photography also necessitate fearlessness about being visible in a crowd. This suggests that 'invisibility' is something to be fought. Perhaps for the predominantly feminist participants, this is a continuation of the feminist battle to be heard in a patriarchal world.

Cultural gerontology suggests that it is ageism that causes older women to be little noticed. However, the way that participants spoke to me about this situation suggested that they do not always experience the feeling of withdrawal from the male gaze as negative. The claim that midlife invisibility is desirable in its freedom from the male gaze has been claimed by some older feminists such as Germaine Greer (1991). Literature suggests that women experience escaping the constant judgement of their appearance in older age as liberating (Jermyn, 2015), and some participants expressed this, feeling that they could pass under the radar of constant sexual objectification in a way which they could not in their youth. However, participants' experiences align with the findings of Woodspring (2016), who asked if older women see and acknowledge each other, whose gaze is valued? Sandberg & Marshall query 'the ways that heteronormativity and its promises of happiness constitute a powerful narrative that organizes dominant understandings of the good (later) life' (2017, p3), suggesting that the heteronormative imperative of successful ageing positions women who do not experience a heterosexual gaze as unsuccessful, devalues a queer gaze, and erases the experiences of lesbian women. Ellen's viewpoint on the effect of age on visibility is a reminder that she is aware of its impact and it is not all about a heterosexual woman feeling visible to males, it is about the withdrawal of interactions. She finds that as she reaches middle age, so people respond less to her. This can extend into all aspects of a woman's daily life as she ages.

It is by considering all women's lives with a feminist gaze that the full extent of the dismissive treatment of older women can be acknowledged. As highlighted through the

activist projects discussed in Chapter One, Laura Bates' 'Everyday Sexism' movement (https://everydaysexism.com) and Tarana Burke's '#MeToo' movement (https://metoomvmt.org/), plus recent media coverage of the gender pay gap (Duncan et al, 2019), women can often progress through their lives, reasonably satisfied that they are not disadvantaged by being female, until they begin to share stories and become aware of the full picture. As Jaffe (2018) states, 'It starts with people talking about the conditions of their lives, realizing that they are common, and that they want them to change' (p81). This is also evidenced through the development of the WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) campaign, which highlights the insidiousness of female state pension changes, which WASPI asserts were introduced without adequate warning (https://www.waspi.co.uk/).

Ageism is also illuminated through the sharing of stories and this can be discerned in participants' accounts, when our interview conversations facilitated reflection about the experience of ageing, with moments of shared experience. Overall, participants feel that they remain visible and heard. However, what this does not consider is the extra work that the women in the study might unthinkingly undertake in order for this to happen, even when this just means raising the volume of their voice. When participants feel that they personally remain visible and relevant, even whilst they observe peers being disregarded as they age, they are able to dismiss the impact of ageism and to see it as a by-product of not being loud or assertive enough to avert it from having an impact. In the act of acknowledging ageism yet denying its impact, it could be argued that participants perpetuate one of the central tenets of ageism, which is equally a pragmatic coping strategy for older age – distancing themselves from older age (Cruikshank, 2003). I did not perceive that the women I interviewed wanted to distance themselves from middle age or older age itself. In interview, no one answered the introductory question "How old are you?" with anything but a direct answer. I conclude that instead, participants prefer to distance themselves from the potential embarrassment of being ignored, or from facets of ageist treatment that it might feel embarrassing to be on the receiving end of. The fear of potential embarrassment is perhaps part of the culture that enables ageism to flourish, the stereotypical 'stiff upper

lip' making it an impossibility to question unfair treatment, if this is perceived as drawing attention to oneself.

Many participants indicated that they welcome the seeming end of sexual objectification but this does not indicate that an older woman's appearance is no longer noted and critiqued in reference to 'age appropriateness'. This finding replicates Kathleen Woodward's observation (1999) about the paradox of the female experience; that the older female body is invisible and hidden from view, yet it is the *only* thing about older women that is noticed. However, taking a cue from Woodward's principle to include *everything* about a woman's appearance, rather than just the physical body, the subject was ever-present in talk of ageism. As a female interviewer of women, with a shared experience of gendered pressures, I felt it was possible that the subject of appearance would arise and indeed it sometimes functioned as a shared point of understanding and humour. Participants were often conscious of the principle of age appropriateness, even as they chose to reject it. I asked women whether they could think of a time when they had decided not to do something due to their age, or because of perceived pressures. Many women in the study initially struggled to find examples and this was encouraging. However, as conversations progressed, I found that they would remember examples later, even after I had turned the dictaphone off, or would nonetheless describe incidents that fit the criteria. This suggested that the midlife participants in the research assimilate ageist attitudes in such a way that they become normalised.

> I've got real thick hair, Turkey's hot, I'm a redhead I don't like the sun, it gets too hot, so I had it all beaded, braided. So, when I came back I still had it braided and a couple of women that I work with that were around my age, apparently, I found out later, were saying I needed to learn to act my age. (Dee)

Dee described an example of age-policing, from women her own age. She does not accept it but her example shows how ageing women feel pressured through everyday discourse, into considering their age in every aspect of their lives. Dee is condemned for not acting her age, although 'act' refers to an aspect of her appearance, indicating how important appearance is perceived to be, when *performing age* (Woodward, 2006), which Woodward judges to be constructed around 'the youthful structure of the look'

(p162). It is not just appearance that matters. To conform to the concept of ‘cultural time’ (Blaikie, 1999), women are required to match the way they look and behave to what everyone else around deems acceptable for middle age. Dee’s experience illustrates the personal consequence of failing to conform to the ageist ‘age appropriate’ expectations of others. All participants were aware of the ways in which their appearance as ageing women is monitored and judged. One of the central tenets of the successful ageing framework (Rowe & Kahn, 1987) is that older women are deemed to have aged successfully when they continue youthful activities, essentially passing as ‘young’, the result of youth and wellbeing being conceptualised as interchangeable (Copper, 1988). The experiences of participants, such as the response to Dee’s braided hair, show that not all youthful activities are equal, as the judgement of ‘age inappropriate’ indicates that she has both failed to look the correct way for her age, and equally has not passed as young.

The experiences of participants suggest that successful ageing functions as a restriction, rather than an opportunity. Age scholars have critiqued successful ageing for its restrictiveness (Asquith, 2009; Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Martin et al, 2015) but focused less on how certain youth-associated activities or looks are exempt. Arguably, the assessment of which activities and looks are deemed suitable to be continued along the lifecourse is a moot point because cultural gerontology argues for people to be allowed to be old in whatever form that takes, not to replicate youth. Gilleard & Higgs (2009) note that an identity of ‘old’ is one that no-one wants to take, due in part to its inability to encapsulate the diverse trajectories of older people’s lives. Ageism shows its hand when considering the wholly different attitude towards ‘young’. The two participants in their mid-sixties noted an interesting phenomenon. They had both experienced occasions where someone expressed surprise at their (older) age. This could echo the ageist fake surprise that is often expressed to flatter the older woman, the mock assumption of younger age offered almost as a consolation prize for the abominable reality of being old. However, it seems that there is a little more to it.

Disrupting Age Assessment Through Punk

Wendy explained to me that she is clearly her age if anyone bothers to look closely but she felt that her unconventional appearance means that the gaze stops there and does not travel further to see whether she really accords with the youth expected of subculture. Similarly, Josie has noticed the same kind of surprise and felt that this relates to making an age assessment on style and accessories rather than aged face. Holland (2004) also noted that women in her research on 'alternative femininities' reported an assumption of youth based on what they wear. It is plausible that the lifelong expectation that women make an effort with their appearance plays a part. In this case, I wondered whether Dee's beaded and braided holiday hair was simply too temporary to be judged credible. Whereas Wendy's undercut hair and earlobes with stretchers, or Josie's top to toe high fashion demonstrate dedication to a look, thus granting credibility. Their 'reward'? Passing as young. The hypervigilance of age assessment indicates a cultural need to categorise people according to age, the foundation of ageism (Bytheway, 1995). Cruikshank's (2003) 'hyper awareness of age' goes further, a comparative device to ensure that people remain conscious of age in relation to each other, the consequence an expectation of difference that increases with the size of the age gap. Josie and Wendy's acquaintances may have intended to compliment, but the effect remains unsettling, drawing attention to a cultural view that there is something about them that is not quite in keeping with their age.

Women who choose an alternative form of dress are no more exempt from the pressure to conform to age norms in dress than anyone (Holland, 2004) although Josie and Wendy's accounts show that subcultural style can confuse the onlooker in relation to age, making ageism just that little bit trickier to enforce. All participants articulated the meaning of punk as a freedom to be true to themselves. This incorporates looking how they want, wearing what they want, or *not* focusing on their appearance. Participants experience ageism in the increasing awareness that this freedom should somehow be censored – that they should consider their age before replicating so-called youthful attire, should consider that certain items of clothing are out of bounds, and should aim for neatness, as a respectable manifestation of older age. Paula's statement that, "Sometimes when I look at things in shops I forget how old I am", betrays a lurking

suspicion that she is supposed to be aware of her age, and to bear it in mind with every purchase. This recalls Twigg's (2007) description of 'age ordering' in older people's clothing as an 'elusive phenomenon', not easy to evidence but somehow present, as Paula's admission acknowledges.

Constant Awareness of Age

A constant awareness of age is what differentiates the experience of ageing women from that of younger women. Awareness that their age should be performed in a certain way means that participants often have conversations about 'age appropriateness' in their heads, even if they do not articulate them, or give in to them. These thoughts may be fleeting but they are frequent visitors, creating a tension that is unique to older age. Participants described an internal narrative that alludes to ageist tropes such as 'mutton dressed as lamb', a constant censoring voice. Twigg (2007) notes such phrases to be widely recognised, with a multi-layered meaning. It was evident to me that to participants, even the word 'mutton' caused hesitation. The term is understood as a warning to the wearer, a 'term of control' (Twigg, 2007, p295), but draws attention not only to the peril of wearing clothes that are seemingly intended for a younger wearer, but also suggesting that the clothes could be inappropriately sexual. This suggests that the wearer is led to feel that she could be desirable, when culture suggests this would only be the case if the clothes were transferred to an appropriately youthful body and unlined face.

> I heard quite recently somebody saying you know as you get older you do have to put in a lot more attention to yourself, make sure that you're presented, because you can't carry off the scruffy look. (Liz)

Liz described an expectation to adapt her appearance as she ages, to ensure that it meets a well-groomed norm. Like Liz, several participants described their punk 'look' simply as being scruffy. Ageism shows itself in the way that the lack of attention to a neat appearance is taken as symptomatic of something more in older women. Indeed, Twigg (2007) describes the increasing harshness with which 'lapses' of dress are judged as a person ages, being taken as symptomatic of social and moral decline. A few participants, later in this chapter, describe an expectation of respectability as they

age, and Liz's experiences reflect this. This suggests that without a tidy facade, there is a horror that a woman may give away that she is actually ageing, and that her less than pristine appearance will lead the casual observer to look closer and see that her skin is less taut and she is old. Gloss over it with a pin-neat appearance however and people may be fooled into not looking more closely. Participants' experiences show that not only are surrounding people looking closely, the constant surveillance meaning a constant risk of 'failing' (Gill, 2007), but society keeps a sharp eye out for potential misdemeanours of ageing.

Participants related comments which draw attention to the omnipresent threat of age judgements, where age monitoring is so pervasive that it is difficult to single out exact sources, and which appear to lead to an oppressive environment of ageism. This ageist culture means that the women in my study are aware of an anonymous yet omnipresent judging eye, constantly on the lookout for age related faux pas and this calls to mind 'age ideology', Gullette's term (1997) for the underpinning ageist social structure.

> My husband said "you're not meant to wear tight jeans at fifty". Are you not - oh well. You know what, I don't give a fuck…He said it, no, how did he phrase it? It was "they say" I think was the phrase. He'd read something somewhere. (Michele)

Michele related her husband's comment about tight jeans, which she wears. Even though she suspects he may not hold this view himself, he nonetheless reiterates it. 'They say' cannot easily be proved or disproved, and if said enough, it is perceived a truth. Michele rejects the idea that tight jeans should not be worn by older women, but nonetheless the thought has been imposed on her, to be remembered. The inherent thinking processes reflect Copper's assertion (1988) on the consequences of ageism for women, that the dread of old age takes up time and energy that could be more usefully directed elsewhere. This experience is symptomatic of the experiences of many other participants, aware that they are likely to be judged and found wanting if they do not bear these invisible restrictions in mind. Michele goes on to say "I don't care. I never have cared. Well I have, I've told you I have cared but I've decided not to care if you know what I mean" and this encapsulates the contradiction of having to *choose* not to care what other people think, highlighting how the expectation to fit in

increases with age. It seems that the women in my study find that ‘unwritten’ rules become harder to avoid as they age, expanding decade by decade, the ‘decade-based dating’ that Gilleard & Higgs (2000) describe that police women’s lives, and are consequently given expression in a critical ‘not for you’ internal voice (Gullette, 1997), that can be accepted or resisted. Participants articulated how it feels for appearance to be shaped by outside pressures, rather than personal choice. Faith’s explanation of the impact of unwritten age rules conveys her unease, “If I try and, you know, acknowledge them, then I feel I'm not quite in my own skin”. Participants’ accounts revealed that even when they choose to reject age expectations, they remain as aware of them as everyone around them.

> I realise that people think at sixty-four, you should dress this (certain) way**.** Well, I mean, it's funny, I go to Topshop a lot and I've got a Topshop credit card and I'm aware that several women my age have said 'oh I couldn't go in there' and I’m thinking well, why? (Josie)

Josie reflects on her shopping habits, highlighting that her peers do not feel comfortable entering the same shops that she does. Her account suggested to me that there is more to this than the minefield of ‘age ordered’ clothes. A metaphorical ‘Ageist Forcefield’ appears to exist, dictating where older women should and should not go. Advertisements that use only young women conspire to exclude older women and, as Carrigan & Szmigin (2000) note, the few advertisements that feature older people, do so in an ageist and limited way, reinforcing a message that older people only use a narrow and age-stereotyped range of products and services. Josie’s account suggests that peer influence also serves to reinforce the message that there are places that ageing women should not go, things that ageing women should not do, and ways that ageing women should not look, even if this is resisted. Some of the women that I interviewed took pleasure in subverting the ageist status quo and enjoyed the sensation of being difficult to label. Sklar (2013) notes that a negative reaction to subversive appearance fosters complex responses in male and female punks of all ages but identified a ‘sense of joy’ (p84) as one of them. However, for the fewer participants who are still identifiable *as* punk, there are equally times when they prefer the aesthetics of their identity to pass without comment.

Flo expressed her disappointment when she overheard younger punk women mocking an older punk woman, their shared subcultural identity clearly demonstrating that it is not unconventional appearance that is perceived as problematic, but the age of the wearer. The mocking that Flo identifies suggests that female solidarity may have an age limit and indeed criticisms of feminism have included its failure to take an intersectional approach that acknowledges age (Calasanti et al, 2006). The effect of ageism is that women are socialised to think that the signs of age on an ageing woman are distasteful (Segal, 2014) and that it is a personal failure to be or look old (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). As a woman ageing within this context, it is utterly understandable when Rosalind explains “I don't mind getting old but I don't particularly want to look old” because she is surrounded by cultural messages that imply that visible signs of ageing on a woman are undesirable, the ‘double jeopardy’ of ageism and sexism that Sontag brought to attention more than forty years ago (1972).

Can Age Stereotypes be Advantageous?

Away from appearance, wider stereotypes of older age seemed at first glance curiously positive.

> One of the curious parts of growing old is that no matter how you behave, a sort of respectability, a degree of respectability is conferred on you simply for being older. (Chris)

Participants encounter stereotypes about the way ageing women are expected to conduct themselves or live their lives. Chris observed that she is automatically considered ‘respectable’ as she ages. The concept of respectability itself is problematic as it is inherently classist (Skeggs, 1997) and gendered**,** functioning as a sanctioning device against girls and women’s participation in subcultures since the 1950s (McRobbie, 2000). Respectability, alongside concepts such as ‘ladylike’ serves to oppress women, to monitor every facet of their being. ‘Ladylike’ is at odds with Halberstam’s (2005) concept of *queer space,* as it aims to discipline women’s bodies into occupying space in a strictly heteronormative way. It could be optimistically construed that ‘respectable’ older women, will be listened to and consequently be allowed rightful access to all areas of society, in which case the outcome, if not the

method, is conceivably positive. However, Chris's explanation that she interprets an expectation of respectability with being calm and measured, to responding to situations with equanimity suggests more of an imposition than an opportunity. My interpretation is that this imposes a duty on older women to somehow *respond better,* rather than the alternative of society responding to ageing women better, i.e. not in an ageist or sexist manner. It might be a slight conceptual leap, but Chris's experience of having 'respectability' attributed to her bears similarities with Woodward's (2002) interpretation of 'old age wisdom', which was introduced in Chapter One. Woodward highlighted how wisdom in this particular form is portrayed as passivity and docile acceptance, and the consequence is the silencing of older people's voices. If 'respectability' conflicts with the punk values of dissent and protest that were discussed as part of the punk ethos in Chapter One, how easy is it for an older woman's voice to be heard when she is indeed protesting and dissenting? An optimistic perspective is that conferred respectability, no matter how inaccurate, makes it easier to be heard, to infiltrate. In this sense, an ageing woman could use her respectability as a strategic tool, a weapon. As Ellen pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, midlife women are perfectly placed to be undercover agents, causing disruption with their beige and sensible cloaks of invisibility.

So, what is it about flying under the radar that might be useful for ageing women? Women are frequently stereotyped as being emotive and irrational (Fine, 2010), the opposite to the male-attributed cool rationality that gets heard and gets things done. Perhaps an end to being considered emotional is an opportunity, a time in an ageing woman's life when she can claim the audience that she may have been denied along the way. However, Fine (2010) considers how such depictions, often 'supported' by research interpreted through a gendered belief system, maintain sex discrimination. The ageist flipside is that older women who do not conform to gendered age expectations of quiet acceptance (Woodward, 2002) are consequently sanctioned, in the same way that women's voices are silenced and discredited throughout the lifecourse by postfeminist descriptions of female voices as 'shrill' (Negra, 2008). Woodward (2002) asserts that this denies women 'the possible galvanizing effects of anger for stimulating personal and social change' (p187). Ahmed (2017) suggest the reclaiming of 'willful' tongues as an act of feminist resistance and her exhortation serves

as a reminder that *keeping quiet* is a normalised gendered expectation for women. The invisibility of women refers not to an aesthetic, but to situations such as these. This is where the spy analogy runs out of steam: what good is infiltrating, if you cannot converse about your findings afterwards? When older women are not heard, the spectrum of their experiences remain unknown by the wider population, perpetuating negative ageist stereotypes of women as rigid, unproductive and dull (Rosenthal, 1990) their lives imagined as equally constrained. However, these representations were not reflected in the conversations I shared with the women in my study. I interviewed nineteen women, who despite sharing some punk values, which will be explored in Chapter Four, are inescapably individuals, with a spectrum of interests, ageing lifecourses lived differently. Nonetheless, several participants noticed the ways in which their own lives are not reflected in depictions of older women in the media.

> If I read a book about women in their fifties, well your children have all left home now and you've got relative affluence and your mortgage might be paid off…what mortgage? What children? (Faith)

> You know, we don't all hit fifty and then we're all one type of person. Well, we never were throughout our lives, so we certainly are not going to be in old age. (Michele)

Faith observes that the limited representation of women in their fifties, in advertising and in books, reflects an existence that she does not recognise. This reflects Halberstam's (2003, p314) case for narratives of queer time and space, where futures 'can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction and death'. The lack of representation of ageing women perpetuates ageist stereotypes that deny the full continuum of experiences and choices that constitute older women's real lives. Representations of older age are typically heteronormative and conservative (Sandberg, 2016), leaving no room for different sexualities, singledom or unconventional lifecourses. Katz (2001) notes that the concept of 'Gerontographics' developed by Moschis (1996) to foster the potential of marketing to older people, assumes that older people are naturally affluent and that consumer identities and lifestyles are themselves desirable. My discussions with the women in my study suggest that, as Katz suspects, these are not universal

desires, nor are they universally achievable. For example, a few participants saw home ownership as symptomatic of a conventional, limiting mindset. Looking at this from an ageing studies perspective, I feel that this might illustrate the punk DIY ethos juxtaposed with the economic realities of being an ageing woman, the DIY ethos serving to validate the fact that there is more than one way to progress through the lifecourse. However, it seemed from Faith's observation that conventional representations of ageing women serve to demonstrate how they *should* live their lives and highlight the economic foolhardiness of failing to do so.

Michele observes how expectations of homogenous age make no concessions for individuality, as if individuality will dissipate in older age, although the advent of cultural gerontology has suggested that older people become more diverse than the young (Twigg & Martin, 2004). Nonetheless, this is not reflected in wider media, meaning that midlife participants struggle to find realistic representations of their ageing lifecourse. Two participants also reflected that older women are not represented in the media because they are not perceived as generating revenue, which is in sharp contrast to the neoliberal framing of older people as consumers (Katz, 2001). Older women are of course reflected in the media to some extent, just not in diverse ways which reflect the lived experiences of real women. It seemed to me that the absence of a representation that my interviewees *could identify with* is the critical point, and contributes again to a feeling of invisibility, as discussed earlier in the chapter. An interplay of ageing theory explores the relationship between representation and economic factors.

Chapter One introduced the perspective that theories of successful ageing rely on older people having access to financial and other resources (Asquith, 2009), leading to a widespread perception that older people have disposable income. The theory was developed to displace theories of loss and dependency (Rubinstein & de Medeiros, 2014), which typify a negative version of ageing, including the loss of economic power and status. Successful ageing's popularity in the cultural imagination is indicated by the absence of broader representation of so-called 'unsuccessful' age, suggesting that participants' perceptions of the importance of economic power are correct. Older people themselves often do not assimilate concepts of successful ageing, interpreting

‘success’ on their own terms (Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Pruchno & Wilson-Genderson, 2014) and I felt that this was reflected in the accounts of my research participants who might not fit the criteria of successful ageing but are satisfied with their own lives, our interviews revealing ageing lifecourses shaped by each woman’s interests and values. This makes the concept of successful ageing appear irrelevant. However, when ideas of successful ageing are assimilated to mean *this is how ageing should be for women*, ageing women might begin to feel excluded from full participation in society, because, as Faith indicated earlier, they are not afforded the same diverse representation that younger woman might expect. As interviews progressed and I heard each woman’s story, the discrepancy between cultural representations of older women, and the diverse midlife reality of these women’s lives became increasingly clear. Participants described a spectrum of experiences, hopes and disappointments of midlife.

The Cultural Possibilities of Midlife

> I’d like to be in a band but people, there's not a lot of people, people my age are either really brilliant, or they don't play an instrument and if I go and find some youngsters, they're not going to play with an older person on the drums. (Heidi)

As undoubtedly indicated by every participant’s identification with punk and enduring love of punk music, many of the women in the study continue to enjoy listening to music and going to gigs or festivals. Participants that play an instrument were often interested in being in a band but felt that barriers begin to appear as they age. This was represented in the way that they discussed their plans in our interviews, and I reflected on whether an absence of intergenerationality, the tendency for people to socialise within narrow age ranges within UK culture, could be to blame. Chapter One introduced Cruikshank’s (2003) ‘hyper awareness of age’ as a way of understanding how human interactions change according to differences in age and this seems relevant. In addition, Freixas et al (2012) use the term ‘reverse socialization’ to describe intergenerational relationships that enrich older women’s lives, and while this celebrates the sharing of new experiences for older women, Freixas et al fall short of confirming this as a two-way process. Heidi suspects that she would not be welcome in a band with younger people and another participant shared this concern. However,

it is Heidi's relative inexperience as a drummer that appears to be a challenge, when filtered through an ageist society. Older women become more visible by taking up time and space, when they are new to an activity. Being inexperienced and learning something new seems acceptable in youth. Approach midlife however, and participants' accounts suggest that this route becomes increasingly treacherous.

Third age theories (Laslett, 1989; Weiss & Bass, 2002) portray retirement as an ideal time for development and learning and the popularity of the U3A in the UK reflects this, having formed in resistance to the unfulfilling nature of 'retirement activities' previously on offer (Katz, 2008). Participants' thirst for *something more* suggests that a third age perspective towards ageing could fit well with participants' experiences, despite the absence of existing retirement for most of the women. The experiences that several women in the study shared, suggest that learning in midlife is not perceived as an intergenerational experience and the existence of age segregated 'silver surfer' classes (Gorard, & Selwyn, 2008) add weight to the argument. There is a wider context about ageing and wisdom, the supposed compliment of which Kathleen Woodward (2002) beautifully scuppers, as described earlier in this chapter. To reiterate, Woodward declaims the portrayal of old age as a time of wisdom, highlighting that wisdom in this form is portrayed as quiet passivity. If older women are meant to be both wise and silent, then asking for help is problematic. In Heidi's situation, it could be concluded that this form of ageism means that she is not expected to progress her musicianship in the exposed environment of band practice and gigs. Just as persuasive it seems, are the 'Ageist Forcefields' that I have already noted, which compel older women to avoid places and activities, even when the origin of that 'you're too old' message is unclear.

> I still know quite a lot of people who were in bands then and I always find it depressing when one of them says to me 'oh I'm too old to do music now'. Because I just think, well when are you ever too old for music, because it gave you joy at one point? (Chris)

Participants queried the notion of being 'too old' for an activity or interest that had little connection to physical ability, relating this to conversations with their peers. Chris questions fellow musicians telling her that they are 'too old for music now'. Not all

interests endure throughout the lifecourse but this is not the same as being ‘too old’ to do something. It is the correlation of non-participation with ‘old’ which betrays an ageist culture that quietly insists on withdrawal from public space, becoming increasingly silent and less visible (Woodward, 2002). Music performance is visible and vocal, things that ageism dictates older women are not supposed to be. Chris’s exchange with her friend over an implied ‘sell by date’ in music performance, relates to these issues. Jennings and Gardner (2012) state that youth no longer retains such a hold over music, as older women are making new music, touring and being heard, but if older women’s music is poorly marketed, as indicated by the wider advertising that excludes older women, then the illusion is perpetuated that ageing women are excluded from music. When this sense of exclusion filters down, ageing women may feel that they should not be performing music at all, even if the setting is fellow musicians playing together in a private environment.

The Ageist Forcefield Encroaches

Participants discussed how feelings of age appropriateness transfer to public spaces and places:

> We went out to check out a place called the Peaky Blinders bar, which has opened in Liverpool. And it was fine, it was a wee bit noisy and we couldn't talk so we left. But when she got back, she said to her son [….] 'oh no, it wasn't for our age group really'. And I said 'hold on', actually hold on, we left because we couldn't have a conversation, not because (of age). (Josie)

Returning to the earlier theme of constant age-awareness, especially in relation to appearance, many women in the study often felt conscious of age in relation to *places*. Josie recounted a night out with a friend, which ended early when the bar they visited was too loud for conversation. However, she later heard her friend retell the anecdote from a different perspective, attributing their experience to ageing, to going to a bar which was not designed for their age group. Another participant recalled judging herself as ‘too old’ at a nightclub in her thirties, but recently assessed herself as ‘the youngest’ at the cinema. Cruikshank’s ‘hyper awareness of age’ (2003, p173) yet again, can be discerned in these internal narratives, which subcultural women are not exempt from (Holland, 2004). The impact of this concept is that age falls in and out of significance

depending on the ages of the people interacting and this can be discerned in participants' accounts, represented by its intrusion into their everyday lives and thoughts. Age is used as the mechanism by which women relate or do not relate to the people around them, and it is not a big stretch to assume that the surrounding people do the same, calculating age to assess whether they are acceptable or welcome, or in the right place. Ageism flourishes when 'old' is used as an 'othering' device, what Carney & Gray (2015) refer to as the 'elderly mystique'. Josie's friend's rationale may therefore have been influenced by the fact that she was retelling the story to a younger person (her son). I understood Josie's reaction to "it wasn't for our age group" as surprise at hearing the age focused mother/son account, following her own conversations that evening, which, occurring between two older women, had not focused on age.

Calasanti et al's (2006) suggestion that recent feminist concern about ageing may be precipitated by the ageing of feminists themselves, suggests that few people are concerned about the ageism that they have not personally experienced. If the only people that have any interest in a woman's middle age are midlife women themselves, or women that were once middle aged and are now even more hidden from view, then ageism is easily perpetuated in everyday life. Josie protests her right to occupy spaces as an older woman, while her friend appears to apologetically relinquish her right to do these things. With one sentence, Josie's friend confirms that there are places that she should not be purely because of her age and contributes to the correlation of ageing with a diminishing social world. Josie's personal understanding of imposed age restrictions extends to her awareness that older age itself should be denied (see quotation below). She feels a social pressure to deny that she is in her sixties and to deny any of the indicators that she is nearing retirement age. Segal (2014) observes that the stigma of old age means that many people feel obliged to either deny their age, or – as a last shot at acceptability – to deny 'feeling their age'. As she so succinctly puts, 'old age may no longer be the condition that dare not speak its name, but it remains the identity about which most prefer to stay silent' (p214), therefore endlessly perpetuating ageism.

> I'm quite open about my age and that, I think, sometimes takes people aback because I think women of my age aren't open [….] sometimes I think it's like I've just farted in a public place. It's like you don't openly say I get my state pension this year. (Josie)

Josie finds that in openly stating her age and impending receipt of her state pension, she reveals a dissonance between herself and other ageing women. She is aware that convention dictates that a woman is reluctant to reveal her age when she is older, and that this is less expected of men. The reluctance to reveal both actual age and markers of age such as pension entitlement acknowledges the concept of 'social age' (Woodward, 2006), which refers to the meaning conveyed by societal markers of age, social policy functioning as a clear waymarker. Consequently, the markers of social age must be denied just as vigorously as chronological age, the disclosure of which Bytheway (2005) notes is quickly used to categorise and regulate. Withholding both chronological and social age can therefore be understood as an attempt to perpetuate an illusion of youth to avoid ageism and retain social value. Women who choose not to admit that they receive their pension consequently resist the label of 'old age pensioner', a categorisation that often depicts older women as dependent and therefore valueless. As Gilleard & Higgs (2000) assert, the construction of the third age is dependent on a 'post-work identity' (p38), which suggests that energy should instead be directed into maintaining purpose and activity, essentially *justifying* retirement. My perception is that to feel age and indicators of age should be downplayed, essentially silences women about the reality of their lives. It suggests that ageing women are only acceptable if they have the good grace to pretend to be younger and to fit in with the accoutrements of youth. Perhaps the worst of this is that it is isolating. How easy is it to remain steadfast in your identity as an older woman, if the actions and words of peers suggest that it is only worthy of apology? Cruikshank (2007) notes that if 'old' was accepted as comprising many, many differences, then no-one would hesitate to accept it as part of their identity. No-one is offended by being described as 'young' because this conjures up a wealth of possibilities.

Imaginaries of Old*er* Age

I found that all the women in the study felt that (even) older age has the potential to be characterised by possibilities and opportunities and hope that they will remain independent into old age. Independence and agency can be understood in the context of what they *represent*, namely divergence from fears of a dependent and powerless old age, which retain a powerful hold in the ageist imagination and will be explored further in Chapter Seven. This version of distant old age, briefly introduced as the 'social imaginary' (Gilleard & Higgs, 2013) in Chapter One, is used to describe the fourth age, the distinction which demarcates third age active and autonomous retirement, from *undeniable* old age. Nonetheless, several participants perceived that sourcing help when they need it is itself an autonomous move, in keeping with a holistic interpretation of independence. Wray (2004) challenges the western specific interpretation of independence, finding that "interdependency with others rather than independence from them is central to the development of relationships and does not inevitably pose a threat to autonomous action and being in control of ones' life" (p31). This raises consciousness to the potential in older women's lives, reminding that to require help does not rule out the capacity for reciprocity.

Looking at inter-generational friendship, O'Dare et al (2017) found that older people are often framed as recipients, rather than as having something to offer. The emotional benefit of reciprocity can be applied to other exchanges and it is by understanding the emotional consequences of a social exchange where reciprocity is *absent,* that its importance can be fully appreciated, as in the words of Ellen who decried the 'invisibility' of middle-aged women at the beginning of the chapter. Apply the principle to the shop assistant who fails to make eye contact and exchange words with the older woman making her purchase. Apply it to the bartender whose eyes skim over the conveniently 'invisible' middle aged woman, to instead rest on and serve her younger version. My understanding from the limits of my interviews is that when women perceive that they are not welcome in social spaces, that their interest in the social space is not reciprocated, then they withdraw, censoring the places they allow themselves to go into. I would argue that the absence of reciprocal relationships with places and with members of the public surely has a negative effect on any older woman's social world.

It is not just relationships with members of the public that impact on older women's ageing life courses, personal relationships are equally scrutinised, ages assessed, and judgements made on an age-only basis.

Gendered Judgements

> We all go out with men who are much younger than us, and it's interesting the reaction you get to that. You get the horrible, horrible terms like Cougars and MILFs. (Faith)

Faith draws attention to ageist insults that she has been subject to. Cougar and MILF are gendered examples, designed to mock situations that are thought unworthy of comment when gender is reversed. 'Cougar' refers to an older woman who 'pursues' a sexual relationship with younger men, and Oró-Piqueras & Wohlmann (2016) note that 'their age-inappropriate behaviour is provocative because it challenges normative age scripts' (p163). Despite the female agency this suggests, cougar is often used as a derogatory term and this highlights the narrowness of lifestyle choices that are deemed acceptable in the cultural imagination. Oró-Piqueras & Wohlmann's (2016) assert that Halberstam's concept of 'queer time' (2005) is relevant to the cougar's embrace of non-normative behaviours and this could explain the resistance to so called 'cougar' behaviours, as they do not represent the conventional, heteronormative imperative of the ageing lifecourse.

The acronym 'MILF' (Mother I'd Like to Fuck) firstly objectifies a woman through the categorisation of her desirability to the male gaze but draws attention to her rhetorical status as a 'mother'. The inference is that an ageing woman's years make her unattractive and undesirable, the ageing process itself rendering her invisible as a sexual being (Calasanti, et al, 2006), and is rooted in a general discomfort with the idea of mothers as sexual beings (Gerike, 1990). Segal (2014) questions ageing studies literature that expresses relief at being able to leave behind a sexual life, suspecting that a fear of rejection may lead women to deny their interest – reject before being rejected, noting that some autobiographical accounts (Simone de Beauvoir, 1978; Doris Lessing, 1998) suggest that it is not older women whose interest has rescinded, rather it is interest *in them*. This again draws attention to the need for reciprocity in older

women's relationships. Older women need to be seen, heard and valued if relationships are to be approached without an age influenced expectation of rejection.

The reluctance to acknowledge older women as sexual beings may also connect to the Ageist Forcefield around the kind of places where people often go to meet a partner. Participants sometimes felt that they do not have access to these spaces. Not all activities are considered equal in older age and there are moral judgements at play. Katz (2000) observes that research on activity in older age highlights through omission, just what counts as activity and what does not, noting that activity checklists tend to omit activities such as sex, drinking and gambling, even though they represent 'doing' and leisure and bring enjoyment. It is the censoring function of 'age appropriateness' that might just serve to make older women hesitate and question their daily lives. Conversely, the authoritarian nature of such prescriptiveness could serve to make punk women resist these restrictions, and instead sculpt their own shape to middle age. I found that some of the women I interviewed discovered that cultural expectations of age function as something to rebel against.

Rebelling Against Age Expectations

> I just did a Body Combat class [….] one of them said 'we see, every time, we see you in there, ooh I couldn't do that. And not at my age'. They talk to me as if I'm thirty years younger and I'm not. I think it's limitations they put on themselves because they're a certain age. (Josie)

Gym attendance fits the successful ageing parameters of active retirement. Josie encounters her peers in a Pilates class at her gym. They mention seeing her take part in an energetic Body Combat class beforehand, and excuse themselves from the possibility of taking part, "not at my age". This could be internalised ageism, as Josie perceives. However, Josie's peers might themselves be feeling the unwelcome pressure of successful ageing, which requires a person to replicate youthful fitness and activity, or at least to *appear* fit, thus granting social capital (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006), the focus on body and appearance meaning that women are targeted disproportionately. It must be noted that young women are not exempt from judgement and indeed, those who do not meet the required levels of slimness (perceived fitness)

will be scrutinised and continually reminded of their failure to measure up, female body shape and size being equated with success (Gill, 2007) The cult of health and fitness can be overwhelming at any age and it is not unthinkable that Josie's peers exaggerate a lack of fitness to avoid the pressure to 'compete', or indeed that they are showing the 'defiance' that Holstein (2006) identified as one justifiable response to the demands on ageing women's appearances. Faced with Josie's committed fitness regime, I reflected that her acquaintance's responses may be more of a face-saving mechanism, an act of resistance.

The pressure to maintain a youthful and active appearance and lifestyle could be overwhelming and exhausting, the notion of retreating from such activities tempting. Indeed, cultural representations of older age as a time of slowing down could be appealing, compared to the competing responsibilities of earlier years. Participants, at their point in midlife, acknowledged only subtle changes in the pace of their lives, if at all, and this will be explored further in Chapter Four. To correlate all ageing with a loss of physical ability is at the root of many ageist assumptions but there is a subtle difference between this, and with understanding that ageing often entails a slowing down, a bodily response to the 'limitations and requirements of the body' (Moglen, 2008, p304). During our conversations, I encouraged participants to think of specific examples of changes they make across the lifecourse and women articulated this tension with examples that responded to specific issues, for example avoiding a moshpit due to a bad back, rather than generally slowing down in response to old age as a concept.

As Hillyer (1998) acknowledges, the body usually demands more attention as we age, and changes connected to ageing entail making adaptations to the way we live our lives. To deny this is to deny the reality of older women's lives and to contribute towards an ageist pressure to maintain a facade of optimum youthful health and physical ability. The individual consequence of not living up to this ideal has been described as shame in showing the ageing process, of disempowerment (Twigg, 2004; Holstein, 2006) but considering the age-range of the women in my study, I felt that that some middle-aged participants were too early in their ageing lifecourse to experience this fully and

therefore their willingness to acknowledge changes attributed to ageing bodies could be considered in this context. Nonetheless, Rosalind depicts the cultural environment within which ageing women live their lives thus: “You're gonna age, you're gonna look different, and you've got to accept that, and youth is the thing, you know”. ‘Youth’ identifies the benchmark against which older women are judged. Knowing that there are expectations for how ageing women should live their lives, alongside a seemingly universal distaste for the ageing process *on women,* undoubtedly influenced the way participants talked about their own ageing and infiltrates everyday decisions and this is explored in the following section.

Ageism in Everyday Life

This final section moves away from the elements of older age that remain a ‘social imaginary’ (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015) to participants, and moves into the minutiae of everyday life, the small things that our interview conversations revealed as being subject to age scrutiny and which, put together, create a wholly scrutinised ageing lifecourse.

> Black clothing doesn't look particularly flattering on women over fifty when they're pale, so I've sort of swapped to navy a bit more now. (Heather)

> I'm going grey and it doesn't suit me. If it did, I'd leave it but it doesn't suit me, so I just throw a colour on. (Flo)

Participants perpetuate ageist language and behaviours in subtle ways that could be dismissed as personal choice, if I was not viewing them through an ageing studies lens. The women that I interviewed appeared largely satisfied with their lives and with ageing, seeing midlife and beyond as a time of opportunity. Nonetheless, participants verbalised ageism unthinkingly, two women linking the word ‘boring’ with ‘old’ or ‘middle- aged’ in a way that suggests that they are interchangeable. As women who do not see themselves as – and certainly were not during our interviews – boring, this suggests that participants must distance themselves from both middle age and old age. However, a closer look indicates that each woman ascribes boringness to an age which she is not, for example Heather’s teenage recollection of thinking of staid young people as middle aged, or Dee remembering that she used to think of people her (current) age

as ‘old and boring’ when she was younger. As Cruikshank (2008) states “the binary old/young holds within itself a presumption of superiority for “young” (p150) and participants were aware of this, and it seems, always had been, now holding that fact against the positive reality of their own ageing with an air of both resignation and humour, as in Rosalind’s “youth is the thing you know!” The knowledge that ‘youth is the thing’ underlines everything that cultural gerontology stands for.

Older age is not imagined as something that anyone could want, and this is due to cultural representations that are limited and one dimensional. It seems to me that with older age as a social imaginary, it feels safe to write off future ages because it is difficult to envisage getting there. That is its function. It seems unimaginable that harmless words will build, word upon word, to create a rhetorical prison to confine and restrict real human beings as they age, yet language builds dominant public discourses about ageing ‘and can shape how older people see themselves and how they believe they are perceived in society’ (Duffy, 2017, p2074). Flo and Heather’s words inevitably have an effect, even if only on their own ageing experience. I found that comments that appear to be about personal preference, and that initially seem harmless, take a different slant when viewed through the lenses of both ageism and feminism. The personal is of course the political. A participant that claims that certain clothes do not suit her as she ages is arguably the product of an ageist society that demands women restrict their appearance as they age. Heather states that she cannot wear black because it does not suit a fifty-year-old women with pale skin and in doing so reiterates the idea that older women simply do not look good without some careful disguising of age. Lurie (1992), referenced in Twigg (2007, p293) makes the connection between age and colour in older western women’s dress, noting that navy is part of a ‘suitable’ colour palette that favours ‘muted, soft, dull colours like beige, grey, lilac and navy-blue’. Meanwhile, Twigg (2007) finds that Harvey’s (1995) association of black clothing with ‘drama and display – the dangerous black of fashion and sexuality’ (p293) could explain why black clothing is less frequently worn by older women, who are ushered towards colours that tend towards camouflage. This suggests that Heather’s choices may be less free than she thinks.

Equally, Flo's remark about not suiting grey hair could be interpreted as discomfort about not suiting the outward manifestations of older age. Grey hair is arguably the most visible manifestation of older age, the universally understood signifier of age referred to in Chapter One (Ward, 2015). Taking into account expectations that older women should dress neatly and erase any sign of disobedient ageing, alongside the universal expectation that women should 'get ready' to go out, I counter that it is grey*ing*, more so than grey that is problematic for midlife women. Having a solid hair colour maintains an illusion of control. Hair that is wilfully attempting to change its colour shatters that illusion and exposes ageing for the natural reality that it is. Given the invisibility of older women, it is unsurprising that a woman might choose to hide her grey hair, to retain her visibility in society (Gerike, 1990) and I feel that this could be a hidden narrative in Flo's account, a residual wish to retain the visibility that both punk and youth had afforded her.

The women in the study had been resistant to being labelled or stereotyped from a young age and this continues, to include resistance to age categories. However, ageism colours participants' beliefs about 'other' generations. Participants did not self-identify with age categories such as 'baby boomers' or 'third agers' and given Bytheway's (2005) belief that all categorisations of age are inherently ageist and have the effect of 'othering', it could be argued that resistance is crucial. However, during interviews, participants were not immune from assimilating generational divisions and from perpetuating media discourse about 'other' ages. It could be argued that ageism shows itself not so much in the claiming of a generation to which you belong, as the rejection of other generations to which you do *not* belong. It is this 'othering' of age that Gullette (2000) refers to as a contrived 'age war', that serves only to divide and conquer people and attribute blame, such as the blaming of reputedly affluent baby boomers for the financial woes of Generations Xers. If baby boomers were initially reported positively, as the first generation to have a defined and notable 'youth' to compare against later old age (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000), is it purely their ageing that attracts negative attributes? Criticisms of older generations are uniquely harsh in characterising older people as actively causing problems for other generations. Millennials and Generation Xers escape with rather more passive charges of

selfishness and self-absorption, charges which have always been levelled at young people (Gullette, 2000). One participant expressed shock at the attitude of an entire generation, the ‘Millennials’, and this had been triggered by stereotypical representations in a television series. However, I would counter that the mothers in the sample, subject to cultural pressure to take disproportionate responsibility for their offspring, were uniquely placed to feel the brunt of adolescent ‘selfishness’, and perhaps to place undue emphasis on this trait.

The pervasiveness of ageist media discourse resulted in some participants echoing the rhetoric. Ellen talked about her concerns for her own future; of a diminished welfare state and too few resources to go around, wondering whether the future will bring “some form of legalised euthanasia”. Winch et al (2016) counts the supposed crimes the media attributes to baby boomers, the ultimate being the inevitable destruction of the National Health Service due to their refusal to die. This is driven by neo-liberal policies and market driven programmes, which pin a personal responsibility on older people to be active to avoid the stigma and risks of dependency (Katz, 2000), which is positioned as inevitable yet distasteful when it is applied to older age. Such rhetoric stokes the fires of ageism by implying that to fail to ensure one’s own optimum health and fitness is to be responsible for the resulting lack of services for others. Ellen’s comment about euthanasia, though perhaps flippantly made, reflects nonetheless the demonisation and blaming of older people in the UK.

Age segregation perpetuates intergenerational conflict and this reflects Hamad’s (2017, p170) concept of ‘toxic intergenerationality’, positioned as the ageist consequence of postfeminist anxieties and cultural scripts. Media discourse pits women against each other in a way that discourages intergenerational sisterhood, positioning women of different generations as ‘natural enemies,’ (Winch et al, 2016:559). O’Dare et al (2017) argue that the dearth of writing on intergenerational friendship reflects the way that ageing and older people are viewed in contemporary societies and consequently in research. I would argue that it is a contributory factor in ageism and in the maintenance of an age segregated social world, the inevitable consequence of which is human beings who cannot imagine other ages but nonetheless imagine the worst.

Understanding this means – for an older woman – internalising the possibility of *being* the worst. Heather recounted an anecdote about her ninety-one-year-old mother resisting a mobility scooter. When Heather questioned why her mother would not use something so convenient, she replied “well I didn't want to look like a decrepit old bugger”. Ageist rhetoric is so powerful and divisive that she is tempted to forgo independence to resist appearing as a ‘decrepit’ old person. For the women in my research, it could be said that ageism results from both a personal social imaginary of old*er* age, whereby they cannot easily imagine the years ahead, then as ageing women they become the objects of younger persons’ social imaginaries.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter demonstrated the relevance of its title. The women in the study, while exploring their experiences of ageing and the meaning of punk in their lives show how ageism is an everyday experience, whether they feel that they are able to resist it or not. Everyday Ageism shows that participants are aware of the experience of midlife invisibility but on the whole do not feel that it applies to them personally, citing personal qualities or occupation as factors which help them to avoid becoming *invisible,* even while they observe the effect on other midlife women. Ellen’s account, which introduced the chapter, provided an exception. Ageism is revealed as a constant presence in participants’ lives, creating a hypervigilance relating to age. This is represented by an internal debate, whereby participants are almost always aware of their own age, the age of others around them, and the concept of ‘age appropriateness’ not only in relation to themselves, but to places, activities and items of clothing. Equally, participants recounted incidents of age-appropriateness being imposed on them by others, of being aware that their appearance is being judged against an age expectation and found wanting.

Satisfyingly, it seems that for the few women in the study whose appearance conveys punk identity, their punk facade confuses other people, disrupting notions of age appropriateness. A similar experience relayed by a participant with a strong individual style shows the powerful hold of ‘age-ordering’ in relation to clothing and appearance in the cultural imagination. Ageism *can* be and *is* resisted by participants, especially in

its form as the sanctioning gaze of ‘age appropriateness’ but this takes time, energy and a level of consciousness, and indeed humour, that cannot always be drawn on.

As the insidiousness of midlife invisibility suggests, ageism permeates public spaces and into the way that midlife women choose to spend their time. The complexity in identifying the factors that cause many midlife women to feel unwelcome in certain places or activities, leads me to develop the concept of the ‘Ageist Forcefield’. Midlife women cannot see it, no one is willing to admit responsibility for it, but nonetheless it exists. Participants, by sharing stories that include their peers, identify places and activities that women feel either ‘too old’ for, or that become subject to the internal “can I? should I?” narrative, evidence of a constant awareness of age and consequently, of belonging. Reciprocity emerges as a theme that impacts on the experience of ageism. When older women are heard, seen, acknowledged and valued, then they are encouraged to participate fully in their social worlds and to evade the hideously familiar midlife invisibility, which also reveals itself in the absence of multi-faceted representations of older women that participants noticed. Punk plays its part in participants’ resistance of ageism, successfully confronting onlookers’ ideas of age appropriateness but also, it seems, equipping participants with an inbuilt resistance to convention and labelling, both of which are inherent in ageism.

Chapter Four examines the meaning of the punk ethos in participants’ lives and explores further the subcultural values, attitudes and practices that older women may use across their ageing lifecourse. These are conceptualised as a ‘Punk Toolkit’, a *personal* set of strategies with which expectations for conformity and restriction in older age may be resisted. The following chapter explores this in more detail, and also examines the ‘moments of conformity’ that touch participants’ lives.

Chapter Four: The Punk Toolkit

The preceding chapter ‘Everyday Ageism’ explored how participants experience and resist ageism in their lives. Through the stories that the women in my study shared with me, they also demonstrated how they internalise and perpetuate ageism. Chapter Four explores how the punk ethos becomes a personal toolkit with which expectations for conformity and restriction in older age can be defied. I found that participants recognise original punk culture for its opportunity and continue to use the ethos to shape a lifecourse. Although few participants identify themselves as *a* punk, all participants identify *with* punk and were able to identify the elements that create their personal Punk Toolkit and recognise its relevance in their lives.

This chapter introduces participants’ early awareness of resisting cultural restrictions. It then takes specific examples of punk values that participants identified, to create a Punk Toolkit and explores the application of the toolkit across the lifecourse. This chapter also examines the ‘moments of conformity’ that participants identify, the times when social pressure to conform seems particularly strong, or difficult to resist. Motherhood is identified as a hotspot of social pressure. However, for all participants, these moments of conformity, even if they remain present for several years, do not take over their lives and the chapter concludes with participants’ perspectives of integrating the punk ethos further along their ageing lifecourse.

Resisting Cultural Restrictions

> I walked past the woodworking sheds with my bright orange Siouxsie hair and my black uniform and my leather jacket on and one of the boys that was in that class, very gleefully told me afterwards that the woodwork teacher had stopped the class and pointed to me outside the window and went 'Lads. Lads. Look at that fucking freak'. Now these days, this guy would have been out on his arse, he would have lost his job but that was what I was going into every day. But I thought if that means I'm not like you, then that is the biggest compliment I can have because conformity and restriction just means living death (Heather)

Heather describes the beginning of her aversion to conformity and restriction, an attitude that permeates her lifecourse. This in turn informs her experience of ageing, which includes the potential restrictions of ageism. For her, punk represents freedom and is the antithesis of ‘a living death’. As some of Bennett’s male participants felt, ‘from the outset, punk had instilled within them a life-changing experience for the better’ (Bennett & Taylor, 2012, p239) and despite the changes over time, punk ideology remained a vital part of their identity and sense of self. The women in my study share this outlook.

The cultural impact of ageing means that older women negotiate their identity as an ongoing process. Women’s identities are challenged by the bombardment of cultural messages about ageing, often comprising two broadly contradictory images of ageing, decline and dependency versus fitness (all interpretations of the word) and agency (Marshall, 2015). Another dichotomy is located within the exhortation towards the ‘settling down and wearing beige’ conformity of older age, which is in opposition to the discourse of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987) with the continuation of youthful pursuits, which are often interlinked with a youthful appearance. I felt that the women I spoke to skilfully weave their way through the ageing lifecourse, accepting and rejecting cultural restrictions, which appear to reflect their experience of bricolage (Hebdige,1991), which Chapter One explored as part of the punk ethos. This entails making new meaning from things, which in punk practice could include making clothing from an old pillowcase and some safety pins, as Liz describes to me later in the chapter.

Clarke (1997) asserts that the technique of bricolage goes beyond subculture to the mainstream and is more than just an aesthetic; it can be used to create meaning across the lifecourse, potentially reframing identity along the way. When participants express their identity as being the same as their younger selves, this does not feel to me like a rejection of being old, but instead an expression of the multi-faceted nature of ageing lives, strongly suggestive of Moglen’s concept of ‘transageing’ (2008), where a multiplicity of past experiences do not suddenly become irrelevant, but instead inform experiences, thus retaining relevance. Seen from a transageing perspective,

expressions of ‘I still feel twenty-one’ subsequently feel less ageist in intent, although the consequences remain so.

Building the Punk Toolkit

Participants with experience of bricolage, whether they recognise it as such or not, should be perfectly placed to continue this through the lifecourse, ultimately weaving together parts of themselves past, present and future, to create their present-day identities. To understand the parts of punk culture that inform the way participants live their lives, I asked the women in my study, “If you could take one thing from punk and pass it on, what would it be?” This builds on writers such as Haenfler (2014) who questioned earlier subculture writing, with its virtual exclusion of women and girls' experiences, asking ‘What, in fact, do subculturists do and how do they make sense of their lives?’ (p10). Indeed, this question should be familiar, as it introduced the section on subculture research in Chapter One. Haenfler noted that some subcultural ideas and practices are carried through the lifecourse. The question of course, is which, and how? I used this question to facilitate the women I interviewed to explore an aspect of punk that is meaningful to them, but also used it to explore its use across the lifecourse.

Harrington & Bielby (2010) shone a lifecourse perspective on fandom to demonstrate the ‘emotional anchoring’ (p445) informed by a connection to the object of fandom. The punk ethos functions in a comparable way, anchoring participants to a set of values with which the lifecourse can be approached. This links with intergenerationality, whereby the punk ethos could be used by women of any age or generation and this leads to the concept of the punk ethos being part of a toolkit for the lifecourse. The terms ‘punk ethos’ and ‘Punk Toolkit’ are used interchangeably in the following chapters because all the answers that participants gave me, as detailed below could demonstrably be integrated into the punk ethos, identified in Chapter One as *Anti-Authority Attitude, DIY Ethos* and *Unconventional Appearance*. Seventeen out of the nineteen women in the study responded to my question but the answers below show a congruence that, from our discussions, seem representative of all participants’ ageing experiences and their experiences of punk culture. The toolkit reflects Hall’s (2013) assertion that culture comprises a set of *practices*, rather than items, the sense of

connectedness between participants' accounts evidencing that, as people identifying themselves as being in the same culture: 'they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world in ways which will be understood by each other' (pxix).

The Punk Toolkit: If you could take one thing from punk and pass it on, what would it be?

- Be an individual – don't conform
- The great energy
- Be politically active because this creates change
- The attitude
- The music
- You can do anything, there is no limit
- If you fancy doing something just do it
- Fuck the patriarchy
- Exploring your identity in a safe environment
- Don't trust a man in a suit
- The attitude – you don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority
- Be true to yourself
- Be yourself
- The freedom to be who you want to be
- Camaraderie
- Camaraderie and fairness
- Be open-minded and non-judgmental

Participants' responses demonstrate the breadth of the punk ethos and some, for example, "Be politically active because this creates change", "Fuck the patriarchy", "Don't trust a man in a suit", and "You don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority" are indicative of a questioning and non-conforming mindset that could equip the women in the study for the challenges of their ageing

lifecourse. Reddington (2007) found that female punks valued individual freedom and self-expression above everything else in punk and this can be easily discerned in the statements above. Chapter Five 'The Feminist Toolkit' explores the elements of the Punk Toolkit that appear underpinned by feminist principles in more detail. Participants explored the extent to which the punk ethos permeates their lives and in an act of infiltration, I have incorporated many of the principles above into the chapter, *italicised* and **made bold** to reveal their integrative potential, as signposted in Chapter Two. For example, as we were discussing the punk ethos, Dee asserted "This is the person I am, accept me for who I am. I'm not going to go with everybody else", and this could also be encapsulated by the Punk Toolkit's ***be true to yourself*** and hence is written in bold and italicised. This inbuilt resistance equips Dee to reject ageist restrictions on appearance and lifestyle and feel confident that however she wants to live her life is the right way, which is contrary to popular definitions of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987), although faithful to Havighurst's original interpretation of successful ageing (1961), and to accounts of older women creating their own definitions of 'success'.

As the previous chapter 'Everyday Ageism' noted, research shows that many older women define themselves as ageing successfully despite falling outside classic definitions and Dee shares this outlook, showing that success is an individually defined concept that cannot easily be captured by literature. Participants' lack of fear in standing out from the crowd and refusal to be defined by other people are punk traits that stand them in good stead to define 'success' on their own terms.

> I don't feel a huge need to fit in. I'm a very sociable person and I love, in the sense that I love socialising, I love meeting new people, I love finding out about other people so in that sense, but that doesn't make me feel the need to conform (Chris)

Participants' interpretations of the punk ethos encompass being at ease with not fitting in, finding a political identity, and embracing change throughout the lifecourse. The Northern Irish women in the study embodied a point of difference, asserting that for them, punk offered an escape *from* the political climate of the time, where the religious affiliations pertinent to the 'troubles' did not matter. Chris's ease with not fitting in and

not conforming, which she takes from punk, is a useful tool for claiming ownership of social spaces, disregarding the 'Ageist Forcefield', the concept I developed in Chapter Three, which attempts to discourage all but the intrepid to stay away. It seems to me that Chris will not feel out of place or unwelcome because 'fitting in' is not one of the factors that affect her belongingness in social spaces. The sense of not fitting in is an insidious beast that otherwise creeps into older women's lives, effectively restricting access to everyday places. Thornton's concept of Subcultural Capital (1995) operates through the attribution of status 'in the eyes of the relevant beholder' (p27), which presumes someone equally subcultural, in whatever form that takes. If only the view of the 'relevant beholder' is valued, then surely this grants a significant degree of freedom in caring about the judgements of others, as Chris's attitude suggests. Some participants found this acceptance within punk events, with punk friends, which were an integral part of their lives. Rosalind describes her own punk ethos as being anti-authority but also about freedom: "Punk to me was an expression of freedom I suppose. Of doing whatever you want to do", admitting that it does not make it easy for her to fit in. It could be contended that if expectations for women were less restrictive, then Rosalind may feel less compelled to distance herself from the conformity of mainstream society and this is further explored in Chapter Five. Many participants highlighted that the meaning of punk for them, in whichever way they express it in their lives, is about social justice, and that it functions as both an outlet and a blueprint for challenge.

Content in the Punk Ethos

> I think it offered hope to young women from backward places who felt that they were inferior. And you sort of, particularly someone like Poly Styrene, because it's a working-class black woman, looking great and sticking it up the Man, 'Oh Bondage Up Yours'. Fantastic. What could be better? (Heather)

Heather identifies intersectional causes of anger, such as racism, classism and sexism, both of which may endure through the lifecourse, only to be joined by the frustration of ageism later in life. The punk principles that interviewees shared with me, and that were embedded in the way they talked about their lives, ranged from a questioning outlook to activism and dissent. This is not to say that all the women in the study were, or ever had been, politically active as an individual. Many admitted that collective punk

practices such as demonstrations and marches have not continued in their lives as they age. Nonetheless, the principles could be incorporated into smaller everyday actions. Kat listed some things that punk means to her: “Question, challenge, stand up for what you believe and stand up for others. That's, yeah, that's what I've taken away from punk”. It is important for Kat to be able to stand up for both herself and others and this is a belief that will always find an outlet, ***be politically active because this creates change***, yet is sometimes expected to be absent in an older woman. Showalter’s (2013) assertion that, contrary to popular belief, older women often become increasingly revolutionary finds a home here. Michele emphasised that punk protest is aimed at righting societal rather than individual wrongs, suggesting that “it is about identifying those things that are wrong and putting them right”. The ability to connect individual discomfort to wider problems is the starting point to challenging restrictive expectations of age and wider social issues, a point of learning that reinforces the depiction of the third age as a time for knowledge and learning (Blaikie, 1999).

Clark (2005) argues that the co-option of subcultural style into mainstream consumer culture is best avoided by having *content*, suggesting that it is important from a standpoint of authenticity to avoid mainstream others taking on elements of the punk aesthetic, without any further attachment to the subculture. Applying this concept to participants’ accounts, the critical point is content. Our interview conversations demonstrated clearly that participants find meaning, or *content* in punk and embed it in values that they carry across the lifecourse, epitomised by the concept of the ‘Punk Toolkit’. However, Clark’s rationale for subcultural content diverges from participants’ personal experiences, in the way that the women I spoke to described *content* as something that they find valuable on its own terms, rather than something to be used to differentiate themselves from mainstream others.

During interviews, participants lightly acknowledged elements of subcultural style in mainstream culture, but without rancour, often acknowledging the value of increased freedom for others, particularly in reference to the verbal and/or physical aggression they had been subject to in the earlier days of punk. Bridget encapsulates ***the attitude:*** “well, do you need to rebel so much when there's no conformity, if you know what I

mean, it's only when they're forcing you to do something isn't it, but if you're free to express yourself in whichever way you like…" In reference to the principle of taking one thing from punk to pass on, participants are not resistant to the idea of passing punk values on to others, and this could be attributed to the acknowledgment that punk values are of social worth, as encapsulated in participants' descriptions of social justice aims. In this way, Clark's (2005) warning that the co-option of subcultural style makes it meaningless, is obsolete. The social justice meaning makes co-option desirable and participants were often keen for their children to benefit from what they perceive as the benefit of the punk ethos. The relative insignificance of style in relation to other facets of punk identity means that participant's ageing lifecourses appear to divert from its original punk premise, which Hebdige (1991) embedded with style.

> I am still filled with the same kind of rage that I had when I was in my twenties, about what I see as injustice. You know, I feel furious that people are relying on food banks, sleeping in the street. I think that's obscene, that's not the kind of future I want to live in (Chris)

Chris's description of the things that enrage her as she gets older, demonstrate that she continues to view the world through a keen social justice lens, aware of inequalities and social issues, in the way that Showalter (2013) notes. I felt that the ageing focus of our interview conversations, at times, encouraged the women in the study to view their own ageing with the same critical, socially aware lens that they use for other facets of their lives. The questioning outlook that informs social justice is one key to challenging expectations of age. Participants' 'social justice' filter is one device in the Punk Toolkit that can be used to examine age inequality as a political rather than personal issue. The spectrum of women's voices represented in this study suggests the continuation of political motivation and activism throughout the lifecourse for many, from their early awareness of injustice, to ongoing social justice fuelled anger and acts of resistance, while for fewer women in the study, this had never been an important part of punk for them. This reflects Haenfler's (2014) assertion that there is an utter spectrum of participation in subculture practices, an appearance of non-conformity or anti-authority attitude not always translating to wider acts of resistance.

Ellen explored in her interview how she perpetuated individual acts of dissent, entering fashionable sportswear shops to protest their inability to cater for her, recognising that these shops are designed to exclude her on the basis of body size and drawing the shops attention to the fact that middle aged women like her often have disposable income. The shops perpetuate an image of health and slenderness that theories of successful ageing attempt to replicate (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). A successful ager has the free time given by retirement, and the affluence to buy costly exercise wear, combined with the dedication fostered by the fear of appearing old. Ellen feels that age itself has become an asset in getting a point across and being heard, the aforementioned 'respectability' of Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism', that at least gets her across the threshold and listened to, although she suspects that her individual act of protest does not lead to change. Ellen points out that it is the principle of her action that matters, the principle of not being excluded, and this is a critical point. For punk women, accustomed to being heard, the ability to ignore the ageist exhortation to become quiet is a useful part of the Punk Toolkit. The act of protest is in itself valuable, as moral and political beliefs keep ageing women engaged (Segal, 2013).

The Punk Ethos and Working Life

Using the Punk Toolkit in everyday life means integrating it into working life and this functions as a site to negotiate punk values, whether this is in the choice of work, or in the way participants approach work restrictions. The relationship between the punk ethos and work and retirement will be explored in detail in Chapter Six. Bennett & Taylor's (2012) finding that ageing male punks integrated their work values into their choice of employment could be easily discerned within participants' choices, both explicitly as in Flo's description of applying the DIY ethos to work: "I think it's an attitude about what I can achieve, that DIY ethos, and I don't, I think I see less barriers because of coming through that, that punk period", and implicitly, especially in the employment of participants who choose work that offers creativity, freedom, or professions that embed social justice principles or a questioning outlook.

Two participants had approached the prospect of a work dress code as creative 'role playing' when they were younger. Using clothes to play a role meant that they were

able to maintain agency in situations that could otherwise be perceived as restrictive. This enabled them to approach the donning of a conventional look as a subversive tactic, reflecting Finkelstein's (1996) assertion that 'when clothes are misappropriated…they fracture convention; when they are parodies, they satirize those same conventions' (p245), although one woman felt in hindsight that her intended 1950's secretary image was probably just boring office wear. Nonetheless, this subversion of appearance could be interpreted as women infiltrating organisations who may otherwise not want to employ them, rather than bending to the will of the employer. Not all participants felt this way, and some participants gave examples where their unwillingness to adapt their appearance has affected their career path. Wendy described an interview where she received positive feedback but was advised they could not hire her if her appearance remained the same. Wendy's rejection of the idea of formal work wear suggests that the Punk Toolkit's ***don't trust a man in a suit*** originates from a disregard for the idea that formal dress or uniform signals ability. She felt strongly that to change her appearance would be to deny an integral part of her being and would be detrimental to her emotional wellbeing, and this part of her punk ethos enabled her to focus on what is important to her personally. She did not change her appearance. Participants' responses to situations such as these varied according to their individual punk ethos.

Other women's stories illustrate a process of adaptation across the lifecourse, a flexible approach to conformity and non-conformity.

> I've had someone in here today and if I need to persuade him to give us money to fund our researchers, he probably wouldn't if I was wearing the same clothes that I wear outside of work. (Michele)

Michele's awareness of the effect of appearance at work means that she adapts her appearance at times to get what she wants, which in the instance above is research funding, in employment that fits her social justice values. Her focus on social justice is the key Punk Toolkit strategy that enables her to negotiate a flexible path, appearance wise, through an ageing punk lifecourse. Kat explained in her interview that she entered employment with the acknowledgement that she needs to fit in, justified by the punk

ethos being something inside her, not just an aesthetic. She later disclosed that although she toned down her punk aesthetic for work for at least a decade, she had a change of heart in her later forties, welcoming back aspects of punk appearance that she had previously enjoyed. This experience reflects Holland's research (2004) with 'alternative' women, who articulated a tension between retaining an 'alternative' look, whilst avoiding censure for age inappropriateness as they age. Holland (2004) interpreted the rhetoric of toning down as 'something that just happens' as a method for not admitting defeat and it is conceivable that the punk ethos itself could be used to justify the disappearance of the visible aspects of punk identity, that are theoretically in opposition to expectations for ageing women. This allows the possibility of an *aesthetic* 'Ageist Forcefield' to be denied. Relying on an inner authenticity implicitly allows punk women to disengage from the reality of expectations for ageing women, to avoid the stigma of a continued subcultural look (Holland, 2004) but also to avoid confronting the possibility that they have indeed conformed to expectations of age – an admission of giving in?

The Punk Ethos and Appearance

The research interviews presented me with the opportunity to share participants' anecdotes about their early engagement with punk, including some inventive and unconventional approaches to appearance. Liz recalled:

> You'd chopped up a pillowcase and put it back together with safety pins you know, you couldn't afford anything from Chelsea Girl or wherever people got their clothes back then, but you could still be cool through being really resourceful. (Liz)

An unconventional appearance is but one facet of punk, if it is chosen at all, and not all women in the study consider it important. As participants progress through the lifecourse, many draw on wider influences and looks than punk. Nonetheless, a punk appearance gave participants the experience of standing out from a crowd, of disregarding censure, and this functions as a punk tool for avoiding age invisibility. Heather drew attention to the crimson streak in her hair, as she said "hair's the safe option, it kind of says 'I'm a bit different, but I don't want to talk about it'". This suggests that a smaller display of non-conformity feels more 'appropriate' for women as they

age, but also engages with issues of sexism, as a woman's appearance is continually scrutinised (Calasanti, 2008). Heather seeks to express her individuality, but this does not correlate with permission for her appearance to be debated. If a patriarchal society holds a woman responsible for the reactions of other people to her, the resultant internalised experience that Holland et al (1998) refer to as 'the male in the head', then it seems that the punk principles the women in my study expressed to me have purpose, making ***fuck the patriarchy*** an eminently understandable ethos to live by, and atypical, confusing clothes an understandable response to the male gaze.

All the women I spoke to had experience of disregarding restrictions and conventions in their appearance, often finding originality far more important than gendered expectations of looking 'feminine', put together or neat, or disputing that there is a right and wrong way to look for every occasion. Some participants disclosed that a lack of money was their initial motivation to make punk clothing, indicated by Faith's "We had no money. So, I think that was it, to make tatty look, well we thought we looked good", with the critical point that it is her own satisfaction with her appearance, rather than outside judgement, that matters. This follows in the footsteps of many punk women for whom 'the DIY element was born out of necessity as much as fashion' (Reddington, 2003, p246). Liz acknowledged that the resourcefulness fostered by her punk ethos meant that she could have a look that she could not otherwise afford. Not all participants had been short of money in the early days of punk but nonetheless enjoyed the creative challenge of creating something spectacular from something ordinary, which suggests a motivation to create uniqueness, ***the freedom to be who you want to be***. This experience of creativity within budgetary constraints is part of the DIY ethos that can be drawn on throughout the lifecourse. Goode (2018) notes that the availability of cheaply produced clothing means that clothes making functions less nowadays as an economic necessity, than a creative practice. Nonetheless, the ability to creatively alter and adapt clothes bricolage style is relevant for older women who may be disadvantaged financially (Ginn et al, 2001) through changes to the state pension system and gender pay inequality, the 'triple whammy of poverty, sexism and ageism' (Dolan, & Tincknell, 2012), or who fear losing themselves in a sea of similarly dressed peers.

Participants explained how punk equipped them to feel confident in standing out or apart from the crowd. This shows how the Punk Toolkit can be employed in individual ways that result in unrestricted access to social spaces, and to ways of being and living. The unselfconsciousness of punk performed a useful function for women, removing them from the usual exhortation to care about, amongst other things, the way they look, the prioritisation of others' feelings and their performance of gender. However, Reddington (2007) found that in the 'aftermath' of original punk, the unselfconsciousness and gender-neutral style of performers began to fade, suggesting that without the reinforcing structure of the subculture itself, punk women were assimilated into mainstream roles and gender stereotypes. As the spectrum of punk values have shown, women can carry their punk ethos forwards without an obvious physical manifestation. However, it is Reddington's perception of the reintroduction of self-consciousness that is troubling. When people begin to feel self-conscious, it influences the way they present themselves and interact with others. I wondered whether participants' accounts of fitting in, including in the workplace, however they justified it to themselves, was influenced to some degree by self-consciousness. The trajectory of participants who, however briefly, felt compelled to conform throughout some mothering years will be discussed later in the chapter. Whatever the rationale for the moments of conformity that fluctuated across the lifecourse, participants' additional awareness of a cultural perception that older women are somehow 'other' sometimes has a disorientating effect.

The Effect of Midlife Invisibility on Identity

> I could not see myself reflected anywhere. And I thought, that in a sense, kind of, to conform you'd need to go along with that and just sink into older age…it took me a few years to kind of find my feet again and step into them and go 'right'. Yes, there's always pressure to conform I think, if you're a woman. (Faith)

Faith recalled first noticing the absence of visual and written representations of her age "I could not see myself reflected anywhere", alongside a dissonance between her reflection in the mirror and the way she felt. Several participants shared this sense of cognitive dissonance, which reflects Featherstone & Hepworth's concept of the 'mask of ageing' (1991) as an aged appearance obscuring 'the essential identity of the person

beneath' (p379), which although arguably ageist in notion, retains a strong hold in participants' perceptions of themselves. Faith advised that it took her a few years to find her feet and re-establish her sense of identity. The experiences that participants described in their interviews suggest that they feel a heightened sense of awareness of the physical signs of ageing in midlife, that can nonetheless co-exist with participants' individuality and dismissal of other expectations of ageing. This dichotomy causes some participants to question who and how they should be, even if for a short time. There is perhaps an added complexity in acknowledging an ageing appearance when other facets of identity such as subcultural interests are interpreted as 'young' purely because they originated *when* the person was young. Bennett (2015) has suggested however, that the concept of youth culture is changing due to the ageing people whose sense of identity is inextricably informed by the culture of their youth. The exhilaration of both youth culture and subculture became evident in participants' accounts, embodied in tone and turn of phrase.

The disparity between the exhilaration of subculture and midlife invisibility could explain Faith's disorientation; from internalising a feeling of being of no interest, to feeling boring, it is hardly surprising that some participants correlate looking boring with feeling boring. While not all participants feel that a punk aesthetic is needed for them to *feel* punk, the link between appearance and esteem for women can be so strong, that it is not surprising that 'boring' appearance might correlate with the way women feel. Male focused research (Bennett, 2006) has found that once older people have absorbed core subcultural principles, the look is of lesser importance but this fails to acknowledge the place of appearance in some older women's lives and its relationship to the attitudes of others, which women experience as a hyper-awareness of image (Holland, 2004). It could be surmised that the feeling of invisibility that older women sometimes experience, is not just about the reactions of others, but an embodied feeling associated with the imposition of a subdued aesthetic (Lurie,1992), as discussed in the chapter Everyday Ageism. Conversely, an injection of individuality into a participant's appearance might function as a dose of adrenalin from the Punk Toolkit and an assertion of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995).

The experience of being highly visible had not prevented punk women from entering social spaces when they were younger, although several participants referred to 'no-go' areas that were hostile to any punk, such as pubs that would not allow punks to enter. Indeed, many of the women in the study claimed that punk and its original feeling of possibility enabled them to feel comfortable frequenting punk spaces by themselves, a contrast to conventional nightclubs which could be ruined by sexualised scrutiny and misogyny.

Using the Punk Toolkit to Resist Midlife Invisibility

> I think it puts you in good stead for not being afraid to, not being afraid to move away from the flock or stand from the crowd in a lot of ways. (Liz)

> I would happily go anywhere and do anything and I realise that they do regard me as a little bit...independent, a bit different. (Josie)

Several participants maintained that the punk ethos fosters a comfort in not only being independent and individual but being alone, and this confronts the association of alone with loneliness, which is typically applied to older women in a way that depicts them as both pitiable and contemptible (Rosenthal, 1990), someone to be kept away from. Josie told me that although her peers feel increasingly more reluctant to continue social activities as they get older, she does not share this feeling, and identifies their approaches to venturing out alone, especially to see a band, as the biggest disparity in their attitudes. Josie does not feel any inhibition in doing this and her attitude of ***you can do anything – there is no limit*** suggests that the Punk Toolkit is a powerful mechanism for resisting equally powerful narratives of ageing, such as those addressed in the chapter Everyday Ageism. Many participants continue to see bands, if only occasionally, and two spoke of attending UK punk events such as the large punk festival 'Rebellion', or the smaller scale 'Nice n Sleazy' punk and ska weekend, emphasising the friendly, inclusive and non-ageist attitude at both events. Bennett (2013) identifies music festivals as one place where ageing fans feel truly comfortable with their appearance and this suggests that at such festivals, these women experience a hiatus, where usual age expectations are suspended. When a social space appears to be targeted at twenty somethings it inherently excludes other ages, and the same

happens in the places that are aimed at older people. The attribution of age appropriateness to places is so endemic, that to ignore it begins to seem a disruption, an act of dissent.

It seems that the non-conformity of the women in the study allows them to break these unwritten rules to some extent and therefore enjoy greater access to society than ageist pressure would usually allow. To me, this reinforces the potential for using this Chapter's 'Punk Toolkit' as a strategy for resisting Chapter Three's 'Ageist Forcefield'. An older woman's reluctance to go to gigs alone is not necessarily indicative of a lack of interest in music but of a wider issue. Midlife women, whose social lives are frequently disrupted by the prioritisation of parenting tasks (Gregory, 2009), must *re-enter* social scenes. Regaining entry into social activities in middle age requires a resilience that is not always easy to find and this could be attributed to a combination of factors, from a socialised reluctance for women to enter certain social spaces alone, to the fear of crime that 'poses restrictions on movement and also dictates how women should appear in public' (Rosewarne, 2005, p75). Patriarchal structures within society tend to be replicated within subculture (Holland, 2004) meaning that punk women have to fight for equality within heterosexual relationships as much as any other woman and this ***fuck the patriarchy*** element is explored further in Chapter Five 'The Feminist Toolkit'. It could be argued that participants who are child free retain an advantage as they have avoided the likelihood of a hiatus from their social lives. Nonetheless, in older age, participants' punk values give them a resilience to maintain visibility in social spaces, including as performers.

> I haven't done a gig now for three and a half years I think, but I still would if I had, I'm not in a band at the moment, but I don't see any reason why (not), and I think I'll still feel the same in my sixties, I don't know why a woman in her sixties shouldn't get up on the stage and sing (Chris)

Chris continues to participate in punk culture as a vocalist. She does not rule gigs out on the basis of age, seeing no reason why she should not be performing on a stage in her sixties and this reflects Jennings & Gardner's (2012) depiction of one of the routes ageing performers may take, of resisting, renegotiating and rebelling against age-

appropriate expectations. Chris told me that her last gig took place three years ago in her mid-fifties, an age when female performers are already subject to exhortations to hide their ageing selves, which Chris derides. Thornton's (1995) recognition that the essence of punk performance could be found in the mistakes, which differentiates between good musicianship and good *performance* could be discerned in Chris's account. This suggests that a focus on performance rather than expertise, and accepting the unpredictability that 'making a mistake' could bring, should give all older women permission to engage in activities, without fear of error, and this is a skill that can be carried throughout the ageing lifecourse.

Participants who are willing to have a go at anything, regardless of expertise, could take this throughout the lifecourse, although as Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' warned, some women in the study encounter barriers to doing this as an inter-generational activity, reflecting Cruikshank's 'hyper awareness of age' (2003). Other participants revealed that they care *less* what other people think as they age and this may be the key to maintaining visibility in social spaces. Bridget noted that people who originally disapproved of her identity have accepted it as she gets older: "once you've got past a certain age, they think it's obviously not a phase" and her ***be an individual – don't conform*** attitude is undoubtedly a contributory factor in reaching this stage.

Even so, my conversations with the women in the study suggested that they often did not encounter this acceptance during their earliest dalliances with subculture, but after many years, decades even, of showing consistent signs of deviation from mainstream culture. This varied widely between participants and it was encouraging to find that while some encountered widespread hostility as a young punk female, several of the women were supported by their families from the beginning. The notion of finding acceptance after years of dedication is often replicated within subculture, with the number of years on a scene denoting authenticity to those within it (Bennett, 2014). This could be construed as either tiresome due to the task of proving and re-proving authenticity (Haenfler, 2014), or comforting, given Bennett's (2006) participants' accounts of authenticity gained through familiarity with and on punk scenes. It could be argued that authenticity is an internal quality, in line with other punk values and because

it is carried through the lifecourse as part of a personal toolkit, outside factors such as being seen as subcultural to mainstream others are less relevant. As Chapter Three discussed, wider cultural influences continue to be a daily hazard to be negotiated in midlife women's lives but the way that participants reflected on their punk identity and ethos suggests to me that being *secure* in their identity, having a certainty about the values and principles that inform their lifecourses is the key to older women resisting unwanted influences.

I found that participants' accounts engaged with Bennett's findings (2006) rather than Haenfler's (2014), finding solace and inspiration in an internal punk ethos, which did not depend on the approval of others for it to flourish and often did not take an outward manifestation that *could* be judged. Several women in the study spoke of their enjoyment of changes across the lifecourse, feeling that embracing new ideas and interests is entirely in keeping with their punk ethos, ***if you fancy doing something, just do it***, which they integrate with punk identity. McRobbie (1994) celebrates a postmodernist reading of popular culture, which could equally be interpreted as the use of bricolage, speaking of new versions of existing cultures as 'vibrant critique, rather than an inward looking, secondhand aesthetics' (p21). This is the meaning I discern from participants, who retain the ability to use their Punk Toolkit skilfully, taking forward the parts of punk culture that are useful but integrating new interests along the way. The beauty of the punk ethos is that its integration into participants' everyday decisions and actions sneaks a nonconformist agenda into society, without being immediately apparent - infiltration at its best. This fosters the Punk Toolkit as strategy for older age.

Conversely, while participants identify ways of using the Punk Toolkit in older age, ageing itself provides circumstances that reignite punk practice. At the very least, the relative freedom of retirement, compared to the structure of work, provides time that could be used to follow interests and hobbies. However, punk could be integrated into the ageing lifecourse in more emotionally satisfying ways. Kat feels that ageing has given her the maturity to carry off her punk ethos more effectively: "I feel like I've now got the maturity to carry off, what I was trying to carry off thirty-five years ago…The not giving a fuck I think" and this represents the increased confidence that several studies

on ageing and 'youth' culture correlate with ageing itself (Bennett, 2015). As Woodward (2002, p206) notes, 'challenges to ageism that rely on a rhetoric of protesting anger should not be dismissed. Anger can be a sign of moral outrage at social injustice, at being denied the right to participate fully in society'. During our interviews, participants recognised the power of punk as an outlet for rage, angst, or the opportunity to form a verbal and physical response to social injustices.

In the course of our discussions, participants described the way that they integrate punk into the lifecourse in smaller ways, such as listening to loud punk music in response to a stressful day, a visceral reaction to music that DeNora (2000, p53) describes as part of the 'care of self', that many of the women in the study shared. Punk music functions as a vociferous reminder of the power of dissent and this itself puts it in the Punk Toolkit, to be slotted alongside protest, activism and a questioning attitude. Woodward's words above provoke the thought that choice of music may have another benefit - belongingness. Playing punk music is an aural reminder of subcultural experiences, the solidarity of being part of a social scene, the 'collective lifestyles' in Bennett's words (2013, p42), and being heard. While it seemed that all participants could connect to the idea that music invokes an emotional response, some of the women that I spoke to found that intergenerational interactions, outside of shared music, do the same. Conversation and shared activities with people of other ages, as evidenced in Mary's quote below, prompted reflections about their punk ethos, either re-animating elements that had stayed somewhat dormant, or reminding participants of the advantage that they felt punk gave them. Some of the incidents that the women in my study related to me in the previous chapter, cause me to reflect that the same situation arises with some of their non-subcultural peers, other midlife women that they almost *perceive* as being a different generation due to their disparate experiences.

> Maybe I would shave my head, maybe I would get the sides shaved, I mean I shaved my daughters head on the sides, her father near had conniption but you know, why the hell not? Why would I want to be the same as everybody else as I've got older? (Mary)

Intergenerational interactions themselves could be thought provoking, serving as a reminder of earlier fearlessness, forcing participants to accept that a fearless approach

to life can easily dissipate when no-one's looking, guiltily being subsumed into cultural expectations of ageing. Mary described how she shaved the side of her daughter's hair (an undercut) which although punk in origin, now represents mainstream style. Since then, she has been thinking about undercutting her own hair and this could be connected to both ***the camaraderie*** of someone nearby doing the same thing, but also the temporal link to her own youth, when dramatic changes may have been made without a second thought. It is entirely reasonable that women might hesitate before making dramatic changes. What is unreasonable is if women resist change on the basis of 'age appropriateness' or a vague feeling that they 'should not' and this is discussed in the previous chapter Everyday Ageism. The insidiousness of social and cultural influences has been interrogated by Gill (2008), who asks how exactly 'anti-ageing culture re-shapes identities from the inside out, making its ideals feel like one's own' (p433). There is no easy answer and participants' accounts evidence how a Punk Toolkit incorporating a questioning outlook on many social issues offers some protection, but certainly no immunity to expectations of age.

Moments of Conformity

Wendy, who has accepted little pressure to conform throughout her lifecourse, explained to me that a new friend (age peer) has expressed regret that they did not meet when they were younger, as she felt she would have had more courage to pursue different activities with Wendy alongside, ***the camaraderie*** offering strength and support. Despite her subcultural experience, Wendy explained that she understands how difficult it can be to stand out from the crowd: "I think it's more acceptable for me because people know me and I've never been any different", especially when 'standing out' means a sudden change. Applying this principle to appearance, participants who apply punk principles to their appearance are deviating further than ever from mainstream expectations of age. This reflects wider subculture research, where 'getting away with it' (Holland, 2004, p126) in older age relies on an existing subcultural appearance, rather than a sudden change. This suggests the benefit of early subculture experience, but also the usefulness of the Punk Toolkit as a result of that subcultural experience. Thornton (1995) argues that the gulf between punk and mainstream culture extends past music to wider culture, noting that mainstream culture means

looking good, sounding good and not making mistakes, although this chapter has already explored the potential freedom in midlife women feeling able to make mistakes along their lifecourses. It appears that lifelong expressions of nonconformity mean that later manifestations are less remarked upon, seen instead as part of normality for that person, although this also seems to feed into expectations of midlife invisibility, of not making sudden noises or sudden changes of any kind.

The discussions I shared with participants showed me that a larger picture of non-conformity and freedom across the lifecourse does not preclude moments of conformity within it. The women in the study have already described daily negotiations between their punk ethos and wider expectations, especially in relation to work, although this will be explored further in Chapter Six. Participants described how they experience moments of conformity throughout their lives, reflecting the impact of wider social and cultural influences, as could be expected in any ageing woman's life. I felt that it was unsurprising that expectations of conformity affect appearance more than other aspects of punk, which can be practiced in less visible ways. Participants feel social pressure at certain moments in time or place, and these pressures ebb and flow throughout the lifecourse, corresponding perhaps to Haenfler's (2014) interpretation of subculture across the lifecourse. For some women, escaping conformity extended to decisions about having children, which will be explored further in the next chapter 'The Feminist Toolkit'.

McRobbie (2000) notes that for girls, escaping the family and the pressures to act like a 'nice girl' remain the first political experience, one that encapsulates 'the personal is the political', and several participants identified with this. Not all the women that had children identified with the pressure to conform, and this was influenced by each woman's unique circumstances. Living in a liberal neighbourhood, having similarly-minded friends, strength of personality (participants' words), or not prioritising appearance all reduce the conflict between sense of identity and sense of mother-appropriateness. Frith (1983) found that young people frequently drift in and out or in-between subculture(s), meaning that moments of conformity could be a continuation of multi-faceted identity. But for several women in the study, the social expectations of

motherhood create a pressure to conform that feels difficult to resist and has impacted on their ability to stay true to their punk identity, in whatever form that takes. The dichotomy of retaining a personal identity, whilst resisting/acknowledging omnipresent whisperings of how a mother should be, is an issue for any mother. Hence, motherhood creates the perfect blend of circumstances for moments of conformity.

> I tried to dress normal to begin with, like with a baby but I just didn't feel right and I ended up back with the full, with the full makeup, the full hair colours and everything and unusual clothes. (Rosalind)

Participants described how they balance conformity and non-conformity. Thirteen of the nineteen women that I spoke to had had children at various points in their lifecourses, from their teenage years to their late thirties and our discussions did not suggest that the age of first motherhood has any bearing on ease of fitting in. Rosalind shared how motherhood affected the way she practiced punk, explaining that although she briefly adapted her appearance to fit in, “I had a perm and everything”, it was other parts of her punk lifestyle that were affected, such as the time available for punk practices outside the house. Punk practices can take place in domestic settings and this was a necessity for many girls in the early years of punk (McRobbie, 2000). Nonetheless, motherhood takes up physical and emotional energy that realistically leaves little space for other concerns, at least to begin with. Despite Rosalind describing herself as ‘dropping out’ of punk at this time, she continued to feel connected to the punk scene and this references punk as an inner ethos, its outer manifestation an aspect that can be taken up again at a later date. Haenfler (2014) notes that subcultural identity can endure even as participation fluctuates and Rosalind’s experiences reflect this. Some participants identified feeling pressure to conform when their children attended school. The inbuilt punk ethos can be drawn on for reinforcement but it has limits, and I would articulate this as a matter of balance, with women negotiating internal influences, alongside outside pressures, which may be greater in number.

> Coming up to my forties I had dreads then and I thought oh I've got to grow up a bit and try and conform a bit, combed all my hair out, tried to wear really boring clothes and then I didn't feel right, it wasn't me, so I decided to go back again. (Heidi)

School represents authoritarianism and conformity, and this impacts on parents. Think back to Heather's experience at the beginning of the chapter, with a teacher belittling her appearance to a classroom full of boys - these are experiences that are remembered.

Several participants reject the idea of class identity (see Appendix D) and I found this unsurprising for several reasons. Critiques of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' (CCCS) association of punk with working class identity (Bennett & Kahn, 2004) can be seen in Chapter One and Huq (2006) points out that this type of rigidity 'precludes the possibility of class mobility' (p14). Indeed, class mobility was one factor in participants' difficulty or reluctance in identifying themselves as one class or another at the beginning of our interviews. Working class identity retains currency in popular, or individual, accounts of punk, meaning that anything other can seem cause for apology. It was clear to me that participants' rejection of labels extends to class, notwithstanding that 'class is willfully obfuscated by subcultural distinctions' (Thornton, 1995, p12). Nonetheless, Reay (1998) found that, whether claiming a class identity or not, class infiltrates mothers' interactions with and about their children's schools. It is not a giant conceptual leap to imagine that the linking of punk with working class identity, no matter how inaccurate this connection, influenced the way participants interacted within the school environments, as suggested by Heidi's experiences at her childrens' school: "the other parents wouldn't speak to you in the playground. Nobody would speak to me". Whatever the cause, Heidi has intuited that it is something in her that needs adjusting, to conform to school gate expectations and she does this for a while, before reasserting her individuality, punk ethos taking precedence. Goode (2018) considers women's awareness of nuances of *dress* within class, through an examination of the fashion choices of older women throughout their lifecourses. It could be argued that punk womens' rejection of mainstream culture includes a rejection of the ascription of class and this in itself provides an element of freedom. Equally, it seems to me that punk women use the creativity and self-expression of their clothing, to confuse stultifying ideas of class and gender and this is explored further in the following chapter 'The Feminist Toolkit'.

> As a parent actually, with younger children, I think that's when I felt most pressured to conform and when I probably felt most uncomfortable within myself (Liz)

For Heidi, the connection between looking punk and feeling punk was important enough to help her resist expectations of 'mother' appearance, and her moments of conformity amount to months, fleeting in terms of her years of motherhood. Liz described her discomfort at feeling the expectations of the systems around her impinge on her sense of identity. Schools, playgroups, other parents – motherhood gives cause for women to see themselves through the eyes of others in these systems (Reay, 1998), and as participants found, it can feel a pressure too far. She described feeling pressured to conform – and it is not clear whether she did – but she illustrates the oppressive feeling of constant expectations, not just for her but on behalf of her children. Gregory's (2009) work with female rave goers found that other people within subcultures also project expectations that participation should cease at a certain age or stage (i.e. motherhood) in life.

Rosalind conformed very briefly in terms of appearance but interpreted conformity to mean reduced participation in punk activities rather than a conventional appearance, which she acknowledges would not have looked like conformity to others around her. Nonetheless, her integral punk values meant that this was not a threat to Rosalind's sense of identity, "I dropped out of the punk thing I guess, but I always felt connected" and this is something she can always carry with her – a tool for life. Motherhood brings women into contact with multiple systems yet punk women are often used to resisting *the* system, in the form of authority and mainstream culture. Motherhood related groups may feel like the ultimate representation of conventionality, with a hierarchy negotiated through experience with children and parenting. It is almost inevitable that the aesthetic norms of such groups will exert an influence too, as women of all ages use 'intermediaries' such as friends, family and media to negotiate the right thing to wear (Goode, 2018).

However, motherhood comprises wider issues than clothing choices, a temporal luxury that some participants noted barely registers due to the time-consuming nature of domesticity. Cross (2014) noted that Vi Subversa, who fronted The Poison Girls as a

mother in her forties, used punk to express the issues that were important to her as a mother. For Subversa, it seems that punk is utilised as a tool for coping with the difficulties of motherhood, and for refusing to keep quiet about the issues it might present. This presents punk as a useful tool across the parenting lifecourse and offers an outlet against expectations for females to be ‘natural’ caregivers, coping without complaint, even when the parenting burden is unequal. Women who are negotiating the gargantuan task of motherhood may feel that resistance to conformity requires too much effort at this point and participants’ stories certainly indicate that this is an ongoing negotiation. Alternatively, it seems that participants may be able to resist pressures to conform when it relates only to them, but social pressure to subsume personal interests for children is compelling. As Gullette (2002, p556) reflects ‘patriarchy prefers to treat all women as essentially and forever as volunteer caregivers’, and this is part of the reason that ‘post-maternity’ (Gullette, 2002) should be cause for celebration, with the freedom this offers. Liz explained that the pressure faded when her children were able to travel independently to secondary school and she could retain some distance between herself and the schools. Not all mothers in the study identified their child raising years as moments of conformity and many participants had cast aside a recognisably punk appearance long ago. As we discussed these issues, the women in my study also described the pragmatic reality of motherhood and how this affects punk practice.

> I don't have that time now to listen to as much music as I used to, which kind of annoys me, but I suppose your life changes doesn't it and other events take over. I've got different priorities now. (Paula)

> I used to play the drums when I was younger and I'd have probably carried on if my mind wasn't on the children, being totally focused on looking after the children. (Heidi)

From our interviews, it was clear that participants’ priorities change as they progress through the lifestyle and for mothers, parenting tasks often take priority above leisure pursuits, although care should be taken to acknowledge the influence of patriarchal and heteronormative cultural expectations. Hodkinson (2011) found that family and children are significant as a rationale for scaling down participation or dropping out of subculture, relating several reasons, from participants finding that with children, their

networks broaden beyond subculture, or because long term relationships and children come to take precedence. Women are socialised to prioritise other people's needs and this is significant. Paula home schooled her daughter for a period of secondary education and she explained that 'responsibilities' change her balance of priorities, underlining how everyday tasks take precedence over her own leisure pursuits. The contribution of Paula's male partner, who initiated the idea of home schooling, is not explored, though we could consider Gilleard & Higgs' (2000) reflection that as women spend far more time on domestic tasks than their male peers, then their agency to pursue third age activities is surely affected, substituting 'third age' perhaps for 'other'.

Heidi explored how the impact of parenthood differs for her and her male partner. Women's participation in subculture tends to decrease further than men's in a way that reflects their disproportionate share of childcare tasks (Haenfler, 2014, Gregory, 2009, Holland, 2004). This was reflected in Heidi's account and may be a hidden narrative in other participants' accounts. Heidi revealed that she put her drum lessons on hold for motherhood, describing herself as having been 'totally focused' on the children, and her partner as not having the same attachment. This comes within a cultural context of gendered expectations, not least of fathers simply carrying on with pre-parenthood lives, which unchallenged soon becomes normality, showing the limit of the Punk Toolkit in some aspects of participants' lives. Halberstam (2003) discusses how queer refusal and resistance of the 'heteronormative imperative of home and family' (p321) prolongs the amount of time devoted to subcultural participation, illustrating the time and consequences of family life and the impact it has on time available for subculture.

The women who described a pressure to conform at the school gates not only feel the pressure recede as their children grow older, but feel opportunities open up and horizons widen once again. This reflects the impact of Halberstam's 'heteronormative imperative' on subculture participation, illustrated by its ebb and flow with participants' family lives. Heidi's punk ethos encompasses animal rights and her practice changes alongside motherhood, signalled by her recent return to veganism and animal rights campaigning. Although she stated "you can go back to how you were in your twenties I think, or try to", I interpreted this less as a desire for a return to earlier years, than a

desire to return to their freedoms or interests. Hodkinson (2013, p14) notes that despite the influx of responsibilities that come with age, continuing interest in youth culture (subculture) does not necessarily represent an attempt to hold onto youth and refuse adulthood. Instead, 'older enthusiasts negotiate and adapt their participation in the context of lives increasingly focused to one degree or another upon adult priorities, orientations and responsibilities' and this interpretation appears to hold true for most participants. For example, Gina explored how she took time to realise that convention does not mean that you must lead a limited or somehow culturally inferior life: "I hate the idea that I got a mortgage and a mortgage mentality [….] It doesn't mean you've sold out, or none of that meant anything to you. It's just part of growing up isn't it?" realising that, despite her initial concerns, a mortgage or getting married does not compromise her identity after all. During our interview, Heidi's description of integrating her original punk ethos into her ageing lifecourse points to the integration of all identities and experiences within each participant's lifecourse. This suggests a 'transageing' narrative with the power to 'explode the flattened, stereotypical projections of others' (Moglen, 2008, p309), an ageing identity that does not conform to ageist expectations. In subcultural terms, this experience could be interpreted as bricolage, with the Punk Toolkit supplying the values and practices to be reshaped and reimagined across the ageing lifecourse.

Taking the Punk Toolkit Into Old*er* Age

Having, in some cases, regained freedoms through the relinquishment of parenting duties, alongside a reconciliation of punk ethos, identity and the practicalities of their ageing lifecourse, my interviewees' punk ethos, ***you can do anything, there is no limit***, encourages them to seize the opportunities offered by midlife or retirement. I found that the women I interviewed take confidence from the experience of being non-conformist and experimental, from their punk identities and ethos, evidenced by the scope of their midlife activities and plans. Participants' plans include learning to play the drums or bass guitar, looking for bands to join, planning to move to a new city for the music and social life and planning to move abroad for further activism. These women introduce new music, new interests and new looks, without this compromising their essential punk identity, and this experience is something they can bring to their

ageing identities and lifecourse. Two participants have always performed and plan to look for new bands to join. Alex reflected on how older punk bands continue touring, still fired up and performing with punk energy, “so all the bands are still really feeling what they’re feeling you know? So, if they’re feeling it, why can’t we? That’s what it’s about”, asking why this would be any different for her as a woman in her sixties. Alex recognises that being one age does not mean rejecting the emotions and experiences that were important at an earlier age as proof of some nebulous idea of maturity, a term which Gilleard & Higgs (2000) note has rarely benefitted women.

Moving on to thoughts of how punk principles such as the DIY ethos can be usefully integrated into the ageing lifecourse, I found that participants reject the idea that their ability to plan creatively along their lifecourse would not be carried through into much older age.

> There's plenty of Paralympians and plenty of young people who are disabled who do things that exceed expectations. Why can't you do that if you're old? You will find a way round if you have an unbreakable spirit. (Heather)

Heather speculates that if life’s obstacles are challenges to be met at any other age, there is no reason for this to be different in older age. Aware of gerontological correlations between age and frailty and dependency (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015), Heather notes that disabilities are not confined to older people. People of all ages have disabilities which require them to reconsider the way they live their lives in an ableist society and the ability to re-frame independence as having the wherewithal to discern where assistance or support can improve quality of life, is liberating. Cruikshank (2003) draws on Emerson’s work (1841) on self-reliance and the assertion that this does not exclude accepting help from others, instead focusing on independent *thinking*. Cruikshank notes that frailty and strength are not either/or characteristics, so one physical limitation can co-exist with other physical strength. I believe that ageism is revealed when younger people can accept assistance without shame but the same situation is stigmatising for older people.

The punk DIY ethos, in embracing change and always looking for an alternative route, offers a way forward for changes in older age. Whether this is taking a seat at a punk

gig as an alternative to enduring back pain while standing, as one participant described, or using a mobility scooter (like Heather's mother in Chapter Three), being prepared to try something different and disregard what anyone else thinks about it – these are ways of enjoying individual freedoms into older age. Our conversations revealed some uniquely punk themed concerns for the future. Some participants shared concerns of being ill or frail enough to require nursing care in a residential setting, a concern that is further explored in Chapter Six, and shared fears of losing their individuality, and of losing access to the music they enjoy (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Forman, 2012). As previously described, participants sometimes use a blast of punk as music to unwind to, the combative nature of ***the music*** acting as aural stress relief after the pressures of the working day. Music contributes to older people's wellbeing and vitality (Jennings, 2015) and this relates to having personal choice and a shared experience. For these women, being played Mariah Carey by healthcare assistants valiantly trying to recreate the music of their residents' youth, it might be riot time.

Summary of Chapter Four

The development of the Punk Toolkit in this chapter enables the three research questions to be explored simultaneously, as participants explore the meaning of punk and its integration into their ageing lifecourses. The punk ethos, or 'toolkit', holds shared meanings for older women, yet has the potential to be used imaginatively and individually in different situations across the lifecourse. This in turn informs participants' ageing experiences, as they utilise the toolkit to evaluate, re-frame and transform events along their lifecourse. Despite a toolkit/ethos that values non-conformity, participants identify moments of conformity across the lifecourse, especially in relation to motherhood. These moments of conformity nonetheless do not disrupt an overall punk ethos, and this could be partly attributed to participants holding a set of values that may be linked but do not depend on a visual manifestation or inflexible punk practices. Despite the presence of ageist culture introduced in Chapter One 'Everyday Ageism', the Punk Toolkit offers a strategy for resistance to age expectations and the women in this study articulate their expectations that the Punk Toolkit provides a framework that will endure across the lifecourse; one that theoretically could be used by any ageing person. However, this thesis pertains to the experiences of midlife

women and as such requires attention to the experience of ageing *for women.* This will be explored in Chapter Five, ‘The Feminist Toolkit’, which explores the facets of punk which could be equated with consciousness raising, an additional toolkit and strategy for the unique challenge of being an ageing woman in a sexist and ageist society. Before this, the next page provides a visual representation of the Punk Toolkit, presented in the style of a zine front cover, in reference to punk style and practices.

OH ANARCHISM UP YOURS!

VOLUME ONE

FREE WITH THIS ISSUE

THE PUNK TOOLKIT

1. BE YOURSELF – DON'T CONFORM
2. QUESTION AUTHORITY
3. HAVE ATTITUDE
4. BE OPEN-MINDED – DON'T JUDGE
5. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING – JUST DO IT

NOW TRY THE ... DIY ETHOS ... UNCONVENTIONAL APPEARANCE ...

KNOW YOUR PUNK ETHOS? ... ANTI-AUTHORITY ATTITUDE

Chapter Five: The Feminist Toolkit

This chapter builds on Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit', with further strategies offered by participants to negotiate the everyday experiences of being an ageing woman. The 'Research Design' chapter outlined the feminist credentials of this research project, meaning that all chapters are constructed through a feminist eye. However, this chapter sharpens its focus, to take a feminist perspective towards participants' experiences of punk and ageing *as a woman.* Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' explored participants' experiences and observations of the ageist culture around them and this provided an underpinning for the subsequent chapters. Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit' followed, demonstrating how the punk ethos embeds itself in the women's lives, offering an outlook, values and strategy (the tools), which are then used along the ageing lifecourse. This chapter highlights the feminist potential of the punk ethos/toolkit and this is conceptualised as 'The Feminist Toolkit'. The ***fuck the patriarchy*** principle from the Punk Toolkit asserts that participants often notice inequalities and, as part of their social justice ethos, seek to challenge them. The Feminist Toolkit is therefore deployed to critique both the egalitarianism and feminist inspiration of punk culture. The chapter also takes a wider look at the gendered issues that participants encounter across the lifecourse. Simultaneously, the chapter explores how participants negotiate these issues, subverting gender expectations with the able assistance of the Feminist Toolkit.

Reflecting on the Egalitarianism of Punk

My discussions with the women in my study revealed the freedoms that they felt punk offered them during the original era of punk and across the lifecourse. Most participants felt that their initial experience was egalitarian, but further discussion often led them to remember incidents of sexism and inequality and this strongly references the evolution of the activist movements #MeToo and Everyday Sexism, that the preceding chapters highlighted. Female oppression, like ageism, is endemic and insidious, the result of 'patriarchal reasoning (that) goes all the way down, to the letter, to the bone' (Ahmed, 2017, p4), and our interviews often revealed snippets of information that reflect this experience. The insidious nature of oppression means that participants are sometimes

able to subscribe to the illusion that punk culture is untouched by misogyny or patriarchy, although all participants were conscious of sexism in a wider context. Holland (2004) has noted that due to patriarchal structures being replicated within subculture, 'girls' tend to be contained within it, rather than shaping their own experience. However, what participants notice is the individual liberations that they enjoy and use as a framework to shape their lives. It seems that the confidence that the Punk Toolkit gives participants to reject and resist mainstream gender expectations means that wider inequalities are sometimes overlooked.

Participants described questioning gender norms, and this suggests an outlook that aligns with feminist values. Most of the women I spoke to describe themselves as feminist, although two reject the label and one participant stated that she does not agree with feminism at all, although she feels that women should be free to do whatever they choose. Reddington (2016) notes that some 1970s female punks perceived feminism as 'another set of rules' (p96) and this interpretation is understandable within the context of an anti-authority punk ethos. The previous chapter, 'The Punk Toolkit' described how participants' personal Punk Toolkits advocate principles such as ***be an individual – don't conform,*** and ***you don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority.*** Nonetheless, most participants see feminism as representative of female freedoms, rather than restriction and this functions similarly to the Punk Toolkit. The women in the study have already discussed how they take a framework of principles that includes subverting gender norms and use it to shape their own lives. My interviews showed me that these women live diverse lives, encompassing work, education, retirement, unemployment, singledom, living with partners, civil partnership and marriage, leading to equally diverse blended families.

The Potential Influence of Feminisms

Feminism is commonly described in terms of 'waves' (Showden, 2009; Gill, 2007) and this has been explored in Chapter One. Depending on their age, the women in the study were children or adolescents when the second wave of feminism gained recognition, meaning that their early awareness of feminism focused on consciousness raising around reproductive rights and gendered expectations, and for those who looked for it,

or who became aware of feminism in the third wave era, an understanding of intersectional oppressions (Romero, 2017) such as ethnicity, disability, class or sexuality. Participants have also encountered the cultures of fourth wave feminism and postfeminism, meaning that there is a variety of outlooks either to integrate into a personal feminism, or to be chosen between, although Negra & Tasker (2014) warn that postfeminist culture has tended to 'suppress and stigmatize women's activism' (p26). Media coverage of feminism pits 'generations' of women against each other with the result that only one wave of feminism can be seen as relevant at any one time and sisterhood between differently aged women discouraged (Winch et al, 2016), intersectionality adding another layer of oppression, with black, lesbian and/or working class 'sister outsiders' part of but separate from any specific community (Lorde, 1984).

However, Chapter One 'Everyday Ageism' explored how participants integrate identities and experiences across the lifecourse, in an expression of 'transageing', (Moglen, 2008) and I would suggest that the questioning outlook that I discerned from our interviews, suggests that these women are equally capable of applying this approach to feminism, to decide which facets work for them. I found that most participants are keen for other women, particularly daughters, to experience the potential freedoms of feminism and are able to see the anti-feminist media trick of pitting women against each other for what it is. Participants' stories demonstrated to me that the concept of sisterhood remains relevant and real, the female ***camaraderie*** of the Punk Toolkit. McRobbie (2010, p24) describes the role of the media and popular culture in displacing the feminist work and gains of the early 1970s as 'disarticulation', and its effects can be discerned in the implications of identifying as a feminist and the conceptualisation of post-feminism. However, the women I spoke to identified how punk culture enables them to subvert gender expectations, beginning with their earliest engagement with the culture and this suggests that punk values can be used to *articulate* feminist aims.

Subverting Gender Expectations via Punk Culture

> I think it made us a bit stronger. We weren't the little discoey girl dancing round her handbag anymore, which is what it always had been, all the girls get their handbags in the middle. We were, we were up there in the moshpit, we were as hard and as tough as them […] we

> could be more adventurous, we didn't have to look like pretty little my little pony girls. We could be what we wanted. (Dee)

As suggested by the extract above, girls are socialised into gender expectations at an early age, as parents impose gendered expectations from the moment of birth, if not earlier, if a scan has revealed the baby's sex (Fine, 2010). Previous chapters have demonstrated that a woman's appearance is always subject to scrutiny (Gill, 2007) and this incorporates the minutiae of movement, the very way a woman moves and positions her body, a social mechanism that Butler (1993) refers to as 'girling'. Females are required to sit with their legs together, to contain their bodies and not claim too much space for themselves (Ahmed, 2017). However, participants described to me how they resist these expectations and through punk, invoke a strength that helps them to live lives in defiance of gender restrictions. Participants' willingness to enter the fray of a moshpit at a gig, with their limbs free to dance, would be compromised if they followed gender conventions of carrying a bag or being 'ladylike'. Alex described crowdsurfing at recent gigs, something she recounted with the relish of resisting expectations of age. Indeed, if a woman is following gendered expectations of decorum, she would circumvent the moshpit altogether. Embargoing the moshpit due to health concerns is another matter entirely and one that will be explored in Chapter Seven. Actions such as these could be conceived as doubly deviant, refuting both expectations of age and gender. This experience is representative of Ahmed's (2017) description of feminism as a learned way of living differently in one's body, feeling free to bump into things, or not withdrawing for fear of violence. It is the latter point that explains why women might be fearful or reluctant to embody feminism in this way. Dee states that punk "made us a bit stronger. We weren't the little discoey girl dancing round her handbag anymore", and this is a part of the Feminist Toolkit for life, of being unafraid to enter seemingly masculine environments, to participate, and to reject restrictive ideals of 'ladylike' behaviour. Dee's use of gendered language such as 'hard and tough' suggests an awareness that there is something to be gained in the claiming of typically masculine associated attributes.

Participants' achievements are all the more remarkable for the cultural and generational context that they grew up in. In our interviews, the women I spoke to drew attention to

the cultural context of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the attitude that women faced when they attempted to challenge patriarchal norms, in one instance abortion rights, “I went out and marched through London and took a lot of stick, you know, from men because this was the late seventies 'get back in the kitchen' and all that stuff” (Josie). The words ‘get back in the kitchen’ make it clear that feminist women run up against barriers when they attempt actions that do not serve men and this is an experience noted by other punk women (Reddington, 2007; Reddington, 2016). The challenge of being feminist in an atmosphere of hostility, combined with a postfeminist culture that positions feminist women as antagonistic, anti-male and unlikeable (Walter, 1998) provides some explanation of why some women might prefer to integrate feminism quietly into their lives, rather than being openly feminist.

The experience of having feminist ideals whilst disclaiming a feminist identity has been described by Pilchers (1993) as the ‘I’m not a feminist but…’ phenomenon, alternatively described as ‘guilty feminism’ (Francis-White, 2019). However, unlike the Punk Toolkit, which could be stealthily integrated by participants without detriment, I argue that feminism needs, in current parlance, to be *owned.* It has been clearly evidenced that maintaining silence over oppressive experiences does not challenge the patriarchy, something that #MeToo aims to demonstrate (Jaffe, 2018). Although as Chris describes, it can take a while to feel comfortable doing this, “I'm not intimidated by over-confident men. Maybe I was in my twenties but I'm certainly not now. And I think I've got the confidence to challenge men whose views I think are...if I feel that a man is being arrogant or sexist”. (Chris). There is strength in numbers and despite contemporary subcultural accounts suggesting a tendency for female punks to see each other as competition (LeBlanc, 2008), I did not get a sense of this from my interviews.

The women in the study found feminist inspiration in the culture of punk, beginning to see opportunities when they observed the representation of women in punk. Several participants named Poly Styrene from X-Ray Spex as an inspiration for her unapologetic sound and her refusal to conform. Brown (2011) notes that punk women’s singing voices allowed them the anger that is usually male-gendered, suggesting ‘they

can be angry, however, if they are already marked as nonnormative' (p457), offering freedom of both sound and expression. Caroline described how punk offered her freedom from heteronormativity, because she found that as "a lesbian, I didn't fit in with the clothes that girls wore, the girls around me and I went to an all-girls school, so looking for an escape from having to look like my peers. Punk allowed you to do that, to dress and be whoever you needed to be really". Chapter Four has explored how punk's questioning attitude provides a tool for participants examining their own lives and Paula found feminist magazine *Spare Rib* similarly subversive. Together these combine to foster her critical awareness of women's issues, which she told me she is disappointed to note have not disappeared, "From a women's perspective as well, about how women are treated, again that hasn't changed at all has it?" (Paula). Although recognising feminist gains, several of the women expressed a similar recognition and this continues to inspire frustration and anger, which participants saw reflected in wider society in 2017's Women's Marches, which protested against Donald Trump's inauguration as president in America (Topping, 2017) against his known history of misogyny, and in the influence of #MeToo (https://metoomvmt.org/) from 2017 to the present day.

Heather felt that feminism can be found within punk and other participants agreed with this view. Talking about their earliest engagement with punk culture, most participants felt that punk culture was as available to them as for boys and this mindset belongs in the Feminist Toolkit. Nonetheless, I would position this against the fact that just one of nineteen women in the study actively participated in a punk band during its original era, although several either took up an instrument much later, or expressed the wish to do so. Several participants stated that avoiding being the centre of attention is a personal preference for them, citing this as a rationale for not participating in music *making.* While I accept and indeed identify with not wanting to be under the spotlight, this surely has to be considered in the context of two, almost dichotomous gender expectations. Firstly, girls are socialised not to take up space or seek attention (Ahmed, 2017). Secondly, women come to understand that being looked at is to invite unwanted scrutiny and commentary about every facet of their appearance and conduct.

Challenging Gender Inequalities and Stereotypes

> There was an understanding of equality but it didn't necessarily play out in reality because...if you were a man you could be in a band and be rough as all hell, and people would say, well that was interesting, and you wouldn't be able to sing or play or anything. But if you were a woman you had to be spot on. (Faith)

> In order to get up on stage and sing in a very masculine music scene, I think that you had to be a bit tough really and probably we compensated for the fact that we felt a bit vulnerable, by putting across a very, tried to put across quite a tough image. (Chris)

During our discussions, I encouraged participants to reflect on whether the punk experience was different for males than for females, *as far as they could tell*, and a number of participants noticed inequalities that play out in punk as in wider society. Chris and Faith both noted experiences of sexual harassment and double standards that persist to this day. As a punk performer, Chris has felt the pressure of being a minority female in an overwhelmingly male environment. When she was younger, she attempted to overcome the fear this engendered by portraying a tough image, although she also explained that this did not mean that she was not fearful at times. Vera-Grey (2016) notes that women's responses to 'male intrusion' can run the gamut of emotional responses, often within the same encounter, and as such create 'a disruption not only of one's time to oneself but one's time *in* oneself' (p11), aptly describing the sense of imposition that not just the experience of male harassment, but the thought of harassment creates. Many participants observed that in the original era, female punks were a minority compared to male punks in their locale but did not reflect on the rationale, which Nguyen (2001, p179) describes as 'the foundation myth of punk egalitarianism'.

I found that the women in my study genuinely feel that punk offered them opportunities and subversive female role models that were not in existence before. However, escaping gendered limitations is not easy and Faith's observation that women could play in bands but would be held to higher standards than men and be judged more harshly if they did not meet these exacting standards provides some explanation towards why fewer women do so. Punk visibly opposes mainstream culture in many ways, seeking to differentiate itself through a provoking aesthetic and an articulation of

an anti-authority, non-conformist ethos, including a dismissal of domesticity. However, Chapter Four has questioned the distribution of domestic tasks, via participants' stories of household responsibilities and through Gilleard & Higgs' (2000) assertion that women spend more time on domestic tasks than men. This suggests a male reliance on the less visible female at home to take care of household tasks. As Whiteley (1997) has noted, males in relationships retain their freedom to participate fully in a music career, whilst women often find that relationships restrict their freedom to participate (Bayton, 1998).

The experience of earlier punk participation, where I speculate that girls may have been letting their own mothers carry the burden of domesticity, means that participants had the opportunity to experience the potential freedoms of punk in full and this often started with freedom in appearance and activities. Earlier in the chapter, Dee articulated the ways in which her identity differed from mainstream girls. Her description of what she was *not,* highlights gender stereotypes. Summoning up the pastel hued spectre of 'My Little Pony', prettified toys marketed at girls to groom and plait the pony's colourful mane and tail, Dee illustrates the inherent restrictions in a rigidly feminine appearance. By drawing attention to the custom of girls dancing around their handbags at discos, she captures the physical oppressiveness of such practices. 'Feminine' in this chapter is taken to mean stereotypically looking and occupying space like a woman, the emphasis on 'stereotype'.

Holland (2004) found that 'alternative' women often feel unable to relate their own subcultural style to the idea of a scale of femininity 'all femininity was somehow tainted by its association with traditional femininity' (p80) and this is unsurprising when the physical restrictions are considered. Dancing around a handbag is designed to ensure the security of belongings and the freedom of limbs while on the dancefloor. However, the bag itself is illustrative of divided gender practices that encumber women and make the experience of going out more effort for women than for men. Women's clothes often necessitate the carrying of an extra bag because pockets are absent, silhouettes expected to be smooth, all the better for revealing a woman's body. Recent activisms have exposed gendered 'pocket inequality' (Snowdon, 2016). Secondly, the dislike for

women's unadorned faces means that women require a holdall for the ephemera required to maintain the facade for the duration of a night out. Jeffreys (2005) pinpoints patriarchy, sexism and racism for their likely responsibility 'for women's discomfort about moving into the public world 'barefaced'' (p115), noting that women perceive a pressure to appear heterosexual, to conform to white ideals of appearance and to play a role, especially in the workplace, thus reinforcing inequalities between women and men, who are not expected to do the same. The women in my study did not raise the subject of make-up in our interviews, other than fleeting reference to the unconventional make-up of the original punk era. Equally, although some participants may have been wearing make-up, I did not notice it and so it did not act as a trigger for further discussion on my part. As Chapter Four has discussed, punk provides the DIY ethos, a prescription for creating your own identity, so makeup may or may not be a part of that. One participant shares her disregard for conforming to mainstream conventions of appearance:

> I felt like it was less acceptable for girls to look like that, and I was the only girl in my school who took on that appearance, and I used to get a lot of stick for it. But being a contrarian, I didn't care because I'd rather identify with that than, say, other things that were around at the time. (Heather)

Heather notes that a punk look was less acceptable for girls than for boys, which was communicated to her through the verbal abuse she received. Heather tolerated censure because she did not identify with mainstream culture, although the proviso that there were other things she did identify with implies that subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) is of importance. Chapter Four's 'Punk Toolkit' illustrates that for participants, subculture offers the freedom to be an individual and not to conform, indicating that acquiescence to the notion of subcultural capital is not especially restrictive. An ability to look objectively at a situation and ask whether it fits personal values is part of the Feminist Toolkit that equips participants for the ageing lifecourse. Josie described the liberation that she feels the punk ideology gives her in terms of appearance, although her reference to more revealing clothes "I started revealing more flesh. Yeah, I think I was breaking out in that way as well, away from the very ultra feminine stuff" offers a challenge to feminism that is best understood as freedom of choice in the cultural

context of the punk era, where the alternative included demure Laura Ashley type dresses. Punk clothing is not exempt from gendered differences, although several participants described an androgynous look in their interviews. In contemporary culture, form fitting and revealing clothes are encouraged for women, whose bodies are offered for the observer's appraisal or lascivious gaze (Jeffreys, 2005) and the freedom that Josie described could be considered as the postfeminist agency to choose how to look, with scant regard to the cultural pressures and commercial forces lurking behind (Gill, 2007).

The Feminist Toolkit could equip participants to maintain agency over their appearance and bodies, although Jeffreys' (2005) assertion that western women are subject to the 'grip of culture on the body' (Bordo, 1993, p117) reveals that 'beauty' practices can be interpreted either as women's agency, or as women's subordination, depending on the feminist viewpoint**.** I found that participants represented a breadth of perspectives along this spectrum. Two of the women I spoke to admitted to cosmetic surgery, both perceiving breast augmentation as returning what breastfeeding had 'stolen'. One of the (same) women advised that she will have a facelift in the future, seeing this as a return to the face that she felt ageing had taken away, which is a familiar trope raised in Chapter One, 'the mask of ageing' (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991). Surgery could represent the ultimate bricolage in its making of new meaning for its users, were it not for the likely conformity of the result.

In our interviews, I observed that many participants seem to balance a tension between a determination not to care what others think about their appearance whilst nonetheless maintaining *conventional* female norms such as wearing jewellery, putting together outfits, dying hair and also enjoying the creativity afforded by fashion and appearance. Only a few of the women seemed to reject all of these things. Twigg (2007) notes that clothing provides 'a significant source of aesthetic pleasure, a valued opportunity for self-fashioning and for personal reflexivity' (p288) and although her arguments relate to ageing women, they take on an extra dimension when applied to subcultural women, whose appearance is often a source of creativity and imagination. Nonetheless, Twigg's findings do not necessarily relate to all ageing women, who may reject heteronormative

imperatives of appearance. Gendered expectations of appearance are so utterly embedded, that the concept of creativity without recourse to gendered norms is difficult to imagine and I observed only a few participants to transgress this in some way in their midlife. Indeed, several participants described other people's shocked reactions to their moments of *nonconformity*, indicating that a woman is allowed only so much agency in her appearance before she is challenged. Twigg (2007, p286) questions the extent to which older people are able to use agency to 'resist, reinterpret or redefine dominant messages about age', a concern that can equally be applied to gender.

One participant describes a reaction that she received in response to her 'unconventional' plan for a fancy-dress costume.

> I'm going as Zorro. With a big hat, and a sword and big wig and everything. And I thought yeah! Because I like that look, it's comfortable, again I will wear my boots, I can walk. And someone at work was appalled. She said to me "Babe! Why are you going dressed as a man?" I don't care [….] I like that look. I'm going as Zorro. And it hadn't really crossed my mind that anyone would be bemused that I didn't want to look glamorous. (Ellen)

Ellen describes shocking a female colleague with the news that she plans to attend a fancy-dress wedding, with a 'film character' theme, as the male vigilante Zorro, acknowledging with hindsight that everyone else would choose a film character based on potential attractiveness and gender conformity. Ellen's account of her initial bemusement at her colleague's reaction reveals her lack of concern for gendered expectations, highlighting just how unusual this is. To focus on the comfort and practicality of an outfit, especially footwear to walk or run in easily, embeds Ahmed's (2017) feminist principle of living differently in one's body. Participants' accounts of early punk practice, of choosing practical boots so that they could run away from abuse alongside their male peers, shows how this practice develops to be part of the Feminist Toolkit. The idea of a choice between footwear to walk in and footwear that *cannot* be walked in (and causes pain) shows exactly how oppression seeps into women's lives, high heel wearing being one of the 'harmful cultural practices' that Jeffery's (2005) identifies in her exploration of beauty practices and misogyny.

Another critical feature of Ellen's costume compared to a 'glamorous' costume, is the time commitment. Ellen's choice requires just putting on a costume, whereas the commitment to glamour requires a significant investment of time and money, both required to show that a woman has made an *effort.* Ellen intuits the ridiculousness of the work required to mask a natural self, and this puts her in good stead to resist the lure of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987), which makes considerable demands on an ageing woman's time and money, the latter which many participants do not feel they have. Acknowledging Twigg's (2007) argument that the concept of 'natural' is itself problematic, there can surely be no argument that the artifice expected of women and its acceptance as normal rather than pathological behaviour, is oppressive. I browsed online for fancy dress costumes to confirm my suspicion - for every practical male costume, there is a 'sexy' female equivalent, illustrated with depilated skin, highly groomed hair and makeup, and high heeled footwear.

My interviews revealed that the women in my study subvert gender norms to varying degrees, but the subversion seems deeper when compared to mainstream culture rather than subculture. Wendy had short hair with an under-cut and 'stretchers' in her earlobes when we met, with unisex punk clothing. Holland (2004) notes that 'body modifications work against the idea of women becoming less visible as they age' (p122) and Wendy's experience suggests that both she and her family are aware of this, for opposing reasons. She recounted her dilemma when invited to a family event, where she knew she was expected to look conventional. Although she found a jumble sale skirt to fit the bill, the internal wrangling reveals that she habitually disregards these norms, and this reiterates participants' internal debates about 'age appropriateness' that Chapter Three explored in some depth. Considering the place that hair takes in reinforcing gender norms, three participants chose closely cropped hair, replicating a typically masculine cut. All three have natural grey or greying hair, although one dyes it brightly at times. The subject of grey hair is itself a feminist issue, with grey*ing* conceptualised in the chapter on 'Everyday Ageism' as problematic, both for revealing age and for exposing a failure to rein in nature, as women are expected to do (Gerike, 1990). Again, subculture adds complexity, when participants enjoy the creativity of colouring their hair in the way they had as younger women. It might be paradoxical to

suggest that this avenue be closed in older age, if only the requirement for women to attend to every aspect of their natural appearance was not quite so persistent (Jeffreys, 2005). The women in the study find ways of opting out of prescriptive expectations and this continues to impact on their ageing lifecourses. In the excerpt below, one participant describes how punk gave her permission to create her own, unique identity.

> I didn't have to be pretty. I used to go to discos and I couldn't do all that bloody formation dancing that they all did in the middle of the floor, you know, it was like oh god. So, I used to sort of hug the walls and that, had no confidence in myself or anything so punk was the answer, then I could create something for myself that didn't have to be pretty or anything, it could just be unique. (Rosalind)

Rosalind recognises the competitive element of mainstream female identity and by allying herself with punk, removes herself from the competition. This is part of the Feminist Toolkit. It has been noted in earlier chapters and also earlier in this chapter but it bears saying again: society pits women against each other. Faludi (1992) describes this as a ‘pre-emptive move’ in an anti-feminist backlash, causing women to focus on the discrepancies between waves of feminism rather than what really matters, freedom from patriarchy.

Female punk bands that were associated with feminist issues often deliberately dressed down (O’Brien, 1999), a conscious move to remove themselves from an assessing gaze, and several participants replicated this aesthetic in the original era. Removing themselves from this enforced rivalry takes back control. In the original era, some participants perpetuated an image so far removed from feminine ideals that they were essentially disqualified from the competition. This is not to say that participants were not subject to abuse and antagonism for their appearance but by creating an unconventional identity that removed them from easy comparison with others, participants scuppered misogynistic ideas of women in competition, and of imposed ideas of attractiveness. Punk women demonstrated each day that their appearance was for them, not the approval of others and it disrupted the idea of ‘natural’ beauty (Bayton, 1998). As Rosalind says, she could just be unique and this made it difficult to classify and compare her with others. She also felt that her punk aesthetic had another function. It kept other people away from her and while Rosalind used this as a strategy to keep

uninvited people away from her, the punk aesthetic could also function as a safety net for keeping the male gaze at bay, something Chapter Four has touched on. However, while some participants found that this tactic worked in wider society to some extent, it did not provide immunity within punk scenes, whose males were as likely to replicate sexist norms as males outside the subculture.

Sexual Harrassment

> You know, if you were at a gig and people were pogoing at the front, you might find that there was a guy that was pogoing behind you and also pressing an erection against you. (Chris)

Chris recounted episodes of sexual harassment at punk gigs, using the example of someone using the proximity of a moshpit to press an erection against her. As raised in Chapter One, the #Metoo campaign illustrates the reality of women's lives, and in doing so raises questions about why women have seemingly tolerated indignities both large and small. As most women know, when misogyny is an omnipresent threat, avoiding it becomes so commonplace that it ceases to be recognised as tactical and instead becomes 'normal'. Jaffe (2018) suggested that rather than thinking of #MeToo as revealing 'norms' of sexist behaviour, it is positioned as revealing patriarchy, the foundation for a spectrum of misogynies. As Chris puts it, everyday events become situations "you've accepted as threatening you" when you are female and she for one, draws on a punk identity and facade to equip herself against threats, as a performer on stage as described earlier in the chapter, but also in everyday life. Other participants did not articulate a sense of threat that discourages them from punk participation but this does not mean that the threat does not exist, and this can be related to discussions in the earlier section regarding gendered differences in punk participation. Considering how women's experiences are interpreted as personal until the bigger picture is seen and it becomes political, I do not find it surprising that several participants describe 'personal preferences' of not wanting to draw attention to themselves, or not wanting to be a performer.

A postfeminist analysis would surely represent the expression of choice as feminist agency (Gill, 2007) and this is undoubtedly accurate in some cases. Not everyone is an

extrovert and some participants clearly conveyed to me not wanting personal attention, preferring to avoid conflict, yet *still* being able to take strength from punk to stand up for themselves when the occasion demands it. However, I find it difficult to truly embrace this scenario within the context of Vera-Grey's (2016) illustration of the embodied response to male threat. Faith highlights her disappointment in subculture, of expecting that because some things are different to the mainstream, everything will be, in relation to the familiar double standard: “blokes could go out and sleep with a different girl every night [….] as young girls we assumed, because we were all equal, that the same thing applied to us and it really didn't”, soon realising that that is not the case. McRobbie (2000) drew attention to the double deviance of women in subculture, asserting that ‘the shock of subcultures can be partially defused because they can be seen as, among other things, boys having fun’ (p28), which highlights that for males, to be ‘deviant’ is gender appropriate, a part of growing up, while girls are not allowed that freedom. LeBlanc (2008) also found that sexual inequalities persist in *contemporary* American punk scenes, with male harassment of women in the scene dismissed as ‘just fun’ by both sexes and double standards of sexual permissiveness as Faith describes.

It may initially seem that there are few tools from the Feminist Toolkit capable of equipping participants from an ever-present threat of misogyny, sexism and atmosphere of sexual threat or assault, and indeed women are not responsible for male behaviour. Nonetheless, in interviews I found that the punk propensity for questioning social and cultural norms leads participants to ask themselves about the fairness of behaviours that they observe or encounter, to reflect on its rightness, and to decide whether to accept or reject it. It is this sense of intellectual agency against misogynistic culture that belongs in the Feminist Toolkit, to counter some of the gendered experiences of ageing that participants describe. Chapter Three explored the phenomenon of the incredible invisible middle-aged woman and several participants discussed their realisation that midlife means escape from the oppressiveness of a sexualised gaze. For a heterosexual woman receptive to the possibility of a sexual liaison or a relationship, this may not feel promising but this did not arise as a response during our discussions.

Instead, several of the women I spoke to took a feminist view towards the tyranny of a sexualised gaze, far from a patriarchal interpretation of attention as 'flattering' or the postfeminist 'empowering' that nonetheless ignores the existence of power imbalances (Gill, 2006), but cognisant of the fact that attention is never a discrete 'compliment' but forms part of a bigger picture of scrutiny and commentary. As Bates (2014) warns, 'when something becomes part of your daily experience, the danger is that you'll simply come to accept it as normal' (p158). Looking at 'midlife invisibility' with a feminist eye then, it is outrageous that women perceive it as a relief. It is not to be taken lightly, as it speaks volumes about the tyranny of misogyny and sexism. It is not just a case of being able to operate under the radar, or not worrying about going to the shops without makeup on. The relief of invisibility pertains to a reprieve from the persistent threat of comments, sexual abuse and assault, the embodied response described by Vera-Gray (2016) and seen from this perspective it is an abomination that anyone should consider framing it this way.

Breaking Out of Gender Conformity in Midlife

> There probably are (expectations). Personally, I don't feel it but when you look around you and you look at the media and you look at pictures of who looks really, really good for their age [….] whatever age you are, the media images kind of do expect some kind of conformity don't they. (Kat)

Kat notes that the proliferation of images of older women in the media always share commonalities, for example a certain level of grooming, slenderness and activity, the epitome of youthful successful ageing (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). Kat does not observe older women *outside* of this model in the media and this sends a clear message about the boundaries of acceptability to any older woman watching. However, the Punk Toolkit and its feminist sister function as a distancing device, enabling some participants to recognise the ageist and sexist media tricks, without applying it to themselves and this reflects Katz & Calasanti's (2014) observation that older people challenge the dictates of 'successful ageing' by judging 'success' on their own terms. Kat observes this phenomenon without feeling subject to the same scrutiny or feeling obliged to replicate the same regimes and this is a feminist triumph, an ability to find sanctuary in her individuality and to reject gendered expectations. Calasanti's (2003) proviso that

middle age itself serves as an implicit standard for 'successful ageing' should be acknowledged but I consider that Kat's midlife outlook bodes well for further resistance as she ages. When women recognise that definitions of the perfect youthful female are irrelevant because their own boundaries of 'success' are different, this is undeniably positive. The challenge of doing this, when females are socialised to seek the approval of others, should not be underestimated and can be attributed to the Feminist Toolkit created through punk. Freedom from self-monitoring liberates participants in more ways than one, as a punk inspired feminist outlook makes many women in the study unafraid to act in their best interests, in whatever form this takes.

> I was in there with my 10-20 lens, banging in. I mean, at the end of the day, when I'm behind a camera I don't feel unsafe, I feel in a bubble and I just feel as if I can't be touched. Probably that's just so arrogant but at the end of the day yeah, I find it, yeah punk does carry you through [….] at the end of the day, I'm a person and I can just get in there and just give it stacks like anyone else. (Alex)

Alex describes attending a large protest in her role as a photographer and, in a parallel with earlier accounts of moshpits, being unafraid to enter the fray to capture a photo. If she had regulated her behaviour in line with expectations of female conduct she may have missed out on professional opportunities and enjoyment but her willingness to take up space (Ahmed, 2017) offers feminist freedoms. Alex reveals her understanding of gendered words and behaviours, saying "I don't mean that, being pushy, but being somewhere where I need to be" and this is a tactic from the feminist toolbox, the ability to reshape existing preconceptions and look at them through a non-sexist lens.

Turning a feminist ear towards language use and remaining alert to gendered doublespeak is something that participants could use to filter sexism from their lives, one word at a time. By refusing to use words that are used to negatively describe women, and to police women's behaviour and lives, women can further refuse to accept the sexist status quo. In the context of the interviews we shared, and also when taking personal details before interviews began (see Appendix D), the women I spoke to showed their awareness of the power of language and this is outlined in Chapter Two, in participants' decisions about describing themselves, for example 'child-free' or 'spinster'. Language can be used to maintain or challenge discriminatory environments

(Hawkins et al, 2001) and feminism recognises this power. Participants' use of language to challenge oppression could be applied to both feminist and ageist concerns. Ellen states that she is reclaiming the word 'spinster', which fits a longstanding tradition of reclaiming words that have become stigmatised, with an attitude of dissent. The word 'spinster' is indicative of a cultural mindset that treats women with contempt if they fail to be married or in a longterm relationship, constructed as 'invisible, abnormal and surplus to society's requirements' (McGlynn, 2017, p113). Ellen's reclamation of 'spinster' challenges a stigmatisation that is only applied to ageing women and asserts the fact that there is nothing negative about being a single woman. Ahmed's 'Killjoy Manifesto' (2017) includes the principle 'I am not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offence', and in doing so Ahmed reasserts humour's potential place in reproducing inequality and injustice (p261), reminding women that sexist jibes deserve not a resigned smile, but a stony-faced rejection. I suggest that the 'pushy' that Alex notes would transform to 'assertive', applied to a male.

Moving into the domestic sphere, the word 'nag' has long been applied to women who question why a male in the house is failing to share household tasks, and which she will no doubt be obliged to complete, should her 'nagging' fail to have an effect. A feminist tactic such as Ahmed's will not fail to find a target in the ageing lifecourse, because ageing women routinely find themselves subject to ageist language. As the chapter 'Everyday Ageism' has demonstrated, such language is both endemic and insidious, expressed in seeming endearments, obvious insults and everything in between. My analysis in these chapters so far confirm that the questioning outlook fostered by punk serves participants well, a tool to challenge both ageism and sexism across the ageing lifecourse. As we explored the influence of the punk ethos during our interviews, participants also thought back to their earliest recollections of focusing a questioning outlook on major life decisions. This commonly began with work and career discussions at school, something no-one found interesting or helpful, and which without exception, failed to challenge limiting gender expectations.

> It was very much about not wanting to get a mortgage, you know not wanting to get a job and have to get a mortgage and have kids and get married it was... I don't think we knew at

> that point what we actually did want to do, but we knew what we didn't want to do [….] it was very much about not accepting what was on offer. (Liz)

Chapter Six will explore participants' experiences of work and retirement in full. However, this chapter benefits from acknowledgement of the gendered expectations that participants shared with me in relation to work. Liz noted the dichotomy of not knowing what she wanted to do when she left school but knowing what she *did not* want to do and this echoes the memories of other female punks who had a strong sense of what they did not want to do, job wise (Reddington, 2003). Liz feels that punk equipped her to reject the limited options offered by her school and to seek an alternative. Another woman that I interviewed recalled wanting to work as a painter and decorator but being advised by the careers officer that it is not available for girls. It seems that there are wide benefits for women who question what is 'on offer' in life choices, with lifelong consequences. Most participants expressed satisfaction with the type of work they do at the midlife stage of their career, which as the previous chapter explained is often informed by their punk values and ethos. Nonetheless, the social justice motivation that the Punk Toolkit explored, easily tips into work that could be considered 'caring' and therefore 'female'. Women's work, which is notoriously paid less than men's (Faludi, 1992; Bates, 2014), seems to come with an underlying assumption that somehow the warm altruistic glow of doing a job that you care about is an adequate substitute for decent pay. I note a peculiar proposition that extrinsic motivations such as higher pay might undermine supposedly intrinsic motivations such as the gendered 'caring' (Folbre, 2012).

Perspectives on Motherhood and Domesticity

Another decision that had impacted on participants' lifecourses, was the matter of whether to have children. Six participants made the decision to be child-free, one participant has six children and most of these mothers have either one or two children and step children. Out of the thirteen parents, five still have a child or children at home, even if that child is nearing independence. One is a grandmother. Participants related some of their decisions about motherhood to the questioning outlook of the punk ethos, examining the implications of having children. I attribute the use of the term 'child-free'

within this thesis to Josie's use of the phrase and her disappointment that it has not entered common usage. It's alternative, 'childless', hints at a deficit, not just of a child, but of a woman who fails to conform to her biological duty. Second wave feminists such as Friedan (1963) and Firestone (1970) provoked outrage with their suggestions that motherhood is neither an innate desire, or a fulfilling role (Hughes, 2002) and participants' experiences suggest that for women of their generation, the choice to be child free remains treated with suspicion. For example, one participant recounted her partner's mother expressing regret that she and her partner do not have children, despite this not being a regret for the participant. This emphasises the expectation that a woman's life choices should incorporate what would please others. Halberstam's framing of 'queer time', allows a more celebratory reading of resistance to 'the heteronormative imperative of home and family' (2003, p321), focusing on the time liberated by *non-participation* in these activities, time that can be used for whatever these women choose, including subcultural practices. Several women in the study shaped their lifecourses in a way that could be read as 'queer time', regardless of their sexuality.

As we talked, Liz reflected that her relatively late motherhood indicates her ambivalence towards convention and domesticity, revealing "I was mid-thirties when I had my kids so I managed for quite a while not to go down that path", which follows on from her earlier declaration that punk for her meant resisting conventional goals of work, getting a mortgage or having children – all things that can be identified as having an impact on freedom, the epitome of being 'tied down'. Gullette's (2002) concept of post-maternity, in celebrating the freedom of the *post* child raising years, acknowledges the female work that goes into them. Ahmed's (2017) premise that a feminist life requires taking up space can be turned to motherhood, with the premise referring not just to bodily space, but social space. The impact of motherhood on bodily and social space is demonstrated in many ways; not having hands available due to holding a baby, spending more time in the confines of the home, or childcare meaning reduced access to social spaces including workplaces. Considering that women take on a disproportionate share of parenting work, their lives change in a way that is not true for fatherhood (Negra, 2008), and women encounter a significant feminist challenge as a

mother. Punk entered popular consciousness at a time when other subcultures willingly embraced gender stereotypes that oppress women and advantage men, defining women in countercultures as subordinate (Whiteley, 1997). I found that the women in my study were reluctant to be subordinate and feel that punk enables them to express their views, however subversive.

> I've had that opinion since my twenties. Certainly, it's never, ever, ever been part of my lifeplan or anything…That sort of ties in with the punk thing for me, in that, yes, I would have been expected to grow up, get married, have kids, but life's so much more than that. (Kat)

> I knew I never wanted children but I felt that, I still feel that punk empowered women a lot, and I felt that I could come out and say what I liked, it didn't matter. I mean if the Sex Pistols could swear on television, I can say I don't want children. (Josie)

Kat explained that punk's questioning attitude enables her to hesitate before accepting prescribed roles and to ask herself what she really wants – and it is not motherhood. Josie also drew a connection between her desire to be child free and the resilience that punk gives her to articulate her wishes. She made the point "If the Sex Pistols could swear on television, I can say I don't want children" and this is quite a statement, illustrating the pervasiveness of the expectation that women should want to have children. With this statement, Josie makes clear that to articulate this preference provokes controversy and is something that she expects to be judged for. As Bates (2014) asserts, 'the common misconception that women's bodies are public property is never stronger than when the subject is reproduction' (p247). Punk's ethos enables participants to take a step back and ask themselves what they would personally like to do.

The individuality celebrated in punk, dichotomous as it sounds, gives participants a framework with which they can shape their lives. Josie describes the real empowerment that she felt at being able to articulate not only what she wanted to do with her life, but what she *did not* want to do and she is emphatic that in this matter, punk gave her a voice, and helped her to express her wishes. Our discussions also showed that many participants are aware that men find their lives little changed through parenthood, whilst women's lives are changed in multiple ways. Negra and Tasker (2014) identified 'the

dyad of the failing man and the adaptive/coping woman' (p13) in media coverage of recessions and this model appears to be a natural extension of domestic expectations, where any gaps in childcare or household tasks are expected to be filled in by women, with their 'natural' coping ability. Any woman attuned to the nuances of this representation of gendered expectations, would surely approach the sharing of a household and responsibilities, with a male, with a degree of hesitation. Negra and Tasker's point is also that if women are supposed to cope/adapt, this really means compromise, which could mean surrendering facets of punk identity.

> I don't dislike children, I have nothing against them, I just didn't want any myself so, but I think not being a parent does enable you to create your own identity to a greater extent. You know, I'm not a mother or a grandmother, I'm whoever I want to be, so I see it very positively. (Chris)

Chris observes that 'mother' becomes an identity, eclipsing other elements of a multi-faceted individuality. A critique of the 'biological imperative' to have children was at the heart of second wave feminism, with Firestone (1979) noting that child bearing and the role of child rearing is at the heart of female oppression, the tendency for women and children to be bracketed together a forewarning that there is no escape from the tyranny of motherhood, which itself is supposed to stand for a multiple of characteristics. Motherhood is often perceived as having a softening effect on music performers (Coates, 2012) and even if unsubstantiated, the perception may dissuade women from trying to balance motherhood with a creative life, which the women in my study explored through the moments of conformity in Chapter Four that peppered the Punk Toolkit. For example, participants who had become mothers recollected forsaking interests that they enjoy because they did not easily fit in with family life or perceiving that there are specific ways of being and looking that should be adhered to as a mother. One participant shared her perception that her experience of motherhood is exacerbated by governmental policies that have made her feel that she has neither choices nor money to help her manage, and this leads her to feel that feminism has not worked for her and has resulted in fewer choices for mothers.

Factors Affecting Women's Choices

> I think feminism's done a lot of harm to be honest. This is where I'm going to sound right wing. Women should have choices [….] Now they've engineered it so that everybody has to go to work. I'm not saying everybody, they should all be supported by, but there is a place for women at home if they want that, and they can't choose it. (Rosalind)

Rosalind expresses her frustration with a patriarchal society that misleads women with the language of 'choice', whilst implementing policies that mean the choice is negligible, if a woman is not affluent. Whilst I do not deny Rosalind's anti-feminist feeling or wish to deviate from the principle of 'giving voice' (Graham, 1984; Reinharz, 1992) that underpins this research and was introduced in Chapter Two, Rosalind's condemnation of feminism can still be explored from a feminist perspective. Maynard & Purvis (1994) highlight the complexity of undertaking feminist research with women, when not all women are feminists, and this applies to my study. It is through adherence to the principle of 'giving voice' that I hope to analyse Rosalind's words through a feminist lens, but without imposing an interpretation that she would not identify with. 'Having it all' is a confabulation that feminist Gloria Steinem, quoted in Fine (2010, p89) disputed: 'The idea of having it all never meant doing it all. Men are parents too, and actually women will never be equal outside the home until men are equal inside the home', reminding us that the concept is not mirrored in men's lives (Negra, 2008), with their freedoms often dependent on the domestic work of a female partner.

Although the terminology of 'having it all' is especially used to describe the balance of family life and career success, it remains relevant throughout an ageing lifecourse, when the concept of 'all' is markedly different for women than for men. Rosalind's feeling that women are blamed for social ills, and compelled to go to work to meet unmanageable living costs seems to suggest a feminist analysis, nonetheless influenced by postfeminist narratives of 'choice', that seek to blame second wave feminism for its insistence on equality in work and home, while society does nothing to facilitate an egalitarian experience. To me, Rosalind's attitude reflects the social justice narrative that weaves throughout the Punk Toolkit, opposing a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' attitude towards motherhood that prevails to this day and is biased towards young mothers, of which Rosalind was one, who are typically characterised as

both conniving for having a baby to secure social housing, yet feckless for ‘allowing’ themselves to become pregnant (Phoenix, 1991; McRobbie, 2000).

Women of all ages can expect to be judged for their working and parenting decisions and single and non-affluent women can especially expect to be condemned for demanding the same freedoms. Single parents have always been a scapegoat for societal issues, as Rosalind rightly points out, the government expressing this through their punitive responses (McRobbie, 2003). Never mind that for a woman to be a single parent, it takes a man to be absent. Participants reflected on the wider meanings of ‘settling down’ and the consequences this could have for a woman’s lifecourse.

> We tend not to have settled particularly down…a lot of the men have. They've got married and had children and stuff, but for women that was what was expected [….] there's a bloody mindedness in you that goes 'Nah. You expect me to do that, I'm going to do this here'. But for men, it isn't such an expectation, like family isn't their supposed natural habitat or whatever. (Faith)

Faith pinpoints a key difference in the way that men and women are associated with family life. She observes that men progress through the lifecourse with few expectations of domesticity. Men often pursue conventional family lives but the critical difference lies in the expectation and the fact that women who do not do this may still be considered subversive, which Faith notes is not applied to men. If women choosing not to have children are considered subversive, then their lives can be seen as occupying queer time and space (Halbertstam, 2005). Faith names a ‘bloody mindedness’ which even when unconsciously applied, allows participants to question, resist and reject expectations. The punk ‘bloody mindedness’ - she is not the only participant to use these words – brings to mind Ahmed’s declaration that to be feminist is to be willful (2017). This reclamation of ‘willful’ rejects the traditional gendered meaning that suggests females should not have a will of their own, instead depicting willfulness as a useful feminist trait and statement of intent. Faith’s experience is that many of her peers similarly reject conventional family life, but this is not true for her male friends. Frith (1997) noted that when home *is* a place of work, which it is for many women, this makes the experience of leisure time different for women. Home in this context is not somewhere to retreat *away* from work because there is an expectation that women

continue work in the house, making cups of tea and maintaining the household. Feminist challenges are omnipresent and, as previously stated, 'having it all' in terms of being able to work and have a family has not freed women from the tyranny of domestic demands and comes at a personal price (Wrye, 2009)**.**

Noticing How Women Are Represented

Away from the domestic sphere, several participants turned a feminist eye to contemporary issues that affect them during our interviews and in doing so, demonstrated an understanding of the lack of representation of women in many spheres of life. Where women *are* represented, this often occurs through well-worn roles, further stereotyping all women (Bates, 2014). The women in my study have already described some of their experiences of social spaces in this chapter and in the preceding chapters. It is difficult to untangle gender and age in participants' stories about the factors that combine to preclude older women from living freely. Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' makes it clear that it is the intersection between these statuses that combine to devastating and detrimental effect. As such, participants notice specific incidents that illustrate how women, and particularly older women, are of little interest to others. I met the three Northern Irish participants at an exhibition about punk women in Northern Ireland and this became a talking point. This exhibition space comprised current portraits of older female punks juxtaposed with their original era photos and a written narrative for each woman, alongside a pinboard entitled 'Punkette Memories'. One participant perceived the 'ette' suffix as referring to a smaller version of something, which mirrors Reddington's reflection (2005) that 'punkette' could be seen as an attempt to put women in their place. This provides another example of the discriminatory power of language which was explored earlier in the chapter.

> I was very disappointed yesterday, it was women and punk in Northern Ireland and the turnout was pathetic. I think if it had have been the boys, there would have been crowds there [….] very, very poorly advertised, very poorly and if that's indicative of how it's going, that's very sad. The girls you know are in a minority. (Mary)

Mary related the lack of advertising and poor turnout at the exhibition's opening night to wider issues about women, that their experiences are considered *only* of interest to

women. This is supported by Bag (2012), who believes that ‘artists should document their own scenes and movements because history has a curious way of focusing itself through the biased lens of the dominant culture’ (p233), which of course includes patriarchy. Within punk, Reddington (1997) found that women’s experiences are sidelined to make way for the men, history reshaped to redefine punk as a male subculture, with the emphasis on male experiences. The conclusion that is surely drawn is that male experiences are presented as representative of everyone but conversely, when women’s experiences are presented, they are assumed to be of interest to women only. Mary's analysis certainly seemed to draw this conclusion about the punk exhibition and as a fellow attendee, noting few attendees other than the women pictured, I concur. If men fail to relate to representations of women’s lives, then this is an ongoing feminist issue, because the issues affecting women fail to be heard by everyone.

Summary of Chapter Five

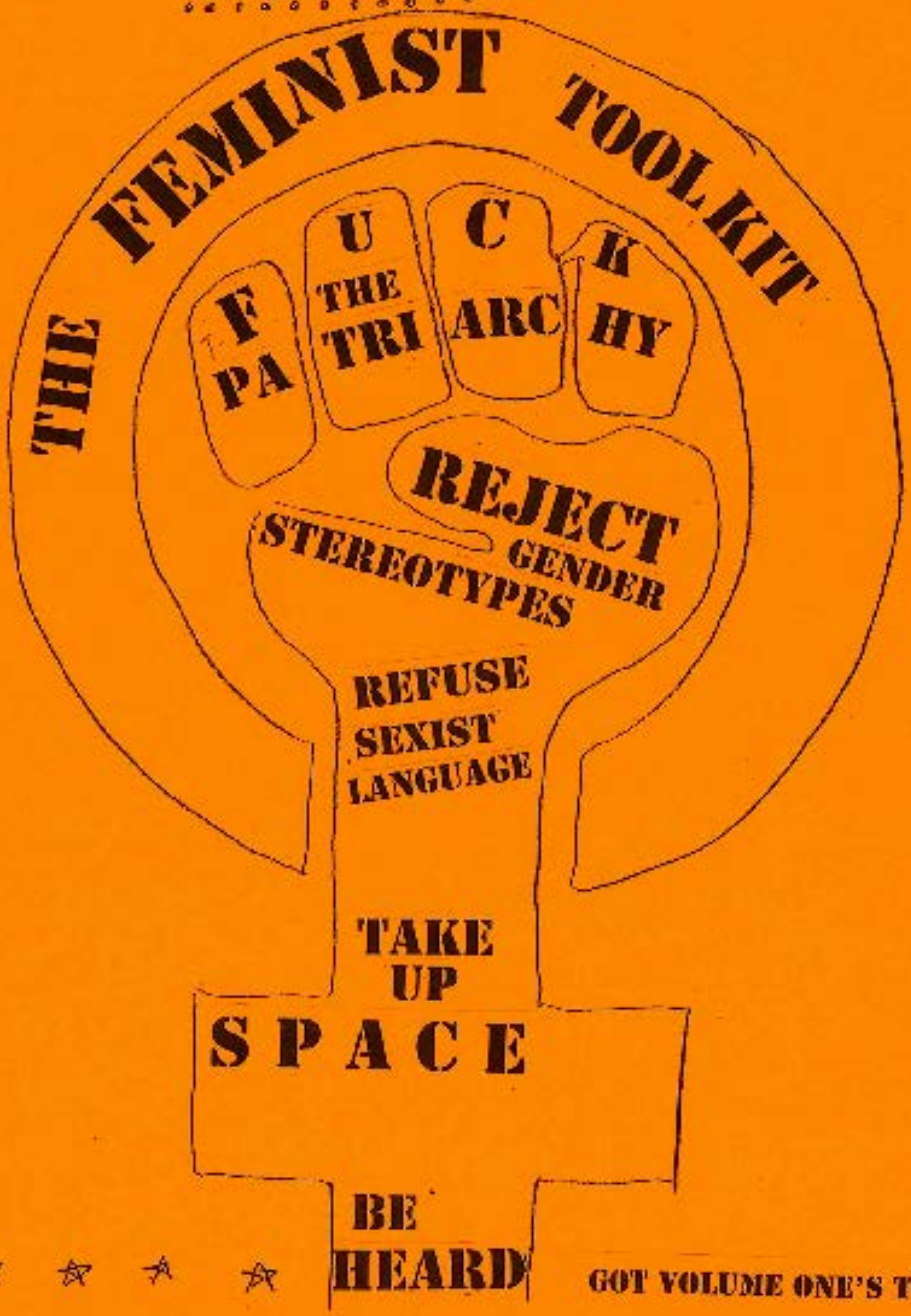
This chapter expands Chapter Four’s Punk Toolkit to incorporate a feminist perspective, examining the intersections of ageism and sexism for midlife women. Any part of the Punk Toolkit could be utilised in a feminist way, especially the questioning outlook that participants use to explore their lives, challenge ageism and inform decisions along their ageing lifecourse. Using this, participants could ask whether cultural and societal values about expectations for older women fit with their own and accept or reject them as they feel fit. Equally, participants could reject gendered age stereotypes and this willingness to create a unique ageing identity for themselves throws a feminist spanner in the works of female comparison.

Participants describe uniquely feminist tactics that usefully inform the Feminist Toolkit and these reflect Ahmed’s (2017) concept of taking up space/living differently in one’s body, alongside a critical view of language use, with women refusing language that contributes to a sexist or ageist environment. Reclaiming language adds a nice flavour of punk dissent and this fits into both punk practice and everyday social practices, equipping women for the female ageing lifecourse. This chapter captures the overwhelming relentlessness of both gendered expectations and the potential violence

of misogyny and it is clear that for any midlife woman, resistance is vital. Resistance and rejection of these things does not make them go away, at least not completely but the next page captures a visual representation of the key components of the Feminist Toolkit. Following this, with the Punk and Feminist Toolkits already brimming at the seams, Chapters Six and Seven explore participants' ageing experiences further. Against the backdrop of Everyday Ageism, these will consider the impact of the Punk and Feminist Toolkits, which in the hands of questioning and non-conforming participants, have the potential to inform an ageing lifecourse that a punk identifying midlife woman can really enjoy and get her teeth into.

OH ANGEISM UP YOURS!!

VOLUME TWO



GOT VOLUME ONE'S TOOLKIT?....USE IT!...BE YOURSELF – DON'T CONFORM...QUESTION AUTHORITY...YOU CAN DO ANYTHING – JUST DO IT

Chapter Six: Work and Retirement

This chapter explores themes of work and retirement, which comprise a large part of each participant's lifecourse. In Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit', many participants identified values that inform the work choices they make, and this chapter explores the impact of punk on career decisions. The following then explores the experience of both job seeking and being in work as a midlife woman, including the integration of tools from both the Punk and Feminist Toolkits. It moves to an exploration of retirement, which most participants anticipate with a sense of hopefulness, yet trepidation. Concerns about pension eligibility and the prospect of further pension changes inform participants' expectations for retirement. The chapter considers participants' concerns about retirement, most notably the worry that older age might bring illness, leaving a retirement that they would be ill equipped to enjoy. Despite economic concerns, participants identify freedoms that they expect from retirement, not just hours available, but the removal of work restriction and conformity. Ultimately, participants anticipate a retirement unique to their individual circumstances, a continuous thread across a subcultural lifecourse. To begin, I return to participants' reflections on the integration of the punk ethos into their working lives.

The Impact of Punk on Work Choice

Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit' contained practices and principles that participants could apply to working life. Two principles suggested that workplace hierarchies were in participants' minds when they were considering 'something punk' to take through the lifecourse. These were ***you don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority*** and ***don't trust a man in a suit,*** examples which although applicable to women too, suggest recognition of patriarchal power structures. Questioning hierarchies and potential oppressions serves as a potential tool of resistance in the workplace. Other parts of the Punk Toolkit, such as ***be yourself*** and ***don't conform*** serve to remind participants of their own values and principles, in the context of work cultures and cultural expectations for retirement. The Feminist Toolkit is also of importance, meaning that participants could equip themselves for workplace

challenges and retirement with their refusal to accept sexist language and their rejection of gender stereotypes, alongside their questioning attitude and integration of social justice values. In our interviews, participants described how punk informs their career decisions and achievements.

> I'm still political and the job I did was absolutely part of the politics. I've worked as a researcher, violence against women and girls, for over twenty years and that, that necessarily involves my politics because it is political. The personal is political. I'm a radical feminist. (Caroline)

Our interviews revealed that several of the women I spoke to are committed to a social justice agenda that had arisen through earlier punk practice, then been pursued through further education and work. Although recently retired, Caroline finds impetus in the political beliefs and feminism which informed her career and described how the personal and political become entwined through these work choices. The questioning attitude of Caroline's punk ethos, alongside her radical feminism directed her towards gender politics. Her social justice aims were fulfilled through the work she described above, until illness compelled her to take early retirement. Flo also embeds social justice aims into her working life and described how she uses the punk DIY ethos as a strategy to create work opportunities, setting up work projects and deciding to become self-employed, when she cannot achieve her aims through work with an employer: "Even when I've been employed I haven't let organisational barriers get in the way of something I want to do, so I will just go do it a different way. And now being self-employed, it is a complete DIY ethos".

I found that the women in my study largely conform to existing findings on ageing punks by Bennett & Taylor (2012) in their focus on social justice aims, or work that would allow an element of freedom. Indeed, for two participants the type of work is of minimal importance, compared to the freedom a job offers in allowing them to maintain an unconventional appearance, and our interviews allowed me to observe the unconventional aspects of their appearance that some employers might object to, for example colourful fake dreadlocks or facial piercings. Participants negotiate a balance between the principles and practices of their punk ethos and this varies from person to

person. As described in the chapter ‘Everyday Ageism’, the concept of transageing (Moglen, 2008) enables participants to integrate identities and experiences across the lifecourse, carrying threads of subcultural identity and values forward. Work functions as one place in which to do this. For many participants these values become embedded in work choices, with work forming part of their identity. Several women articulated how their career demonstrates a cohesion between personal and work life.

> I will argue the toss with anyone about anything if I think a principle is right. I will fight for the underdog and that shows in my profession as well because I'm a nurse. I will back marginalised people to the hilt wherever I can. (Heather)

Heather explored in her interview the social justice principles that underpin her career as a mental health nurse and described using her role to address these issues. The idea that work should have a ‘purpose’ characterised the work choices of many, although not all, participants and their statements support this. Paula expressed the concerns she feels when considering work: “The idea of sitting in an office, as I say, with people who are suited and booted and just ...it really doesn't appeal to me”. Her statement seems to be less a wish for unconventional appearance, than a desire to be with people with whom she has something in common. Sklar (2013) notes that subcultural style can be used to ‘draw attention to the notion of kinship among like-minded people in all that is counterculture, provide visual cues regarding ideals and preferences, and/or promote distinction’ (p141) and this resonates with Paula’s seeming motivation. My observation is that although Paula did not look ‘punk’ as such when we met, there were elements of her appearance that mark her out as *alternative.* Equally, as two strangers meeting for an interview, we were assisted by a time and meeting place, but I believe that Sklar’s (2013) ‘visual cues’ also enabled recognition. Paula’s dislike of convention is epitomised by the phrase ‘suited and booted’, with an underlying suspicion that to accept a work ‘uniform’ is to reveal an unquestioning attitude, the antithesis of the punk ***never trust a man in a suit*** ethos.

Job Seeking in Midlife

Considered in their entirety, the interview conversations indicated that the women in my study employ a questioning outlook when looking for new work, analysing potential

work opportunities to assess whether they would offer job satisfaction and enjoyment, or cohesion with personal values. Job seeking also prompts an evaluation of employers' preferences and an awareness of whether participants fit these requirements. However, there are times when it seems that looking too closely into a job opportunity serves to reduce the jobs that participants feel are available to them, rather than increase the opportunities. Ylänne (2015), looking at representations of ageing in the media, described the idea of 'age-targeted' advertising as an unclear concept, due to the difficulty of predicting what someone might identify with. Although job advertisements may function differently, participants' accounts indicate that they nonetheless perceive job advertisements as age targeted, suggesting that employers integrate ageism into the way they word and present their notices.

It seems that as these women age, their concerns about meeting an employer's criteria increase to reveal fears of being excluded from work due to age. Taylor & Walker's (1998) research indicated that 'workplace perceptions about older workers...may directly influence not only their prospects for gaining employment but their prospects for development and advancement within an organisation' (p653). Taylor & Walker's interviews with personnel managers revealed a balance of views, yet a combination of the issues of ageism raised in Chapter Three, plus the concerns raised by participants in this chapter suggest to me that these views do not always translate to age-inclusive working environments or practices. The women I interviewed describe a thinking process that is time consuming, peppered with second guesses about the age expectations of others and ultimately characterised by uncertainty.

> I've got a sister who's a HR director and she clearly told me that some people will not look favourably on any application I make because of my age, and because of my age comes that wealth of experience as well, and she said it as if it's just common knowledge...so applying for jobs, my age has affected me applying for jobs definitely. (Flo)

Some participants perceived that experience and knowledge can be off-putting for employers and this relates to the concept of 'age appropriateness' that the preceding chapters have already had cause to explore. Flo was made redundant from work in her late forties and this led her to look for new opportunities, which her sister's words then

dissuaded her from applying for. Flo picks up on the way that her sister presents the 'facts' as she sees them and is immediately reminded that there is no immunity to age expectations. Generalisations about the links between life stage and experience are not without risk in an 'increasingly complex and fluid social world' (Coupland, 2009, p853) leading to people imposing age criteria on other individuals, often through the concept of 'decade-based dating' (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000) that Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' introduced. Flo appears to perceive that younger people can apply for a variety of jobs because their youth means they are able to claim inexperience, while she is excluded due to age and experience. This reflects another of Chapter Three's findings, which suggested that for midlife participants, being an *older* new musician feels incompatible. Age is meant to function not only as a predictor for a certain level of experience or knowledge, but a predictor for that person's wishes, and this can be seen as what Gullette calls 'age ideology' (1997, p3), the cultural framework that regulates everyone into acceptable age expectations. This led me to consider whether a person who does not match an age expectation is perceived as somehow dysfunctional, in the process becoming less employable.

> Sometimes, when you read sort of job descriptions or person specs or whatever, you read between the lines a bit and think well, they're clearly looking for someone who's just graduated, and a young person who's just graduated. Not a mature student, someone who's just out of school and they can kind of mould them to what they want to be, what they want to be. As opposed to someone of my age who's going to go in and say I've got my own ideas of what I think this role could be. (Kat)

Flo and Kat both discern the subtle ageisms that dissuade older people from applying from jobs and Kat reflected that employers might be put off by "someone of my age who's going to go in and say I've got my own ideas of what I think this role could be" and this is an interesting point. Conversely, Taylor & Walker (1998) found that older workers often perceive that potential employers would not want to train them, suggesting that for midlife jobseekers, there is a mysterious tension between being knowledgeable, but only in a certain way. Kat is willing to bring the questioning outlook and DIY ethos of Chapter Four's 'Punk Toolkit' to a new job, and she perceives these as positive characteristics that can benefit work and employers, a perspective I identify

with. However, in these accounts of jobseeking, a questioning outlook does not always serve as a useful attribute. As outlined in the quote above, Kat seems to have internalised the idea that she is getting towards the end of her working life, wondering whether employers would prefer to avoid employing older people for multiple reasons: “Are they looking at, well they've only got so many years before they retire, so what would be the point in investing in that person if they're only going to be here for ten years before we have to pay them shedloads of money”. She suggests that older people are perceived by employers to have a limited number of years left before retirement, and to have wage expectations that employers would prefer not to meet.

Kat’s concern that employers effectively write off older people as employees a long time before actual retirement affects her experience of jobseeking. The way that participants spoke to me about the complexity of looking for work in midlife calls to mind the spectre of the ‘Ageist Forcefield’ that Chapter Three described in relation to the places and activities that midlife participants feel slightly reluctant to go to or do. It is small wonder that Kat’s perceptions of employers’ attitudes to age manifest into a reluctance to apply for these jobs. On these occasions, the urge to ‘read between the lines’ of job advertisement text and reflect on the potential motivations of the employer or advertiser serves to deter participants from applying for jobs and this appears to be a particularly gendered response (Mohr, 2014). Studies evidence the favouring of men over similarly qualified women in job applications (Fine, 2010), and this may be considered a contributory factor in the gender pay gap. As Lips (2013, p170) asks, ‘are men and women rewarded similarly for similar levels of investment?’ and while Lips applies this question to women and men’s working lives, it is transferable to jobseeking. Participants’ experiences suggest an understanding of this dynamic, which may cause them to hesitate before applying for a job. To rectify this, a questioning outlook could be more usefully diverted elsewhere, perhaps to a question of ‘why *not* me?’ or to thoughts of how ageism and sexism operate on multiple levels, the questioning outlook that serves participants well in Chapter Five ‘The Feminist Toolkit’.

The Workplace in Midlife

Work cultures can be powerful forces that absorb employees into a culture that may conflict with personal values. Chapters One and Four introduced Bennett's (2006) research, suggesting that 'ageing punks' find the best way to ensure the integration of work and personal values is to become self-employed, something that Flo demonstrated earlier in the chapter, alongside Faith as a freelance editor, Liz as an artist and Bridget as a web designer. During our interviews, none of the self-employed participants disclosed negative experiences of being an older woman in their working lives. Although we did not discuss this further in the course of our conversations, I would speculate that controlling their own work puts these women in a position of power, where finding clients for their services is dependent on a confident show of expertise and experience. Equally, the nature of self-employment, and particularly 'virtual' work such as Bridget's means that a typical working day does not involve in-person interactions and perhaps this relates to Paula's desire earlier in the chapter, to avoid 'suited and booted' people, with whom she may have nothing in common.

The personal information I collected from each woman in my study at the beginning of our interviews included work details and I admit that, having assimilated Bennett & Taylor's (2012) research, and observed similar with my own punk friends, I was unsurprised by most participant's jobs. For context, I would have been surprised at an insurance broker, the kind of job I perceive as making money for an organisation, rather than being for the greater good or allowing creativity! The few self-employed women in the study fitted into these latter categories. Most participants, however, worked for an employer and therefore shared experiences of being an older woman in the workplace. While some participants feel valued in their workplaces, others described moments in their working lives that cause them to question how age prompts others to respond to them differently. Cultural gerontology shows that older people face a significant challenge in being recognised as individuals, when 'old' is imposed as an identity of its own (Gilleard & Higgs, 2009). When the characteristics assigned to older women are internalised and assimilated into wider culture, they become restricting. Some participants noted tendencies for employers and colleagues to treat them or their peers differently as they age *within* their jobs.

> I've got a colleague that's older than me in her later fifties and I think she's very undervalued. She's a very skilled practitioner and I think age does come into that [….] I've got another colleague who's in his late forties, 'oh John's PIN is 00001 because he's so old, he's been in nursing so long' and it's like, they'll make comments like that, which yes can be considered banter, but on another level it's like, trying to take someone down a little bit. (Heather)

Heather feels valued as a nurse but named incidences of ageism that she observes within her workplace. Heather recounts ageism directed against a male who is approaching middle age, but appears to relate to it, perhaps because at age fifty, there is little difference in their ages. This example may be used by Heather to suggest that males are not exempt from ageism. She explained to me that she does not feel that middle age causes her to be treated differently but observed that her female colleague goes unseen and unvalued by colleagues and this replicates findings within the chapter 'Everyday Ageism' about midlife invisibility. Calasanti et al (2006) explored how power relations and age-based organisation affect life chances, stating that old age exacerbates other inequalities, conveying reduced power to those designated as old, no matter the pre-existing power, such as that gained through professional recognition. Bee at al (2008) found that within mental health nursing, service users' views of nurses are informed by a number of factors, most notably the amount and quality of contact they receive, but nurse age is not named as a factor. A nurse, such as Heather, arguably has the power of her role and expertise but if others around her note an aged face first and apply ageist characteristics, then she is disadvantaged, but intersectional inequalities also converge within the workplace. Heilman & Chen (2003) query whether performance can override stereotype when it comes to work inequalities for both female and minority ethnic employees and conclude that this rarely happens, stating 'there is a powerful tendency for stereotypes to perpetuate themselves, throwing up a protective shield from disconfirming information' (p353). Heather's comment about her colleague brings the powerlessness into sharp focus and one can sense the power of her colleague's nursing role being slowly depleted by the competing status of 'old'.

Heather observed her male colleague being similarly sidelined and notes the 'banter' which has become a contemporary password for discrimination, allowing any verbal

content that is presented in a lighthearted manner. Heather perceives this as “trying to take someone down a bit” and her insight reflects Gullette’s statement that ‘humour is the last refuge of hate speech’ (2015, p23). The jokey nature of ageist memes, birthday cards and anecdotes discourage a serious or questioning response and indeed, Everyday Ageism highlights humour as a coping mechanism for participants dealing with everyday life and ageism. Segal (2008) goes further, recognising humour as a mechanism for undermining the cultural stigma of older age and invoking Freud’s (1927, p161) words on the subject, ‘Humour is not resigned, it is rebellious’. There may be mileage in refusing to dignify ageism with a serious response and potentially the Punk Toolkit provides an alternative.

However, in the Feminist Toolkit, Ahmed’s (2017) command not to respond to sexist language with humour bears closer examination. What is it about ageism that makes a softer approach seem more appropriate? It only seems conceivable until the tables are turned and the idea of indulging sexist language and behaviour in the same way is imagined. A review of a selection of the ageist insults applied to women shed some light on why this might be. Ageing women are often caricatured as humourless, unimaginative harridans (Rosenthal, 1990) and it could be understood that one response to this is to make the effort *not to be* these things. To show humour, even when unwarranted, is a technique for disproving such accusations. Conversely, to refuse to laugh along with ageist depictions is to refuse the lifeblood of a response and to deny the depictions, which fail to acknowledge the heterogeneity of older age. When older people are interacted with as the butt of ageist jokes, then the myth of homogenous older age is perpetuated. The breadth of work skills and experiences that I drew from participants’ accounts demonstrates the heterogeneity of their lifecourses.

Interrogating humour means utilising social justice principles. Participants’ willingness to stand up for social justice principles indicates an assertiveness that insists on being heard. The Punk Toolkit advised ***you don’t have to accept what someone says just because they have authority***, and used alongside a feminist questioning of values, participants are ideally placed to resist ageist and sexist work cultures. This raises the issue of whether the questioning attitude and resistance to being sidelined associated

with the punk ethos, has given Heather tools that mark her out from her colleague, who through being an ‘ordinary’ older woman is treated in a way that is so diminished as to make her invisible. I make this statement with the proviso that any older woman in the workplace is arguably more visible than an older woman who is absent from the workplace. Chapter One introduced Gullette’s (2000) warning about using age related language in a ‘contrived war’, noting that accepting age stereotypes in employment serves to divide and pit people against each other and this, of course, encompasses the stereotypes conveyed in ‘jokes’. None of these make for a comfortable working environment and instead discourage intergenerationality, assuring each person that there are age-related qualities and experiences, which people of other ‘generations’ cannot be expected to understand.

> When you see them talking to people who are their age or a similar age, there's no effort at all, no problems whatsoever. But with us, it's kind of like they need to make some kind of special effort…we all know that we make mistakes, but it's the way we're told about it, that very kind of, it’s almost like they're telling you you've got cancer. (Kat)

Kat identified a curious facet in the way that age is treated in her workplace. She finds that younger managers in her organisation seem to feel uncomfortable with speaking to her and she both observed and experienced this phenomenon as “it’s almost like they're telling you you've got cancer”. This references Elderspeak, ‘a simplified speech register with exaggerated pitch and intonation, simplified grammar, limited vocabulary, and slow rate of delivery’ (Kemper et al, 1998, p56). Although Kemper et al (1998) acknowledge that facets of Elderspeak can be useful to someone with cognitive difficulties, its wholesale use at other times conveys disrespect, reduces the opportunity for a meaningful conversation and presumes incompetence. Indeed, Kat senses uncertainty in the way that younger managers engage with her that evidences an ‘othering’ of age. This is supported by her observation that her managers are visibly at ease discussing tasks and difficulties with younger workers. This shows vividly that age is the factor that produces this discomfort, the ‘Ageist Forcefield’ named in Everyday Ageism, which affects the behaviour of those approaching it, giving them pause for thought.

Cruikshank's (2003) concept of the hyper awareness of age which varies according to the ages of the people interacting, is evidenced through Kat's manager's fluctuating communication style that shows just how toxic age hyper-awareness can be. The implication is that speaking to an older person is different to speaking to a 'normal' person. If Holstein & Gubrium's (2000) suggestion is accurate, that a person treated as dignified and respectable will take that identity, then what are the consequences for women who are not treated in that way? If older women are treated as if speaking to them risks entering a confusing world of age related 'issues', then this has implications for their self-esteem and identity. Kat analyses the interactions she experiences and finds the other person's standpoint bizarre but for many others, this kind of ageist attitude surely erodes their sense of self, for as Gullette (2017) asserts, ageism is an attack on selfhood for an older person. Even if equipped with the Punk Toolkit's questioning outlook, there is the question of reciprocity, raised in Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' as a necessity if midlife women are to participate fully in their social worlds and avoid the sensation of invisibility. The experience of working without reciprocal relationships leaves a lot to be desired for any woman in the workplace.

Participants have already described the rigidity of age ideologies (Gullette, 1997) that correlate age with levels of seniority, status or experience when job seeking. Once in employment, it seems that the same ideology is at work. Kat's role is junior in relation to the managers and it appears that this presents a problem when work issues need to be addressed: "I feel like they're trying to tread a fine line between 'look we are your bosses and we do need to tell you what to do', but 'oh my god you're so much older than me and I'm a little bit scared'". I initially wondered if this could be attributed to a 'respect your elders' message that is interpreted as deferring to older people. However, Kat's account reveals interactions where people feel uncomfortable in drawing attention to the errors of older people, in a way that seems over dramatic. Theories of loss and decline in older people correlate with fear about old age (Cruikshank, 2003), something that I will explore further in Chapter Seven, and this is perhaps what these interactions represent. In the same way that 'lapses of dress' in older women are seen as symptomatic of an age-related decline (Twigg, 2007), hence minor errors at work are

feared as an inevitability of older age, the loss of taken for granted work skills or symptomatic of cognitive impairment such as a dementia.

Conversely, the trope of age-old wisdom (Woodward, 2002) could be at play, meaning that older people who make errors seem puzzling, failing to conform to a stereotype of naturally absorbed wisdom and knowledge that covers all life eventualities. Kat acknowledges the human-ness of error but the 'othering' of ageing women means that the work error of an older woman is seen differently. In her susceptible to error embodiment of a midlife working woman, it seems that Kat is not quite what her managers are expecting, and the way they relate to her reveals their unease. It could be perceived that Kat is expected to have already progressed professionally to a level where her younger colleagues will feel comfortable relating to her. However, literature shows that women breaking away from 'baby boomer' era gender barriers frequently took administrative or other poorly paid roles (Faludi, 1992). This creates something of a puzzle if Kat's employers demonstrate discomfort in managing a middle-aged woman – she is in a workplace that is commonplace for older women.

Research looking at public perceptions of ageing workers (Börsch-Supan, 2013) identifies conflicting tropes of 'declining health limits the capacity to work at older ages', 'older workers are less productive', 'retirement is bliss' and 'keeping older workers creates unemployment for the young' (p3), which Börsch-Supan identifies as myths. Whether myth or stereotype, these work in conjunction to justify ageist treatment of older people in the workplace. Two of these statements categorise older workers as unproductive and/or unable and therefore of little value, in conflict with neoliberal ideology that demands for 'successful agers' to be productive (Rowe, 1997). The latter statements sanction the failure to employ older people and early retirement/redundancy on the basis that it serves a greater good, looking at the needs of the population as a whole, while failing to acknowledge the influence of ageism and therefore practices that discriminate against older people. To justify this, it is positioned as serving the needs of younger people and an act of kindness for the older person. The narratives that Börsch-Supan (2013) identifies might be located in Kat's account of hushed tones, the same hushed tones that are used to impart difficult news in medical practices.

The narrative of declining health as a deterrent for work intersects with issues facing disabled people of all ages. Owen & Harris (2012) consider the impact of disability reform policies on human rights, noting the influence of neoliberal 'no rights without responsibilities' rhetoric (p23). The experiences of the disabled people in their study suggested that they are often excluded from work, citing barriers including the resistance of employers and the complexity of legislation regarding work and benefit eligibility. The Equality Act (2010) aims to prevent employers from excluding people with disabilities from the workplace and puts the impetus on employers to take positive and supportive measures, although Hockey & James (1993) note that the workplace challenge lies in 'subtleties of hidden prejudice, through to more overt forms of discrimination, to the practicalities of the working life itself' (p141). However, once 'old' is bestowed as an identity, it seems that this may take prime place, meaning that illness or disability are then perceived as an integral and irreversible feature of ageing, rather than something that should be supported in the workplace. The ableism inherent in successful ageing (Berridge & Martinson, 2018), means that ageing women who experience disability or illness are inevitably perceived as 'unsuccessful', a characteristic surely unconducive to progression in the workplace. Whether happy in their jobs or not, participants explored in their interviews their wishes and expectations for retirement and these covered a spectrum, from fears that poverty will ruin retirement plans, to fully formed plans that recreate retirement as a natural progression in a multi-faceted working life.

Pension Concerns

For most of the women in my study, thoughts of retirement are inextricably linked with concerns about economic security and therefore pensions, for example Heather stated: "I hope no-one steals my NHS pension governmentally. I hope we've got enough to live on". Participants expressed concerns about recent pension changes and the possibility that boundaries of entitlement will continue to shift. As pension reforms grow steadily more opaque, so the future of retirement becomes less certain (Grech, 2013), explaining participants' concerns for the shape of their retirement. Asquith (2009, p259) notes that 'economic security is the key to purchasing the new, better third age; yet economic security is not gained by individual action alone', critiquing the neoliberal

discourse of positive ageing. Many of the women that I spoke to have worked solidly for years yet feel financially ill-equipped to retire, sharing Asquith's view that this is not something that can easily be challenged alone.

Women's pension changes take place against a backdrop of ageist media coverage, which depicts an ageing population whose behaviour has been detrimental to younger generations (Carney & Gray, 2015). It seems that a perception that comfortably off older people are to blame for the economic misfortunes of younger generations (Gullette, 2000) has led to the denial of the diversity of financial circumstances in older age. Ageism shows in the way that the myth of the affluent older person is applied to *all* older people, a familiar trope from 'Everyday Ageism'. Nonetheless, during the course of our interviews, it seemed that this stereotype has been assimilated as truth by several participants, who in this instance see themselves as the unwitting recipients of old*er* people's alleged follies. Whatever the cause, these women are concerned about their economic circumstances in retirement.

> I'm quite worried, quite worried about retirement because I don't want to be an impoverished pensioner living on cat food, having to choose between heating and eating. That does worry me. That does worry because I do worry about the dismantling of the welfare state [….] I don't trust any government and I'm quite resigned to the fact that I could be living a very poor old age. (Ellen)

Ellen states that she has worked for thirty years and will be eligible for some work pension. However, she remains concerned that she will not have enough to live on and attributes this to the possibility that her state pension, which she currently expects to receive when she is sixty-seven, will no longer be adequate. Other participants, such as Liz, had not considered a private pension at all in their earlier years, seeing it as part of a mainstream, conformist culture that they do not identify with, "I haven't got a pension or anything like that at all, but…I expect I'll die before I get old. Yeah that's probably the biggest influence it's (punk) had on me, not getting a pension", not imagining that a separate pension would seem quite as necessary as she enters midlife. Jenks (2003) noted that for younger people, avoiding 'adult' overheads such as mortgages and pension plans in order to direct resources towards social activities,

clothes and music is not only logical but grants subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) and this raises interesting points about why this may persist.

It could be argued that continued investment in a non-conformist lifecourse means that conventional concerns such as pension plans are simply not a priority. Equally, Liz's invocation of English rock band The Who's famous lyric "I hope I die before I get old" (My Generation, 1965) makes me wonder about joyful expressions of youth, that are juxtaposed with an 'older age' that is both to be avoided, and too far away to consider – and the power these representations hold. Flo and Heather share Ellen's concerns that a state pension alone may not be sufficient for a good standard of living and do not see a solution. As Flo states "I haven't amassed a great pension, that's a real concern to me as an adult, sane thinking woman, that wants to be here for a while. So, I worry about poverty as an ageing woman [….] I will be a poor pensioner", expressing the feeling of powerlessness that this creates.

Our interviews revealed that many of the women I spoke to are just as concerned about the availability of the state pension to supplement their work pension, using the word 'steal' on occasion to describe the way the government can both give and withhold money. The 'Women Against State Pension Inequality' (WASPI) organisation in the UK protests against the way that changes to women's state pension age were implemented with 'inadequate or no notice' (https://www.waspi.co.uk/about-us-2/) and although most women in my study have not experienced a *sudden* change in pension age, they have nonetheless absorbed the uncertainty. Ellen attributes these circumstances, which she feels worried about but powerless over, to a combination of "the dismantling of the welfare state", and the number of "baby boomers". Katz (2001, p28) notes the role of language such as 'empty nesters' and 'boomers' and the meanings attached to them, work to disguise the realities of poverty and inequality in older age. The consequence is that midlife women are considered fortunate and affluent, despite the mismatch between the myth and reality. Participants articulated their concerns about how they will manage financially in retirement and older age.

> I don't own property, I'm not going to inherit a massive amount of money and I've only been working in a permanent job for eighteen months, so my pension's not going to be brilliant, so I do worry, I'm slightly concerned about the future. (Kat)

Several of the women in the study feel that retirement is not an economically viable proposition for them. The third age presents retirement as a time of opportunity due to several factors: the removal of work as a time constraint; dependents having left home; fewer financial responsibilities due to mortgages being paid off, plus the prospect of a good pension. Some of the women in the study experience impending retirement in exactly this way. However, not all participants feel that they will be able to take advantage of retirement in the way that they would like to. Gilleard & Higgs (2000) noted the gender imbalance that means women enjoy fewer retirement freedoms due to domestic ties, and indeed previous chapters have explored the impact of domesticity on the ageing lifecourse, but participants identify finances as the primary restriction on retirement. It could be construed that women could disregard household tasks if they choose to, but it is much more difficult to disregard an utter lack of money. Gilleard & Higgs (2011) identify 'choice, lifestyle and identity' as the key vectors which shape the field of the third age but it is the element of economic 'choice', that informs the extent to which participants could pursue the lifestyle of their choosing.

Participants, whose punk ethos/Punk Toolkit may have incorporated a rejection of responsibilities such as house ownership and full-time work in their younger years, sometimes found themselves in an economic environment where the possibility of home ownership is not viable, as they age. Gina confided her realisation that the things she rallied against when she was younger, seem less important as she ages. "I hate the idea that I got a mortgage and a mortgage mentality, which was like some of the songs [….] But we do and it's just life. It doesn't mean you've sold out." When she entered middle age she both married and bought a house, and if these things entail losing subcultural capital, as Jenks (2003) might imply, then Gina's words suggest that what constitutes subcultural capital either changes across the lifecourse, or fluctuates in importance according to other priorities. This is consistent with participants' negotiation of the Punk Toolkit and its integration with moments of conformity, as discussed in Chapter Four. Practically, Gina's experience illuminates how the

contributions of a partner *can* make a critical difference to retirement plans. Participants in this study encompassed a spectrum of personal circumstances (see Appendix D) and this emphasises that someone's economic stability in midlife is difficult to predict from bare details alone. Many participants had always worked and this still does not provide them with protection against a poor old age, especially if single. A woman's income is often insufficient on its own, meaning that she is dependent on a partner's income for economic security in retirement (Laws, 1995). Dual incomes make a significant difference to financial decisions along the lifecourse and to the economic experience of older age and retirement, although from my conversations with these women, I would counter that having two incomes is still no guarantee of financial security.

Several single participants expressed their concern that they will not manage in retirement if they do not continue working. Faith is freelance and expects to receive only a 'tiny' pension from a period of working for an organisation, "I don't know anyone who one day will be able to retire. I'm freelance [….] I'm just going to have to keep on working till I drop". She is aware that this will not be enough to live on, even with a government pension, and the only solution that she can see is to keep working. For women that are aware of the potential restrictions relating to older age, this is an alarming prospect. Although depictions of older age inextricably linked with frailty and dependency should be challenged, critiques of successful ageing (Katz & Calasanti, 2014) show that physical realities should be acknowledged and understood if older age is to be accepted for all its diverse possibilities. Chapter Seven, 'Health', will explore this further but even when a job is well loved, the realisation that there is no end in sight to a working life is uninviting. Decades of work appear a much more manageable prospect when tempered with an acknowledgement that all the hard work will be repaid through retirement later in life. There is a critical difference between choosing to retain some working hours and feeling that doing so is a matter of survival. Börsch-Supan & Schuth (2014) note that early retirement 'is seen as a much appreciated social achievement that increases personal well-being, particularly among employees who suffer from work-related health problems' (p225) and from my interviews, I feel that this perception would be shared by most of the women in my study, whether early retiring

or not. Kat's analysis of her situation: "I don't own property, I'm not going to inherit a massive amount of money and I've only been working in a permanent job for eighteen months" acknowledges the fear that it is no longer feasible to rely on leaving work and receiving a state pension to have a good, financially stable, retirement.

Carney & Gray (2015) assert that evidence that state welfare systems would not be capable of providing a retirement income for up to thirty years, mean that work and retirement need to become fluid and flexible, for older people to be able to manage financially in older age. Our interview conversations suggested that this is already the case for many participants. Josie supplements her private pension with part time work and many of the women I spoke to felt that even if they retire in the sense of leaving their 'main' full time job, this will not equate to leaving work altogether. If women leaving work live in poverty, then the concept of retirement is altogether different. Like earlier participants, Rosalind voiced her conviction that the prospect of a poverty-stricken retirement is perpetuated by an uncaring government, "We're expected to work till we drop now, seventy, is it seventy? I'll be seventy-five by the time I retire...I think the world's uncaring". The neoliberal solution would be individual responsibility for retirement (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006) and the fear, voiced by Rosalind and other participants, is that it might require working until death. Indeed, Asquith (2009, p264) warns that the experience of retirement is affected by 'external factors beyond the control of the individual'. Rosalind's concerns relate to people who have lost money from pension funds. This connects to her punk mistrust of people in authority and their motivation, echoing Chapter Four's 'Punk Toolkit'. Continuing the theme of working into older age to supplement a government pension, participants reflected on the impact of health on retirement, although this will also be explored from another perspective in the following chapter.

Retirement Concerns

Three of the women in the study had taken early retirement from work due to ill health and now receive personal pensions: Caroline due to cancer, Josie due to an anxiety disorder and Mary due to several health conditions. Josie is due to receive her state pension imminently, for the others this is at least a decade away, a reflection of the

shifting ages of pension entitlement, although I acknowledge that there are also fourteen years between the youngest and oldest participant. Just one woman that I interviewed, Wendy, had reached state pension age and already received a state pension. Although retirement and pension eligibility do not necessarily occur at the same time, they are linked in many narratives of ageing. I note that the word 'pensioner', whether preceded with 'old-age' or not, resonates with ageist ideas of a narrowed world, far away from working life, yet 'retirement' allows a more optimistic interpretation in line with successful ageing or third age representations of age. Nonetheless, retirement should function as a marker of social ageing (Woodward, 2006) given its association with older age and pension entitlement.

In Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism', Josie told how she resists the pressure to deny markers of age, such as pension receipt, the term 'old age pensioner' rife with stigma. However, for participants, retirement seems to avoid the same associations, and this can be understood twofold. Shifting boundaries mean that although retirement relates to older age, it cannot easily be associated with a specific age. The infiltration of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987) into media representation of older age may also be a pertinent factor, positioning retirees as affluent people with time to travel and enjoy their lives. In fact, if age were to be removed from the equation, retirement could potentially be perceived by younger people as the kind of gap year they would enjoy if they had money to spare. Therefore, it seems to me that there is something aspirational about retirement, the 'neo-liberal, golden retirement dream' (Dolan, 2016), which could explain why participants do not perceive it as a social marker to be avoided. Participants' concerns and fears for retirement are perhaps allayed by the knowledge that retirement might look outwardly successful, if financial circumstances remain hidden.

> What I would have wanted, and what I have, and what I would expect are all three different things [….] I don't have the energy, I don't have the money and I don't have anybody to do it with, so realistically I have to draw back those expectations. They were kind of dreams, travel and things like that, I still do them but in my capabilities. (Mary)

Mary explored how her former plans for retirement have been impacted by divorce and illness. She can no longer afford the things she aspired to, nor does she have the practical or emotional resources to manage them alone. Her health conditions fluctuate, meaning that she cannot guarantee that she will be well enough to walk or stand on any given day. Chapter Seven will explore lifestyle adaptations due to illness, disability or bodily change in detail, but it bears examination here in relation to work and retirement plans. Caroline's cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment have also had a significant impact on her life, "I needed to retire, I couldn't have done the job that I did after chemotherapy, because chemotherapy has damaged my brain". She explained that in addition to the physical illness, she developed anxiety as both a consequence of having a cancer diagnosis and a side effect of chemotherapy and this inextricably hinders her ability to work. More than forty years ago, Barfield & Morgan (1978) identified good health and favourable finances as the two notable factors influencing satisfaction in retirement, and these factors remain relevant. The fear of serious illness is shared by all participants, as it is undoubtedly shared by people of all ages, and it became apparent during our interviews that this partly relates to a fear of having their remaining years and the possibility of freedom wrenched away. Nonetheless, Caroline's illness has been tempered by the freedom of a poverty free retirement, "I've been able to retire on full pension and I can actually do now, at fifty-three, everything I want to do and not worry about finances. So, I do feel incredibly lucky. How bizarre is that?" Caroline's full work pension in her early fifties comes at the expense of her health, albeit with potentially fewer years to appreciate her retirement.

Matters of health in older age caused participants to question how they will manage retirement, should they become ill or disabled. Heidi observed "You don't know what's 'round the corner, a lot of friends of ours, a friend of ours has got cancer and things and you've got to make the most of it I think, while you can", which demonstrates her awareness that she cannot guarantee the continuing health that will enable her to enjoy her retirement plans, which include long distance cycling. In the framework of successful ageing, fitness is precious 'social capital' (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006) but participants appeared hyper aware of the fact that although they could choose to prioritise fitness, if they are able and well enough to do so, they are powerless over

major illness. Cultural expectations of age can be discerned in the way that Heidi interprets the illness of her age peers as a reminder of her own mortality. Nelson (2016, p277) states that 'believing negative age stereotypes also influences the degree to which older people feel that they have control over their health' and this can be discerned in participants' accounts where illness and older age become interlinked. When serious illness comes in older age, it seems to be followed by thoughts of the inevitability of ill health that do not accompany younger diagnoses to the same extent and this can be related to an 'adversary' model of ageing (Bytheway, 1995), where an older person is perceived as powerless against ill health or death.

Concerns about being able to manage in retirement were of particular interest for single, child-free participants and this extends past financial issues, to encompass concerns about ill health or reduced independence in older age.

> Who is going to look after us, because there is no man to look after us, there will be no parents to look after us, there will be no children to look after us, although you cannot assume that your child will look after you, and there will be no extended family to look after us so will the state, what will there be, will there be a state to look after us? (Ellen)

Ellen's concern that state assistance will not prevent poverty extended into concerns about who could help her, should she need physical assistance as she grows older. Ellen is single and child-free and she is concerned for other women in her position and what they might do, should they need support in the future. Gullette's (2002) concept of 'postmaternity' positions the years following childrearing as coloured by freedom, but relative freedom from retirement and/or dependency concerns may not be one of the freedoms Gullette imagined. There is no guarantee that grown up children will provide future support, yet it is often considered a safeguard, with some studies suggesting that family care offers some protection against abusive care (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015). Grist & Jennings (2020) explore the tensions of care homes attempting to replicate a 'gold standard' family model of care, which must be balanced alongside professional boundaries, highlighting the sometimes conflicting expectations that care homes must negotiate. Fears about the need for financial and practical assistance feed into an atmosphere of foreboding about retirement that colours participants' experiences of

ageing. Jermyn's (2015) analysis of the older women featured in the film 'Fabulous Fashionistas', women whose eye-catching style called to mind the fearlessness of punk, acknowledges that lives 'reimagined' following retirement depend on both maintaining good health and a certain level of affluence, two factors demanded by Rowe & Kahn's 'successful aging' (1987), and I will be covering the subject of health in the following chapter. The presence of a partner makes Gina's material circumstances different to Ellen and other single participants, but her proviso of "We're going to do everything we want to do. While we can, while we can still walk and remember it. And that's our plan" echoes the overwhelming attitude of all participants – their imagined retirement is one characterised by good health, which will enable them to enjoy the freedom of retirement. Participant responses to the question of what they would like from retirement captures gleefully imagined freedoms, the imagining of a world without paid work and its demands on their time.

Josie perceives that her friends' retirements are permeated by restrictions and consequently she is keen to distance herself. Josie listed the things that she observes her friends are no longer willing to do: "'Do sensible things when you go on holiday and hire a car. Don't use public transport.' I think it's just, some of my peers that have retired, 'well we like long country walks, oh we don't fly anywhere, we don't want to go abroad'", and this feeds her suspicion that these small forfeits are symptomatic of something more sinister, of subscribing to an 'age ideology' (Gullette, 1997) of culturally acceptable and staid leisure options that serve only to place limitations on an ageing lifecourse and retirement, should you give in. Josie's words "I think some people regard it as almost like getting ready for the end of their life" acknowledges a subtle pressure to withdraw from life until you ultimately do not exist altogether and Josie's resistance to this approach echoes Jermyn's concept of lives 'reimagined' following retirement, 'a reminder that since death lies ahead for all of us, we should live colourful lives for as long as we possibly can' (2015, p143).

The idea of retirement being approached as a preparation for death are echoed in participants' fears about deep old age/fourth age (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015) and the practicalities of potentially needing support. Participants' discussions about the

possibility of needing residential care revealed concerns, raised in the chapter 'The Punk Toolkit', which other participants share. All the women that I spoke to were aware of stereotypes of older age and this appeared to contribute to the fear of a powerless older age where individual preferences and values are disregarded. It may seem surprising that the subject of care homes arises in this chapter, rather than Chapter Six 'Health' but its placement reveals something of the pervasiveness of depictions of age that position older age as a time of powerlessness and dependency within the context of retirement. Earlier chapters have highlighted participants' expectations that they will exercise agency and choice across their lifecourses, invoking their Punk Toolkit to do so. In these situations, it is not illness or frailty itself that is to be feared, it is the inability to manage a change in circumstances. Care homes therefore represent a threat to autonomy, more so than illness. This creates the prospect of older age as a time of not just physical, but cultural discomfort, relating to a disparity between individual identity and cultural expectations of older women. Carney & Gray (2015) consider how institutional ageism affects the post-sixty life trajectory, including in the form of age segregated care homes, supported by social norms. While this has been noted, especially where people have advanced dementia, as 'social death' (Brannelly, 2011), I would argue that this is a reasonable description for any home that is age segregated, if older people are not responded to, or catered for, as diverse individuals.

> I do genuinely have concerns if I would ever end up in like an old people's home. And be sound of mind perhaps but not so much able in body, and instead of things like 'We'll meet again' you know, they're playing Mariah Carey or something over the speakers. I just can't state, you're stuck in a chair in your big fluffy slippers and dressing gown and they're playing something like that, that I just couldn't listen to. Where will the nursing home be for old punks? (Mary)

Mary shared her concern about her cultural wellbeing, should she become dependent on others for support in older age and she reflected on being subject to music that she would not choose. Cultural influences regarding the undesirability of care home settings are hard to avoid and Golant (2015) asserts the near impossibility of avoiding media messages that the ideal is to *age in place.* Nonetheless, these messages are set against alternative narratives and images that position certain retirement communities

and apartments as desirable sites of affluent, successful ageing (Katz & Calsanti, 2014), absent of the realities of full-time care or the restrictions of illness or disability. What these dichotomous representations do share however, is a further absence. Life (2017) notes that literature featuring nursing homes tends to focus only on a white, heteronormative slice of life that excludes many others. Blaikie (1999) further notes discouragement of intergenerationality, as 'age segregation is fundamental to housing markets' (p177), although it could be argued that any care home catering for people aged sixty to one hundred *is* intergenerational to a degree. Mary's concerns reflect this expectation of homogeneity within a care home setting and the resultant fear of, at last, being compelled to conform.

Mary's wording of 'end up in' suggest a lack of choice in every aspect of care home living. Chivers & Kriebernegg (2017) note that the assumption that an institutional setting *should* be home-like is rarely questioned, but ask 'whose home these spaces are meant to be like?' (p20). This pinpoints the dilemma that care homes, apart from the personalisation of bedrooms, cannot possibly represent each resident's personal idea of home. This goes beyond the aesthetics of 'home' and preferences in decor, to individual ideas of *how* a space should be used, of sitting up straight versus lounging against the sofa, of silence versus radio shows or music playing. This presents a challenge for the Punk Toolkit, not least because the social justice of the toolkit demands consideration of the other people and their needs. However, it might provide exactly the right 'challenge' for the women in the study with activist principles and a dislike of hierarchy, fostered by ***the attitude – you don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority.***

Our interview discussions showed that music plays an important part in punk culture for all participants, who continue to enjoy punk music, alongside many other genres. However, several participants were clear that there are some types of music that they just cannot bear. Harrison & Ryan (2010, p666) found that musical tastes narrow in older age and asked, 'if tastes are the foundations of people's associations with others, what happens to people who have few?', concerned that this has implications for social opportunities. If 'narrow' tastes mean mainstream preferences, then this is surely less

problematic. But for participants whose subcultural tastes endure throughout the lifecourse, it seems their chances of hearing the music they like is far reduced. The concerns that Mary shared are about the ageist consequences of seeing older people as a homogenous group. The implication is that if the basic needs of older people are understood, there is no further need to understand 'them' as unique individuals like Mary – who may feel like screaming upon hearing Mariah Carey from the nursing home stereo.

Retirement Freedoms

The way that participants explored the theme of retirement showed that most look forward to it, imagining the freedom of spare time, and the many ways they could fill this time. Some of these women's dreams of retirement stood out in their quiet nature and this stands against the pervasiveness of the successful ageing narrative, which requires people to be disciplined by activity if they want to retain their status as 'not old' and therefore valuable (Calasanti et al, 2006). Liz's plan to potter around, Caroline's glass making, or Dee's "I love reading yeah, I love my jigsaw puzzles, I like my gardening, taking my dog for a walk, going away, camping" were not uncommon plans for participants, who have a wide range of interests including travel, art, cycling and gardening. It could be construed that the authenticity that Bennett's (2006) ageing punk participants claim in relation to having 'nothing to prove' in subcultural practice filters out to wider parts of an ageing lifecourse. In this case the women in my study may be, without realising it, resisting narratives of successful ageing and the imperative to prove worth through levels of youthful activity, although it could also be argued that claims of any activity show a motivation to prove that they are doing *something.*

Laws (1995) noted the representation of retired people as less valuable, less participatory members of society and it is this depiction of retirement which may compel older people to prove their worth through activity and achievement. In a continuation of a theme identified in 'The Feminist Toolkit', older women's unpaid caregiving work is not valued in society and Nesteruk & Price (2011) categorise this kind of activity as 'unrecognised', in comparison with women's other voluntary work as 'good'. However, I did not get a sense of the need for activity being a motivating factor for my

interviewees. Participants explored plans and aspirations which encompass existing interests, alongside interests that they have long wanted to pursue, but this did not seem to reflect Law's concern and instead formed a response to the 'moments of conformity' described in Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit'. The women in my study described re-connecting with values and activities that had been lost under the competing demands of working and family life in a way that seemed personal and positive rather than obligatory. Consequently, participants including Dee, who frequently attends punk events in addition to the 'quiet' activities named above, are able to create their own image of older age, embracing the opportunity to shape retirement into something meaningful to them.

> I'm not one of these people that is going to retire in the conventional sense of the word. No. (people think) It's about time you settled down and stopped working at Glastonbury and stopped going to these gigs and stopped gallivanting around [….] There are more people like me that are not settling down in front of the fire and going for country walks when the weather's nice. (Josie)

Josie has begun her own retirement but brings another perspective, gained by observing the retirement activities of her age peers. The divisive way that Josie and her peers have approached retirement reflects the earliest use of the term 'midlife crisis' (Jacques, 1965), characterised as the personal realisation of the inevitability of one's death, the result of which is to divide people into either accepting their life as it stands or working hard to achieve their outstanding aims (Hepworth and Featherstone, 1982). It could be argued that Josie's approach is influenced by ideas of 'youthful' behavior and lifestyle, in accordance with successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987). However, it is difficult to see Josie's plans and activities as representing anything other than freedom and enjoyment for her, representative of the Punk Toolkit's resistance to conformity, and the Feminist Toolkit's resistance to a constrained life.

The difficulty with discerning rationale reveals the preoccupation with age ordering, a basis for ageism (Bytheway, 1995). In this way, ageing women can never get it right in retirement – perceived as either pandering to the favouring of youth, or of embracing the implied conservatism of 'old'. However, this did not seem to matter to the women in my study because, as already discussed, participants do not encounter the internal

debates, the ‘not for you’ internal voice (Gullette, 1997) identified in ‘Everyday Ageism’s’ exploration of age appropriateness, when it comes to retirement activities. Participants identified plans, or dreams for retirement, but the cohesiveness of their values, activities and the things that bring them joy suggest a retirement without censorship, as far as could be imagined.

> Retirement's an opportunity to maybe do things that you can't do when you're in your working life, so like I've said, my husband and I, we're musicians, so it would be nice to go to more events like that. It would be nice to play at events, although I think that would be a bit scary. I think I'd be able to fill my time more than adequately, I get quite annoyed that work gets in the way of things. (Heather)

Retirement planning entailed participants using midlife as a time for re-evaluation. Sheehy (1977) welcomes this, noting that the awareness of limited time often works to our advantage, and I found that participants identified with the notion of remaining years and how to fill them. Chapter Seven further links the idea of ‘remaining years’ with their expectations of health. In Sheehy’s interpretation, nostalgia holds back progress. However, participant’s accounts of their retirement plans demonstrated how they retain links with the things that have been important to them throughout their lives, weaving them into a ‘current’ sense of identity that does not celebrate one age or another but instead integrates them into the present. As explored in previous chapters, this reflects the concept of transageing (Moglen, 2008), which replicates participants’ deployment of bricolage (Hebdige, 1991), the practice of making new meaning from existing objects.

Heather considered the introduction of new activities and this can be framed as adding a new layer to her existing identity. She already plays guitar and retirement is the potential trigger for new meaning – for playing gigs and seizing back some of the punk spirit that is currently compartmentalised to smaller facets of Heather’s life. Segal’s (2008) concern that transageing represents a nostalgic yearning for past selves that were not experienced as positively at the time, is disrupted by participant’s prior articulation of the important facets of their younger selves. This was epitomised by the ‘Punk’s Toolkit’ opening question “If you could take one thing from punk to pass on, what would it be?” which focused on values and practical ways of thinking. Participants

did not reference ‘former selves’ as idealised aesthetics but as pragmatic, continuous identities to be drawn on.

In the course of interview conversations, participants discussed retirement plans that were frequently pragmatic, with the continuation of work for some women, and this was not always unwelcome. Bridget described the retirement plans she has with her husband, “We're going to sell both houses and we're going to buy a farm, smallholding [….] We want to retire while we can enjoy it really. I know technically it's a job cos you'll be renting out glamping pods”. She expects to enjoy her version of retirement and this demonstrates the multiplicity of work and retirement scenarios that older women might expect to encounter, the ‘new creative forms of living’ that Onyx (1998, p32) identifies as a step away from binaries of work and non-work. Börsch-Supan & Schuth (2014) warn that early retirement, while providing liberation from work stresses and restrictions, tends to be only briefly experienced as beneficial. The authors link this to loss of purpose and while it can be understood that the reality of retirement might not live up to the anticipatory planning stage, these women’s accounts communicate more than just the relief of leaving work. Everingham et al (2007) assert that the adjustment to retirement is often less problematic for women, because their lives already incorporate ‘other lives’, including caring roles and this resonates with the lifecourse depictions already detailed within this thesis.

Retirement in Bridget’s case means leaving the routine of full-time work, freeing up economic resources, and shaping her own retirement to nonetheless include an element of work. Alex’s account of her work as a photographer also provides an example of continuous identity and practices, the sole participant who has no desire to leave work at all, “This is not work, this is having the time of my life [….] I get the opportunity to do stuff and work with people that have the same passion. And it is a passion, it’s not a job.” Alex’s self-employment and choice of career may be a relatively unrestrictive option but Alex describes a job that provides her with so much enjoyment that the distinction from leisure time is ambiguous, and this recontextualises retirement, reflecting Asquith’s (2009) assertion that ‘retirement is a transitory phase in the lifecourse – it is neither beginning nor end’ (p264). It could be argued that having

agency over plans is a significant factor in looking forward to retirement, but Everingham et al's (2007) study suggests that the nature of many women's lives is a determining factor, 'their retirement tended to have this feature of continuity, since it involved the development and integration of skills and threads of another life that was already there' (p515).

However, some participants identified factors that meant that leaving paid work is desirable. Heather stated that "work gets in the way of things", and this could be elicited from the statements of most participants. No matter how enjoyable the work, there was a discernible sense in our interviews, that a working life has a shelf life in the bigger scheme of an ageing lifecourse, and as women progress towards retirement age, the most useful function of work is the pay packet and the biggest drawback of work, the restrictions it places on time and conformity. This reflects the factors that Börsch-Supan & Schuth (2014) name as motivation for early retirement, and references the 'Punk Toolkit' chapter again, where moments of conformity are tolerable when an end is in sight. Michele uses her professional life to challenge issues of social injustice but as she has progressed in her career, she feels restricted by pressure to conform for the role. Without the inhibiting effect of work conformity, Michele's retirement plans, "Community activism. Use what skills I've got to be gobbier and in the face of politicians, wherever that may be", would enable her to take an increasingly activist approach. Despite older people being popularly imagined as politically right, many become increasingly revolutionary, campaigning and sustaining this outlook throughout their lifecourse (Showalter, 2013) and Michele's plans reflect this.

Michele's ageing lifecourse, expressed through work and soon through retirement, reflect Segal's (2013) observation that moral and political beliefs keep us engaged. Michele's plans epitomise the continuing engagement of her political beliefs, expressed in a retirement that defies conventional narratives of becoming less visible and vocal in older age (Woodward, 2002). Thinking about retirement freedoms means that participants contrast these with their current work situation. Chris expects to be liberated from conformity when she leaves work: "As soon as I retire, I won't see any need to conform at all, I don't think. I'm not saying that my life will change radically but

I'll feel that I have the luxury to live, to dress, exactly as I want without thinking". Haenfler's description of subcultures as 'in stark contrast with conventional work. They seem to foster leisure and play, while work suggests responsibility, punctuality, and perhaps even drudgery' (p148) seems particularly relevant here. These women's words suggest that the conformist influence of work culture can subtly infiltrate, altering personal behaviour or appearance to fit a work culture, even if these are unspoken rules, and perhaps this has an additional focus, gently guiding them towards the acceptable face of 'successful ageing', and the work this requires (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). Peluchette et al (2006) introduced the term 'appearance labor' (p45) to describe the work that goes into matching appearance to workplace and this usefully describes other modifications that are undergone, taking up thinking space and time, however minimally. Participants who had rejected conformity in other guises throughout their lives were aware that work almost inevitably has an inhibiting effect. For most participants it could be said that the differences between work and retirement will only become truly clear once they have experienced both.

Summary of Chapter Six

The subject of work and retirement provided a rich source of material for participants' experiences of ageing. All participants had already worked for a large part of their adult lives and could reflect on work and workplace experiences across the lifecourse. Participants integrate punk and/or feminist values across their lifecourse, impacting on their work choices and experiences. For many participants the social justice principles or DIY ethos that they take from their 'Punk Toolkit' focuses their work choices and guides them along a career path, whether this is self-employment, work for an employer or a mixture of both. For others, a punk identity connected with an unconventional appearance provides the motivation to seek employment where appearance need not be censored. On the whole, participants enter work in midlife, confident in their abilities and the work reputation they have built up – they feel heard and valued. However, seeking work in midlife tells a different story.

Some participants feel that they are excluded from jobs as an ageing woman, a multiplicity of ageisms impacting on their willingness to experience possible rejection

by applying. Ageism came from cultural expectations of age, expressed through the way people talk about job opportunities for older women, the wording in job advertisements but also participants' internalised ageism, which causes them to question job advertisements and themselves, and stops them from proceeding. Woven into participants' positive experiences of midlife work are themes that replicate the findings in Everyday Ageism. Participants observe ageism in their colleagues' experiences, but also personally experience unusual elements of ageism, such as being spoken to differently to younger colleagues. The moments of conformity that 'The Punk Toolkit' identified are acknowledged by participants within the workplace, coming into view as the comparative freedoms of retirement enter the horizon. Apart from the freedom from time constraints, retirement causes participants to contrast how their lives might alter, without work related restrictions on behaviour and appearance.

Despite only one participant having reached the eagerly awaited trinity of statutory retirement age, receipt of a state pension AND leaving employment, the subject proved worthy of discussion with all participants. Retirement functions as a social imaginary, vivid in participants' minds, whatever their stage of planning. Participants' circumstances vary and some did not articulate financial concerns when considering retirement. However, concerns about the shifting boundaries of pension entitlement and pragmatic considerations about the economic viability of retirement permeate many participants' expectations and plans. Concerns about illness shape retirement plans or concerns for some participants, whether this is early retirement due to existing illness, or a heightened awareness of the time available for retirement triggered by friends' illnesses. Economic and health concerns notwithstanding, participants anticipate retirement as an opportunity to continue their values and interests throughout the lifecourse and this takes a variety of forms. Participants' plans include the possibility of further work, and a spectrum of activities from reading and gardening to world travel, activism and live music. All share the same characteristic – retirement plans that reflect that person's identity and ethos, a continuation of an idiosyncratic but cohesive lifestyle, congruent with the principle of transageing. This chapter does not conclude with a visual representation of the themes, as I used these to illustrate specific concepts (the Punk Toolkit and the Feminist Toolkit), whereas subsequent chapters are served by a

more traditional summary. Chapter Seven will continue the theme of health, exploring participants' experiences and expectations along the ageing lifecourse.

Chapter Seven: Health

Health is a matter for everyone. Gilleard & Higgs (2000) have stated that everyone, of all ages, sees health as being both important and positive and it is difficult to think of an opposing view. Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' explored health and illness in relation to ageist representations of older age. Woodward (1991) notes that it is only in extreme old age that the limits of the cultural construction of ageing are found. None of the women in the study could be described as being in 'extreme' old age, or 'fourth age', meaning that in my research the fourth age still functions very much as a social imaginary (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015). This means that the influence of cultural gerontology remains at the forefront of discussions, addressing 'the nature and experience of later years in the widest sense' (Twigg & Martin, 2015, p353).

This chapter begins with an examination of the moments when participants confront age in relation to their experiences of health and reflect on the ways that their bodies function differently as they age. Next, the chapter explores the gendered healthcare experiences that participants described in their conversations with me. The chapter then explores the impact of health on participants' lives, including the relationship with the way they live their lives, and *expect* to live their lives, especially in an ableist culture. The chapter journeys through a reflection on the gym environment, the gym functioning as a site of cultural messages about health, appearance, age and gender. Lastly, the chapter explores the changes participants make or *consider* making in relation to health concerns and this leads to a consideration of cultural messages about age and health, with participants' decisions of whether to accept or reject these messages. Ultimately, these findings confirm the concept that introduces the chapter: health triggers the confrontation of age.

Health (Warning): May Make You Confront Age

In the Punk Toolkit and Feminist Toolkit, participants explored the facets of punk that equip them to maintain their individuality and to decide for themselves which elements of surrounding culture, or cultural messages on how to live their lives, to accept or

reject**.** The women in the research are theoretically perfectly equipped to examine cultural messages about health and decide whether to accept or reject them. For instance, media narratives about individual responsibility strongly emphasise a link between personal actions and health. The link is of course not infallible. People who take care of their diet and fitness become ill, while people who do not do these things live to an old age, for example, Jeanne Calment, who shortly before her death at one hundred and twenty-two years old was photographed smoking a cigarette (Blaikie, 1999). Blaikie also noted the eagerness with which cultural signs are drawn from reports of extreme longevity, with people hopeful for a clue to how death, like a hostile enemy, can be evaded. Media discourse of serious illness also employs the language of war: treatment for cancer is described as a battle, people are urged to 'fight', and then characterised as survivors if they live (Ehrenreich, 2010). Whilst the war-like rhetoric is surely hinged on a wish for agency over disease, the failure to 'win' invariably characterises others as 'losers', a reflection of successful ageing's flipside. Asquith (2009) critiques 'positive ageing', successful ageing's sibling, for one of the messages it implies, 'that if you have a positive outlook on life, then you will age well' (p257).

People who succumb to serious illness are thus depicted as the reverse of a survivor – a victim or loser, whose failure to think themselves positively into good health has resulted in death. The original premise of successful ageing could be conceived as positive, with its aim to break down various myths of ageing, including the correlation of old age with sickness (Rowe & Kahn, 1998) but for people who do not fit the criteria of youthful activity, fitness and health, there is the implication of having aged unsuccessfully. Like ageism, the markers of successful ageing are hard to avoid and Tulle (2015) explores how older people are increasingly monitored through visible digital technology such as fitness trackers, the ageing body 'colonized, known and monitored by measurement, given the proverbial kick up the backside using digital devices' (p17). While these devices are theoretically monitored by individuals only, they surely function as a reminder of 'neo-liberal mandates of activity, enablement, and independence' (Katz & Marshall, 2018, p63), a duty to be healthy and productive.

Twigg (2004, p61) points out that ‘culture is saturated with concepts of age and ageing. Dominant culture teaches us to feel bad about ageing and to start this early, reading our bodies anxiously for signs of decay and decline’. This suggests that the smallest of indicators of ageing are noted and registered and I would have been surprised if participants could not identify bodily aspects of ageing to discuss. The women I interviewed discussed aches, pains and illness and several did not hesitate to talk about the menopause, situating it as a health matter that places age to the forefront of some women’s minds. The way that several participants spoke to me about these issues suggested that as they progress through midlife, they often begin to experience other health issues as being representative of the ageing process.

> I was never ill until I hit forty and all of a sudden I've had a few illnesses, a couple of operations and I don't like that. And I know that can happen at any age but for me it has happened in middle age. (Flo)

Flo articulated her awareness that health issues can strike at any age, but nonetheless her awareness that they arise in middle age seems significant. This indicates that there is something about becoming ill or injured in older age that is different to illness or injury for participants when younger. This suggests to me that participants may have internalised a decline model of older age as a time of unavoidable loss, dependency and worsening health (Bytheway, 1995). Chapter One raised Cruikshank’s (2013) assertion that older people frequently maintain a dichotomous stance of viewing older people *in general* as being in poor health, whilst seeing themselves as an exception, and she interpreted these responses as a pragmatic response to ageism. Participants’ midlife accounts suggest that this approach does not begin until further into old age because the women I interviewed did not talk about themselves in terms of being *an exception to* their age.

When we talked about health, all participants appeared to accept that the wear and tear of ageing bodies is likely to result in aches, pains and other more serious concerns. In midlife, participants do not see themselves as exceptions, as per Cruikshank’s (2013) finding but it is health itself that re-iterates this correlation of ill health with older age, leading the women in my study to imagine encounters with ill health in the future. Mary

has already experienced significant illness in midlife, which curtails her activities and caused her to take early retirement. She said, “Well, I’ve always kind of felt forever young. My health has impacted that and told me no, you’re not forever young”. Mary’s experience, in common with other participants, demonstrates how a spectrum of health concerns from aches and pains to life limiting illness cause participants to confront ageing. Arber et al (2003, p3) state that ‘age represents a marker for several distinctive processes within older people’s lives’. First, age reflects the physiological ageing process. On average, ill-health increases with advancing age, and we may expect many activities to decline with age simply because of increased frailty or restrictions on mobility but Mary and Flo’s accounts suggest that the reverse is equally true, meaning that ill health may appear to function as a marker for age, and their experience suggests that being aged by culture (Gullette, 1997) includes the experience of being aged by illness. The question this inevitably raises is, without physical reminders of illness, would participants neglect to think of age?

Chapter Three demonstrated that a culture of ageism, alongside responses from others mean that midlife participants are always conscious of their age to some extent, regardless of health or illness, with Chapter Six exploring the impact of this on participants’ experiences of work. It seems that ableist discourses intersect with ageism at the point of *becoming dependent*. Wendell (2006) asserts that differentiating between disabled and able-bodied experiences ‘challenges the able-bodied paradigm of humanity and creates the possibility of a deeper challenge to the idealization of the body and the demand for its control’ (p52). This statement could be applied to expectations of ageing and Wendell (2006, p52) further suggests that if a ‘cultural obsession with independence’ was substituted for a model of reciprocity, then the possibility of requiring help would not be interpreted as failure, including in older age. The importance of reciprocity in other areas of participants’ lives was introduced in Chapter Three and this further emphasises its reach. Looking at illness alone, participants’ experiences point to a dichotomy. Whereas Gullette’s (1997, p3) assertion that ‘whatever happens in the body, we are aged by culture first of all’ is well evidenced in preceding chapters, participants’ accounts of illness, indicate that ageing, for them, remains a bodily experience. It is in age’s perceived expression in bodily matters, that

participants feel aged. This suggests the *influence* of 'biomedical theories of ageing (which) define successful ageing largely in terms of the optimisation of life expectancy while minimising physical and mental deterioration and disability' (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005, p1548) but not an absolute dependence on them, as the women in my study talked about their experiences in a way that does not frame them as 'unsuccessful'. This includes the participant who has experienced stage three cancer, from whom I discerned an additional focus. As Katz & Calasanti (2014, p28) state, 'disability and disease are not necessarily experienced in terms of unsuccessful aging', and this is reflected in participants' accounts. Caroline's encounter with life limiting illness, and the prognosis she lives with, cause her to examine the age she hopes to live *to*, alongside her current age and to re-evaluate her lifecourse in that context. The focus of a prognosis arguably brings that *final* age to attention, the stage of dying and eventual death.

Despite experiencing a spectrum of health issues, all of the women in the study focused on their current experiences of midlife health, rather than future health. In addition to health issues that can occur across the lifecourse, these women talked about changes that typically occur in midlife, and in this study the menopause functions as an event that situates participants firmly in midlife. Wider responses to the menopause reminded participants that not only is it a female only experience, but the subject itself is responded to in a gendered way.

Gendered Health Experiences

Chapter Five 'The Feminist Toolkit' showed that the majority of participants integrate feminist principles into their lives and this equips these women to look at gendered experiences with a questioning eye. The women in the study appeared to perceive the menopause as being symptomatic of middle age because this is the age it typically occurs. The menopause promises liberation from the menstrual cycle and possibility of pregnancy, but it also affects women's lives, with physical and cognitive symptoms often lasting for several years. De Salis et al (2018) identified 'overlapping narratives of menopause' from the midlife women in their research, with menopause described variously and simultaneously as 'a normal process, as a struggle provoking and

expressing distress, and as a transformative experience' (p524), demonstrating that the menopause experience cannot be neatly summarised.

One participant noted that the menopause impacts her mental health, with increased anxiety but finds that taking Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) alleviates her symptoms. Looking back at the interviews, I am surprised to realise this was the sole example of an interviewee talking about the impact of mental health across the lifecourse, although it had been raised briefly by a different participant as the reason for her early retirement. It seems that while biomedical theories list 'the absence of chronic disease and of risk factors for disease; good health; and high levels of independent physical functioning, performance, mobility, and cognitive functioning' (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005, p1548-9) as indicators of 'successful' age, cognitive functioning tends to be pathologised as a potential dementia, rather than linked with mental health.

Not all women in the study discussed the menopause but those who did, portrayed it as a significant life change with diverse symptoms. A recent proliferation of women, including celebrities, talking about their experiences of menopause in the media (Frostrup, 2015; Francis, 2018) suggest that being denied a voice is part of the othering of older women, which depicts female bodily experiences as embarrassing and distasteful and the menopausal body as a 'problematic and lacking body, deprived not only of reproductive capacity but also of both sexual desire and attractiveness' (Sandberg, 2013, p33). Gullette (1997) takes an alternative view, that menopause talk has never really been taboo, that it pathologises common bodily experiences as 'symptoms' and supports a gendered narrative of decline. However, discussion of the menopause in our interviews felt normalised and the subject arose naturally, meaning that it is not always older women's unwillingness to discuss the subject that leads to it being neglected. If the Feminist Toolkit's exhortation to 'Be Heard' (p163), and the Punk Toolkit's 'Question Authority' (p133), are employed by the women in the study, might this enable them to negotiate the hierarchical structures within healthcare? One woman shared her experience of the challenge of seeking medical advice about the menopause.

> There's no information and it was only after I had HRT and I went on these forums, I found lots of women all saying the same things but the doctors don't tell you anything at all. Because they're men and they don't know anything about it, or they're women and they go 'ooh I haven't got there yet'. (Bridget)

Bridget's experience of seeking menopause advice demonstrates that an older woman's willingness to discuss the menopause is not always reciprocated in healthcare services. Greer (2019) suggests that 'oppressed women' at the point of menopause are already used to being given short shrift by doctors that do not have a ready answer for their problems and would rather they ceased complaining and got on with it. Bridget described how she did not find the help that she needed until she had sifted through online forums for peer support, looking for lifestyle advice to supplement the HRT she had already requested and obtained and while the use of social media forums to elicit advice is commonplace (Cole et al, 2016), perhaps a hint of punk DIY ethos can be discerned too. Gullette (2003) noted that the introduction of Hormone Replacement Therapy positions the menopause as a deficit that needs to be fixed, the converse surely being that women who choose not to take the drug are ageing, or *menopausing* unsuccessfully, although I suggest that the willingness to take individual action and medication to address the menopause, fits quite neatly with a *successful* ageing narrative in Rowe & Kahn's terms (1987). Nonetheless, Bridget finds that it has an immediate and substantial effect on the unwanted symptoms of her own menopause. More significantly, her choice is to take it.

Bridget's experience might reflect an ageist truth about the lack of interest in older women in society. While younger women might be expected to show some recognition of the menopause as a wider women's issue, Bridget's experience of a younger female doctor responding to her dilemma with "I haven't got there yet" reflects the exclusions in feminism, where 'woman' often fails to include older women (Laws, 1995) and this was explored in Chapter One. Cruikshank's 'hyper awareness of age' (2003, p173) also seems to be at play, obscuring female commonalities at the expense of ageing, menopausal difference. There is a separateness to these responses about the menopause. I would not expect a doctor to have experienced a condition personally to be capable of responding to it, nor is it unexpected that sometimes a doctor needs to

investigate a condition further to understand it. However, the menopause affects every woman at midlife or earlier, meaning that there can be no excuse for the responses described. The Feminist Toolkit advocates Ahmed's (2017) approach of women taking up space with their bodies. However, Bridget's experience of encountering doctors with little interest in the issues affecting women at midlife reveals a further deficit. It seems that midlife women are also absent from *thinking* space, that midlife women must demand that other people engage with the issues that affect them, because it is unlikely that such consideration will otherwise be given.

In this case, the issues affecting midlife women are somehow separated from a collective consciousness where people of all ages have a shared understanding of what it might be like to experience a common health concern or serious illness. Menopause symptoms such as a hot flush or 'brain fog' may often be talked about humorously by midlife women, but they are also presented as symptoms in need of a solution. The subject of humour was introduced in 'Everyday Ageism' and Coupland (2009) has noted the place of humour in older people's conversations about painful or difficult events, noting its function in dispersing the seriousness of the original event and instead, normalising it into a relatable event. I recognise this in menopause talk with my own friends, where accounts of curiously changing symptoms invite the listener to laugh and empathise. The women in the study who discussed their menopause also discussed their experiences in somewhat comical terms, in tandem with serious complaints of the impact on their lives. However, humour may have a bleaker function. The cultural narrative of older women as staid and humourless (Cruikshank, 2003), requires them to work hard to alleviate that image.

Chapter Five's 'Feminist Toolkit' turned to Ahmed's (2017) 'Killjoy Manifesto' for an alternative view of humour. Ahmed suggests responding to misogyny with a straight face, refusing to accept the belittling words or jokes and this can be applied to participants' healthcare experiences, where both the Punk and Feminist Toolkits are of benefit. Whilst I do not suggest that Bridget approached her doctors with anything but a serious request for help and information, the softening effect of laughter could be interpreted as permission for a less than serious response. Some of the women that I

interviewed described relationships with healthcare services that began when they were much younger, and I have used these in my discussion because they illustrate comparable issues to those across the lifecourse. Overall, these examples of participants' interactions with healthcare services, few as they are, nonetheless demonstrate experiences of a patriarchal and judgemental outlook that is perhaps unsurprising given the experiences detailed in 'The Feminist Toolkit'. Koutroulis (1990) notes that concerning patriarchal attitudes which privilege biological determinism and heterosexual norms can be discerned in obstetric and gynaecological textbooks, and these influences filter through to medical practice. Koutroulis references Scully and Bart's (1973) assertion that, if obstetricians and gynaecologists position themselves as women's friends, then, 'with friends like that, who needs enemies?' This does not bode well for ongoing engagement, because the attitudes of services encourage or deter women from accessing further services. Given that further requirement for services is likely, as indicated by participants' accounts, earlier experiences are significant. Two women described traumatic encounters with doctors which expose a patriarchal attitude of ownership towards women's bodies, and advice in conflict with their own wishes.

> They strung me out, and eventually I managed to get an appointment with two doctors who were both very moralistic I think and eventually gave me permission to have an abortion at twenty-three weeks… When I came out of the doctor's surgery, having been told that I could have an abortion, the nurse who took me to the door said to me on the way out 'well, I hope you're happy now' and I cried all the way home. I was so far from happy. (Chris)

> I said "I don't want children, never wanted children, never gonna want children. I have this, it's causing me a massive amount of stress and discomfort, please can I have a hysterectomy?", 'No, not until you're at least fifty'. I said "okay, why?" He told me actually, to go away and have a baby and that would help it. (Kat)

Chris and Kat had visited the doctor requesting an abortion and a hysterectomy respectively, experiences from their twenties and thirties. Neither woman wanted to have children yet if the doctor's advice had been taken, both would be mothers. Chapter Four, 'The Punk Toolkit' describes 'moments of conformity' that relate to motherhood

and explores participants' decisions to be child-free. This often relates to rejecting gender norms or concerns that identity might be compromised once a 'mother' identity is conferred. As several of the women in my study state in The Feminist Toolkit chapter, women do not have to justify their life decisions, and choosing to be child-free is a personal choice. Nonetheless, several of the women I spoke to were made to feel that choosing to be child free requires an explanation and moral defence. Kat described how her doctor advised pregnancy to relieve the symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome, despite her assertion that she did not want children. Chris's experience seems to suggest that her abortion was only agreed when she had demonstrated distress, given that abortion is often a traumatic experience in later pregnancy (Coleman et al, 2010). Both participant's experiences demonstrate a policing of women's life choices on the most personal and impactful level. The attitudes described imply that having children is the only correct choice.

The policing of women's lives filters down to wider areas of health and fitness and the gym environment will be explored later in the chapter. During our interview, one participant observed that the fitness industry does not consider women's needs when it comes to health issues and women's bodies. This reflects an issue which Criado-Perez (2019) has recently raised, noting that despite women's and men's bodies responding differently to exercise, health studies whose results are meant to be universal often exclude women from their sample. Rosalind has a prolapse and finds that exercise exacerbates her urinary incontinence. She stated that "The fitness industry hasn't addressed that or looked at it and that was pissing me off as well and, in the end, I just thought, you know, what they're teaching is men's stuff to women". Criado-Perez's statement that 'even something as basic as advice on how to exercise to keep disease at bay is based on male-biased research' (p210) supports Rosalind's concerns. Rosalind, a gym instructor herself, points out that common female issues such as incontinence simply are not taken into account when exercises regimes are taught, although exercises can otherwise be adapted to accommodate injury or disability. It should be considered that individual gym instructors may not be aware of the origin of their exercise routines.

Gullette (1997) noted gender bias within healthcare, using the example of female symptoms of heart disease and the way this is treated. Criado-Perez (2019) also highlights the ways that patriarchy filters into everyday life, quietly causing harm, or difficulty to women on a daily basis. Criado-Perez describes crash test dummies being modelled on a male physique and smartphones being built to the proportions of a male hand, making it clear that there are significant repercussions for females. Rosalind's experience reflects this but with an ageist slant; finding that exercise classes do not take issues such as incontinence into consideration suggests the stigma of older age and also of disability. This makes it an onerous task for individual women to raise, especially in a group environment. As Cruikshank (2003, p138) advises, an old woman who fails to be cheerful will be thought of in negative terms, and 'when one of these labels is affixed, it may expand into an identity, rather than mark a passing mood'. From that perspective, in order not to alienate others with their talk of malfunctioning female bodies, women must take care not to frame their grievances too harshly, mindful that to do otherwise risks being thought an age stereotype. As raised earlier in the chapter, the pressure to demonstrate a 'positive outlook' (Asquith, 2009) in relation to successful ageing is pervasive. It is surely an onerous task to radiate the required 'positivity' whilst acknowledging bodily issues that others are trying their hardest to disregard.

The Feminist Toolkit offers strategy via Ahmed's (2017) exhortation to 'be willful', stripping 'willful' of its gendered duplicity and re-framing it as being strong willed. This is a vital tool, if women are going to get the attention and services they need. Kat and Chris approached a doctor several times to request the services they wanted and healthcare policy meant that Kat did not get the service she requested at all. Nonetheless, if Chris had not been willful, she would have been forced to proceed with a pregnancy she did not want, or seek an abortion elsewhere, with an increased risk to her physical or mental health (Coleman et al, 2010). The Punk Toolkit's strategy of ***you don't have to accept what someone says just because they have authority*** is significant in the situations these women describe. Kat's experience of being advised to wait until she is fifty for a hysterectomy suggests that her body no longer matters at fifty and pathologises midlife as a time of little value. It could be argued that as women become less useful for their reproductive potential, then the interest in other facets of

their reproductive health is reduced, meaning that the interest in women's bodies and health decisions retreats as they progress along the lifecourse. Greer (2019) draws attention to 'the presupposition, that menopause marks the end of a woman as a 'sexual being' (p266) and these correlations emphasise a misogynist culture that position a woman's body as anything other than her own concern.

The Impact of 'Age'

In the course of our interviews, I got the impression that all the women I spoke to are aware of their age in relation to an expected lifespan, meaning that they see their lives as proportionate and plan accordingly, and Chapter Six 'Work and Retirement' contributed to this in relation to retirement planning.

> I don't know what the future is. I don't know whether my future's six months, twelve months, five years. Statistically it shouldn't be five years but I'm well right now and I'm going to enjoy it so I don't, I don't think about ageing, I don't think about dying really. I think about living now. (Caroline)

Participants' perspectives on ageing, illness and mortality are influenced by several factors, including their own health and the health of people around them such as friends and colleagues. For nurse Heather, the service users that she works with provide an extra perspective, "I work in a hospital, so I see a lot of people who are frail, and age has done terrible things to them**",** her wording suggesting an adversary model of older age (Bytheway, 1995), the older person a victim of age's weapons, although she acknowledged that other much older service users that she has met, are in good health. An awareness of 'time left' permeates participants' experiences of age, even if this functions as a positive device for making the most of time. Caroline's prognosis from cancer meant that, in our interview, she was pragmatic about the fact that her future could be numbered in months, rather than years. The consequence of Caroline's illness was that, as she said, she focuses on living rather than dying, and it seems that illness has compelled her to confront this. This acknowledges that ill health shapes the way that life is lived, whether this is positive or negative. Whilst critiquing the inherent ableism in successful ageing, Berridge & Martinson (2018) note that for disabled older women, alternative ways of functioning may also engender 'a sense of perspective on

what is valuable in life, and opportunities for personal development' (p89), and this suggests that the successful ageing framework is too limiting to accommodate older women's diverse and wide ranging lives.

Perhaps one of the dichotomies, or missed opportunities of the successful ageing framework is that Rowe & Kahn (1998) attempt to dispel age related ideas about both the likelihood and impact of some illnesses, asserting that illness or disability do not always matter greatly in people's lives, and sharing other age scholars findings (Martin & Gillen, 2013; Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Pruchno & Wilson-Genderson, 2014) that 'many older people view their health positively, even in the face of real physical problems, which may reflect a remarkably successful adaptation to disability' (p18), thus paving the way for a more holistic model of ageing success. Yet their model, with its three components of the ability to maintain (i) avoiding disease, (ii) maintaining high cognitive and physical function, and (iii) engagement with life, appears to disregard their earlier findings. The way that Caroline spoke about her health, her life and plans gave me no cause to think that she sees it as unsuccessful, yet by definition her ill health would frame her this way.

Apart from longevity, I found that the way that participants talked about their lives revealed their awareness of the impact of age on the functioning of their bodies. This often related to 'slowing down' and an increased awareness of the impact of everyday activities on their bodies. Laz (2003), interviewing both women and men about embodiment and age found that many interviewees referred to 'slowing down', yet rarely viewed it as a negative point and this tone resonates with the accounts provided by the women in my study. There is a critical difference between the concept of 'old age' as an indicator of health and the impact of a 'long-lived life' (Dolan, 2018). The latter acknowledges that years of use have an effect on the body, on limbs, joints and organs, and increased longevity means that people are more likely to live long enough to experience the effect. Almost all of the women I interviewed related changes in the way their bodies function, and several women used the example of recovering from illness or a night out to describe how their body responds differently as they age. Bridget disclosed how her awareness of the future increases over the lifecourse, "When you're

young you don't care about the future do you...because thirty seems like a long way off and whatever, you know. When you're in your fifties, sixty doesn't seem very far away and seventy feels, doesn't feel much further after that". This suggests that the correlation between older age and illness is seen as an inevitability, but one that is of little relevance when *old* age seems far away. Participants' accounts indicate that chronological age retains a firm hold, as a way marker of an ageing lifecourse.

For midlife participants, it seems that the increasing proximity of older age makes the physical embodiment of ageing a reality. Bridget also articulated her concern that illness or injury encountered in older age is less easy to recover from, a message rooted in the responses of health professionals when she broke a limb in her fifties. Gilleard & Higgs (2000, p139) noted that multiple studies have indicated that 'pessimistic beliefs about their agedness, their health and their ability to 'control' these characteristics contribute to functional decline and death in later life'. Wendy broke her hip in an accident two years earlier and related the recovery time as being trickier in older age, although it was not clear to me whether she had also broken a limb when she was younger. Nonetheless, her lifestyle remains active and I noted that she gave every appearance of being fit and healthy. Midlife participants, given their relatively good health at the time of interview, are well situated to maintain agency over their lives but their accounts reflect the competing influences that threaten to shatter that sense of security. Older age as a social imaginary (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015), as detailed in Chapter One, functions as a space filled with cultural depictions of ageing, and this incorporates a wealth of fears about ill health and bodies breaking down irretrievably. Nonetheless, participants' concerns at this stage in their ageing lifecourse relate more to having to adapt to an ageing body than having to curtail activities altogether.

> With hope I've got about fifteen to twenty, well fifteen really good years before I start to really slow down probably but I'm going to give it as good as I get through that, go out with a bang. And if it means I slow down, well maybe my bang won't be as big but I'll still be there you know. (Alex)

Alex is sixty years old. She explained that as she gets older, she expects to inevitably slow down and she has a possible timescale in mind for this, expecting a change in

pace from around age seventy-five. The critical point is that Alex resolves to adapt to a change in pace only if and when she needs to. She does not betray any sense of slowing down or altering her lifestyle *just in case* although she told me that she will if necessary, which seems a realistic attitude. Alex does not perceive slowing down as disastrous and this is important, because it means that her identity remains unchanged – a change of pace is not integral to the person she is. In other words, she remains 'successful' on her own terms. This approach to ageing reflects Moglen's transageing (2008) and this is consistent with the experiences of ageing conveyed in previous chapters. The activities that Alex has enjoyed and continues to enjoy, do not appear to connect to one age over another, because they have taken place across her entire adult lifecourse. As Wray (2003) asserts, 'women maintain control and agency despite health problems. This ability to *get on with life* is not simply a feature of growing older, rather it is present throughout the life course' (p518) and this shows how transageing incorporates ways of living or coping with changing health. Alex acknowledges that she may need to embody these experiences differently, if ageing dictates that this is necessary but this does not cause her to reject the experiences. It is purely a matter of adaptation, as participants adapt to other events during their lifecourse. Alex's ability to do this means that she avoids becoming the 'lost object' as Moglen warns, instead embracing the 'enlivening connection and dynamic change' (p303) that transageing brings.

The correlation of older age with illness is itself flawed, if Cruikshank's perspective is considered (2003). Chapter Four 'The Punk Toolkit' introduced Cruikshank's interrogation of the idea that frailty and dependency are absolutes, reminding us that as multi-faceted human beings, areas of difficulty or weakness can easily co-exist with strength in other areas, whether physical or emotional and this brings to mind parts of the punk ethos. Equally, disability studies remind us that older age and disability are not necessarily experienced at the same time (Barnes et al, 2002), and therefore disability may represent continuity of experience across the lifecourse. The willingness of women in the study to incorporate their Punk Toolkit into everyday activities, applying a questioning outlook to potential restrictions, makes it clear that for many of these women, they do not define themselves by illness or health. After all, maintaining agency

over decision making (employing a questioning outlook), even if this involves deciding to ask for assistance, is still independence (Wray, 2004), as explored in Everyday Ageism. Equally, making an informed decision to 'slow down' or to do something differently to avoid aching the next day is something that most of the women in the research could do, and do. It could be argued that acts of agency such as these help participants avoid the correlation of ageing with dependency or loss of control and indeed, Bowling & Dieppe (2005) suggest that the concept of successful ageing could encompass 'effective coping and adaptive strategies in the face of changing circumstances…as the ability to grow and learn by using past experiences to cope with present circumstances while maintaining a realistic sense of self' (p1549). This seems to be represented by the women in my research, who recognise physical signs of ageing through its impact on their bodies and everyday lives, but nonetheless retain agency over their ageing lifecourses, successful ageing viewed through a transageing lens.

Going Out and Having a Good Time

In the course of our interviews, the women I spoke to consider the consequences of physical actions and lifestyle as they get older and this appeared to remind them of changes in the way their bodies function, influencing the way they live their lives.

> I don't go days without sleep like I used to. Yeah, yeah takes too long to recover you know, so I make sure I sleep every day and I make sure I eat everyday now. Yeah, I think you do become, you try and live within your means, so to speak, a bit more. (Bridget)

The women in my study related their awareness of the consequences of a night out and this encompasses going out to see bands, drinking and partying. While no-one spoke explicitly about taking drugs, one participant told me that she thinks the drug taking aspect of punk culture is glossed over, and others alluded to the drug taking habits of fellow punks. Whilst ageing theory that focuses on illness and dependency might interpret changed lifestyles as a pragmatic solution to aged bodies (Hillyer, 1988), participants' accounts suggest a more nuanced interpretation. The way that these women spoke to me about their lives suggested to me that the issue does not seem to be that drinking and going out do not affect health and wellbeing in youth, but that

responsibilities change. The changing nature of subculture participation across the lifecourse has been addressed by Bennett (2006), Hodkinson, (2013) and also Gregory (2009), who noted the cessation of rave participation as adult responsibilities encroach on female participants' lives.

Some of the changing priorities of an ageing lifecourse have been addressed as 'moments of conformity' in Chapter Four, which participants largely integrate into their lifecourses without it detracting from a sense of punk identity, and this theme can also be discerned in relation to motherhood in Chapter Five, and work in Chapter Six. While participants' earlier years may have been relatively free from work or domesticity, participants' descriptions of midlife show it to be characterised by work or domestic responsibilities, and this suggests that awareness of consequences increases with responsibility as much as age. Bennett (2018) notes that awareness of the shifting requirements of ageing music audiences has led to music venues and festivals offering options that aim to accommodate an older audience, with price tags that reflect assumptions about third age affluence. The physical effects of a night out, of tiredness, aching limbs and hangovers all have an impact on the following day, as evidenced in Josie's "I don't drink as much as I used to when I was younger and that's sense, nothing to do with, that's being sensible. But the occasional time I have, my hangover lasts a week". If the following days include work, caring responsibilities or household tasks, then this may negate the enjoyment of going out, which adds another layer to the impact of gendered roles and expectations explored in Chapter Five.

The women in my study find different ways of negotiating this. While reducing participation in social activities may be seen as a rational response to bodily limitations or discomfort, there are other narratives at play, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated. In Everyday Ageism, Josie described how a friend attributed leaving a bar that was too noisy for a conversation, to 'not being for their age group', which highlights how practical considerations can evolve into an issue about age, and age appropriateness. Some tactics from the Feminist and Punk Toolkits pay dividends here. When participants question gender norms, consciously take up space, or use a punk facade to engender confidence, this helps to differentiate the practices that genuinely

benefit from amendment, from the ones that are being avoided for rather more ageist or sexist reasons. Nevertheless, considering my earlier assertion that people who succumb to illness are depicted as losers, or 'unsuccessful agers', I suggest an alternative interpretation to the situation that Josie described. Both hearing and visual impairment are prevalent in older age, with varying degrees of loss (Cox, 2001) and background noise is a factor affecting hearing difficulties (Souza et al, 2007). Therefore, Josie's friend may have been experiencing difficulties connected to hearing that she increasingly recognises as she ages, her rationale for wanting to leave both a reflection of difficulty and an unwillingness to draw attention, at least in public, to the 'failure' of an age-related hearing impairment.

Chapter Three 'Everyday Ageism' noted that the media focus on the link between lifestyle factors and illness has enables the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility and blame to thrive (Katz, 2000). This in turn informs cultural narratives of age, where an ageing person who does not appear to be doing their best to 'defy' age and ageing is essentially an aberration. Several of the women in my study described an increased focus on health as they age, naming dietary changes and committed exercise regimes as one way of trying to maintain health, or in other terms, ageing successfully. Gilleard & Higgs (2010, p81) warn that 'exercising solely as a means of resisting age may establish an identity defined principally by the dangers it seeks to ward off', but I felt that participants' experiences indicated a more multi-faceted rationale for exercise. Wray (2003) links good health to a pragmatic concern that responds to the issue of invisibility raised in earlier chapters in this thesis, noting that in her research 'women's bodies represented their access to *being* in the world' (p525). For the women that I spoke to, their own interpretation of 'being in the world' encompasses a multitude of interests and activities, not all of which would be typically described as 'healthy' and consequently not valued in successful ageing terms as an activity (Katz, 2000) but for several women in my study, exercise and sport has always been an important and enjoyable part of their lives and this sense of continuity across the lifecourse came across during our interviews.

Going to the Gym

Some participants shared their experiences of going to the gym and the fitness activities they take part in. Josie advised me that she has been visiting the same gym for twenty years, meaning that for her the gym is not the strange and unfamiliar environment that can discourage new members, but a familiar and friendly place where she continues to feel at home. Four participants in total talked about visiting a gym regularly, suggesting that the gym can be a welcoming environment for older women. For others, the gym environment might be found challenging because of a sense of enforced competition, women's bodies scrutinised not just for acceptable shape and size (Gill, 2007), but in relation to each other, competitiveness fostered through the pace and duration of exercise activities. Craig & Liberti (2007) noted that 'women are constructed as nice and niceness is the absence of pushiness or competition' (p685) in their exploration of women-only gyms, and this gendered expectation could contribute to a reluctance to engage with a potentially competitive gym environment. Considering the influence of the successful ageing narrative explored in 'Everyday Ageism', the gym as a social space dedicated to health, body and fitness can also be examined for the wider messages it conveys.

> I keep looking at myself and I think, does it matter or do I still have a pressure to conform, because I think the whole fitness industry is about how you look, it's not about health and fitness. Yeah, I found, if you go into any gym, what are the pictures on the wall? They are young people with six packs and beautiful young girls. (Rosalind)

Rosalind had previously worked as a gym instructor. She felt valued as an instructor, with classes that were popular. Both being and appearing to be fit, buys 'social capital' (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006). Nonetheless, Rosalind identifies features in the gym that she feels exclude older women, including a proliferation of images of super-fit young people. An 'old' identity falls in and out of significance, depending on the context and the ages of those present (Cruikshank, 2003). In the potentially intergenerational context of a gym, older age is a minority and therefore always significant, ever-present in the minds of both those 'doing' old age and those observing age. Indeed, Pike (2011) found that the youthfulness inherent in health promotion materials and discourse often

have the unintended effect of dissuading older women from exercise, an expression of the ‘not for you’ inner voice that Gullette (1997) identifies. The atmosphere is influenced if the gym contains images that older women cannot identity with and results that are not easily achieved. If images of older women are absent from the gym, then surely the prevailing message is that it is not for them, the absence unsurprising given Twigg’s (2004) warning that ‘consumer culture is quintessentially youth culture in that it presents and promotes youthfulness as the ideal’ (p61). ‘Everyday Ageism’ broached the subject of reciprocity being an integral part of successfully functioning social worlds. Essentially, when older women feel valued and welcomed by people *and places,* then their interest in being in these places is revitalised, a social world opening up. If the cultural context of the gym demonstrates to women that it is not for them, that they are *out of place*, then it seems unlikely that this activity will be enjoyed and maintained.

Older women can be healthy or wish to be healthier without conforming to a model of youthful super-fitness but their lack of representation in images at a gym does nothing to foster a sense of inclusion and McGannon et al (2011, p102) assert that such images draw upon ‘appearance, weight-loss and heteronormative discourses’. I would suggest that this contributes to the exclusion of older women from social spaces, reflecting Everyday Ageism’s concept of the ‘Ageist Forcefield’. An aspect of this was addressed in ‘The Punk Toolkit’, when Ellen described entering exclusive fitness wear shops to complain that their exercise wear is only available in small sizes. Exercise wear is rarely marketed as unisex. Men can choose to reveal little of their body shape, as loose exercise wear is readily available for them. In contrast, much women’s exercise wear reveals every contour of the wearer’s body. Studies have shown that adolescent girls can feel reluctant to have their bodies revealed in exercise wear (Whitehead & Biddle, 2008), and participants are familiar with this scrutiny, articulating it in earlier chapters. Pike (2011) confirms that older women often continue to feel an unease at the prospect of revealing their bodies to participate in exercise, which says more about gendered expectations of clothing, than the clothing required to move freely in exercise. This remains a concern, but participants are equipped with the Punk Toolkit.

Using the Punk Toolkit, women *may* be able to resist uniforms and conventions in various guises. I noted that one woman in my study, who had foregone work opportunities due to her refusal to conform, stated that she is often to be found in exercise wear, which is after all, designed to be functional. Several participants had previously welcomed the functionality of punk clothing, compared to so-called 'feminine' clothing of the time, so I can see that there could be a place for *selected* exercise wear in both the Punk Toolkit and punk aesthetic. The flexibility to embrace or reject elements of mainstream style as they feel fit is another crucial part of the punk ethos for participants. Channelling the Punk Toolkit, one woman equated being an older gym user with a sense of rebellion and defying expectations.

> I'm very proud of the fact that in some of my classes I'm the oldest women there. I quite like that. The rebel in me again, I enjoy the fact that in my body pump class I lift some of the heaviest weights, and I'm also the oldest woman in the class. (Josie)

For committed long-term gym users such as Josie, I got a sense, from the way that she speaks about her life in both this and previous chapters, of her functioning as a representative of older age. This seems to place her in opposition to Cruikshank's (2013) finding that older people often distance themselves from their peers, when they perceive older people generally as being in poor health, although it may be precisely Josie's relationship with exercise and fitness that enables her to see these possibilities in older age, as a representative 'successful ager'. Josie seems to feel 'in place' at the gym, actively enjoying challenging age stereotypes, confident enough to acknowledge that, "I go to the gym a lot but the body isn't co-operating quite as much as it used to. I think". Her regime encompasses sessions in the gym, gentler classes such as Yoga or Pilates and more intensive classes such as Circuits or Body Pump, which use weights. Josie enjoys her reputation, *in relation* to her age, "I lift some of the heaviest weights, and I'm also the oldest woman in the class", endlessly aware of cultural expectations of where an ageing woman should be, what she should be doing and what she should look like.

The high visibility of activities such as gym going might suggest a preoccupation with concealing visible signifiers of age, or to return to the war-like rhetoric, of battling age

and decrepitude. Everyday Ageism explored how one pragmatic response to ageism is to conceal signifiers of age, aiming to ensure that other people do not change their attitude towards us. This is the bedrock of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1987), where the successful replication of youthful ideals of health, appearance and lifestyle, indicate that a person has successfully 'passed' as young (Copper, 1988). However, Josie challenges this ageist strategy, whereby ageing women distance themselves from ageing to be accepted. My interpretation, consistent throughout our interview discussion is that Josie does not disassociate herself from her age at all, instead proudly holding it up as a sign that she is not an age stereotype, although this may be underlined by an awareness that to be *that kind* of age stereotype is indeed to be perceived as someone who is a 'victim' of age. For all the women in my study that use the gym regularly, this exercise habit represents the continuation of their practices, rather than a change introduced to address midlife health concerns. With health in mind, participants went on to describe making changes across other areas of everyday life

Making Changes

All the women in the study related experiences of identifying changes, pain or stiffness in their bodies and taking action to identify the ways they could reduce the effects, whether this is in the way they use their bodies, or through changes to their lifestyle. Noting that their bodies behave differently as they progress along the lifecourse means that participants connect issue of health and functioning bodies to ageing. Faith noted "I had huge energy right up to a few years ago. It's only now that I find myself kind of slowing down, and there's various things going on that I kind of have to pace myself energy wise". She cannot find anything to attribute this to, other than the effects of age. Indeed, participants' experiences demonstrated an increased awareness of their bodies that seems to come with age.

> I've started going to Pilates because I was getting stiffer and getting a few back problems so I guess I'm aware that perhaps I have to do a little bit more now, just to keep supple and you know, and maybe watch my drinking a little bit more, don't drink so much and take a few more vitamins and so it's just kind of like you would with an old car isn't it, you just kind of take a little more care of it. (Liz)

Liz portrays a sense of valuing her body for the service that it gives her. This approach might be differentiated from one of personal responsibility, which ties in to the wider responsibilities to healthcare services that government and the media exploit (Katz, 2000). I found throughout participants' interviews, that valuing and nurturing the body you are in connects to an expectation of longevity, of recognising that a functioning body is needed for the journey. Quite literally perhaps, as Josie described to me how she makes some changes to the way that she travels, "We did a long-haul flight in 2015 and we broke the journey. When I was young I would have said 'sod it' you know [....] I'd go in comfort now, but that's only for comfort, not I feel my age". She differentiates this as not being *about* age but about choosing comfort over convenience *as* she ages and importantly, she has the economic and time resources to do so, therefore fitting a third age narrative of activity and consumer culture.

Moglen (2008) notes that mourning for our younger bodies is tied to the context in which they functioned and for the things they allowed us to do. Some of the women in the study have already described the limitations of their bodies as they age, in the context of socialising. However, their ability to seek ways of using their bodies differently for ongoing activities means that at this stage of midlife, the mourning of youthful bodies does not seem to play a significant part in these women's lives. As discussed in 'The Punk Toolkit', participants' experience of bricolage (Hebdige, 1991) equips them with an understanding of adaptation and it could be argued that it is not a formidable leap to move from creating new *things* from old, to creating new practices from old.

During our research interviews, I encouraged participants to think about specific examples of changes across their lifecourse and they responded to this, telling me how they adapt their lifestyles, tempering their habits so that they can continue certain activities. In relation to having a night out, examples included going out for fewer hours, drinking less, or dancing further away from the front of a gig. This reflects Bennett's (2013) descriptions of ageing male punks, who maintain gig attendance, but position themselves towards the back of a gig, rather than the chaos of the moshpit, feeling that they have nothing to prove through making their bodies uncomfortable. The Punk Toolkit explored the moments of conformity that pepper participants' ageing lifecourses,

ultimately finding that these moments do not disrupt participants' innate punk ethos. Participants' experiences suggest that this attitude could be transferred to health. The women in the study who amend their lifestyles to cope with changes brought by illness or poor health, which may *look* like conforming, find that this does not compromise their identity or their punk ethos.

Nonetheless, a small number of the women I interviewed identified physical and practical barriers to participation as they age. For example, Mary's health condition means that she cannot guarantee that she will be able to stand or walk for long periods on any given day. Laz (2003) refers to the *willfulness* of bodies 'when they behave in ways that occupants cannot predict or control. Bodies have the capacity to act, to surprise us, to rebel - we get sick, experience unexpected sensual or sexual pleasure, or turn scarlet with embarrassment - and we must tolerate, withstand, or accommodate these physical contingencies' (p507). While willfulness has been described as a potential tool for the 'Feminist Toolkit' in Chapter Five, it takes a different shape when applied to bodies and in Mary's example, has the potential to scupper her plans. At the time of interview, she was looking forward to a large punk concert, whilst knowing that her participation is dependent on accessing a seat, one of a few reserved for disabled people. The small number of accessible seats, which facilitate gig attendance suggests an ableist discourse whereby disabled people are excluded from social participation, and/or people are expected to reduce participation as they age. Oliver & Barnes (2012) refer to this as a 'personal tragedy view of disability' (p51), which stands in opposition to the social model of disability (Oliver, 1981), which focuses on the failure of society to be accessible for *all* people.

Whatever their relationship with illness or disability, discomfort and aching limbs from standing for long periods were things that almost all the women in my study could identify with. Chris named her long work hours as a physical restraint. She is a lecturer and she explained how her lifestyle has evolved to ensure that she feels prepared for a long working day, "I don't feel tempted to dance to three in the morning any more. So, it's maybe more, more for me physical restraints like long work hours, and I know my stamina isn't the same as it used to be, so I need more sleep". She acknowledges a

reduction in stamina as she ages, or perhaps an increase in *awareness* of stamina. After all, the body has physical limitations, whatever the age. This references Laz's findings of a 'change in stamina' (2003, p513), whereby her participants noticed being less energetic than their younger selves. Just as the extra energy used for a night out might be balanced by more sleep and doing less the day after, so it seems that the participants in my study often choose to distribute their energy differently, to spare themselves from embodied consequences.

> You go to a gig and there's these kids just in the middle of the moshpit absolutely throwing themselves around. And I'm looking at them and thinking yeah, if I did that and fell flat on my arse it would hurt my back! So yeah, I suppose it does stop you, not stop you, but you just look at it from a different view when you're older. (Dee)

Dee notes that she looks into the moshpit and considers the back pain that would result from falling over in the middle of it and I think it is important to emphasise that Dee's concern focuses on the realities of a moshpit (Holland, 2018), rather than a preoccupation with 'falling', which could be said to have become a cultural shorthand for the juxtaposition of older age and frailty. I consider Haenfler's (2014) assertion that ageing bodies become subject to social expectations in subculture: if practices such as moshing are perceived as 'unbecoming', this poses the question of whether falling in a moshpit may be more mortifying than painful, an unwanted reminder of the cultural pressure to be 'dignified' in older age, and a reminder that subcultural participation is not immune to the Ageist Forcefield. Whilst an acknowledgement that bodies wear out after years of use has already been made in this chapter, ageist depictions of older people, as explored in Everyday Ageism, seems to mean that participants are aware of the expectation for their bodies and cognitive faculties to degenerate as they age. However, I found that interviewees' accounts of the way they adapt their lives to incorporate aches and pains seemed logical. These women's accounts show that they focus on the things they really want to do and adjust their working day or week accordingly so that their energy is preserved. This reflects Hodkinson's (2013) finding that people adapt subculture participation along the lifecourse to encompass changing lives and responsibilities, but could be applied to all areas of daily lives.

The women that I interviewed also responded to our discussions with wider narratives about health, fitness and mortality.

> I lost four friends last year, quite young ages. Two were expected and two weren't. My mate went on a fitness drive 'right, no I have a responsibility, I'm that age, I've got young children, I've got to look after myself for their sake if nothing else'. But me, I'm just you know what, I'm fifty-one, if I want a cream cake I'm gonna have a cream cake. (Kat)

Having noticed changes in the ways their bodies cope with activities, several of the women in my study started thinking about wider health issues and this often related to seeing peers with serious illness, or dying, as Chapter Six has explored in connection to retirement plans. Copper (1988) asserts that correlating age with death ignores the fact that death is everywhere and at all ages, whether due to illness or accident. Nonetheless, participants consider the implications of their lifestyles and decide whether to make changes. As previously noted, the adversary model of older age (Bytheway, 1995) looks at older age as a time of powerlessness against 'adversaries' such as ill health or death and an element of this can be discerned in the approaches of a few of the women, who choose to look for weapons such as an improved diet or an exercise regime that would help them 'battle' exactly such adversaries.

Not every participant shared this view. Kat described the opposing approaches she and her friend took following the early deaths of two friends. Kat described her friend planning to become fitter and eat well, with a sense of personal responsibility for her own health. Cairns & Johnston (2015, p1) conceptualise the framing of dietary restrictions as positive choices as a 'do-diet', noting that doing so negotiates 'a tension at the heart of neoliberal consumer culture; namely the tension between embodying discipline through dietary control, and expressing freedom through consumer choices'. Conversely, Kat felt that she would continue to live her life as she chooses, and not feel guilt for her lifestyle choices. As she pointed out to me, she is free to reject advice that purportedly relates to her health, resisting the moral duty that such discourses imply. Kat shows a punk resistance to prescriptive advice that is in keeping with earlier rejections of expectations or labels. There is a gendered element in these exhortations and it is unlikely that concerns for longevity are participants' first encounter with cultural

pressures. Tunaley et al (1999) also discerned ‘rebellion’ in (non-subcultural) older women’s attitudes towards body size and eating, expressed at a more personal level, ‘directed at their husbands because of the negative comments they made about their wives' body size. Here the comments seemed to be directed at the women's appearance rather than their health’ (p751). Media discourses focus on women’s bodies, attempting to impose a responsibility not just for health, but for appearance and I suggest that it is the latter that is expected to take precedence, with ‘health’ considered a mere tool for making women’s bodies slim, fit, youthful and therefore acceptable. The women in the study explored their tactics of resistance through the ‘Feminist Toolkit’ in Chapter Five as part of their overall punk ethos. Participants who reject messages to make changes to their lifestyles to secure good health would be supported by Asquith (2009), who asserts that older age is too late to make any lifestyle changes that might impact on health.

Cultural Messages: Accept or Reject?

This chapter began with the assertion that the Punk and Feminist Toolkits equip the women in the study to decide for themselves which elements of culture, or cultural messages on how to live their lives, to accept or reject and applied these concepts to health. The experiences of the women in my study and their descriptions of their own ill health suggest that midlife women often do not view illness or injury in older age as weakness or failure, but integrate it as an expected feature of their lifecourse. Acts of integration by the women that I interviewed fall on a continuum. These range from Caroline’s integration of her reduced life expectancy into a new outlook on retirement, to Bridget sleeping in a caravan rather than a tent when she goes to festivals. Caroline still has a retirement and Bridget still attends festivals, but they have both integrated physical limitations into an ageing lifecourse. In fact, it could be said that they have ‘transaged’ (Moglen, 2008).

Put the same story into the media and there would undoubtedly be a different perspective. My interpretation of media narratives about older age, is that they tend to pathologise the kind of pragmatic adaptations that participants describe. Rather than changes being understood as clever strategies for resolving a physical ‘problem’, the

emphasis falls on the problem rather than the solution. The power of language has been explored in preceding chapters (Hawkins et al, 2001; Freixas et al, 2012) and multiple examples of its power to pathologise, demean and mislead can be seen in the inescapable twinning of older age with illness and frailty. The influence of ageist language on narratives of illness in older age can be detected in subtle alterations – from 'falling over' in youth, to 'having a fall' in older age, the passive nature of the latter reminding the listener of the power of older age to remove the fall*er*'s agency.

Cultural representations of age that correlate physical restrictions as an inevitable part of the ageing lifecourse create a picture where the likelihood that something bad happens seems far greater in older age (Gullette, 2015). However, Michele provided an example that seems to stand alone. She described the time she chose not to do a bungee jump because she heard that this could cause detached retinas if over the age of forty. The NHS direct website (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/detached-retina-retinal-detachment) suggests in its causes, that this *can* happen when you get older, so there is a risk to be weighed up, however slim. Michele has hardly restricted her lifestyle by electing not to do one bungee jump, "That's the only thing I can think of, bungee jumping, nothing else has changed", and I would argue that this experience in the context of her active lifestyle should be looked at in perspective. Assessing the risk of doing an extreme sport is not the same as re-evaluating everyday practices, the removal of which might have greater impact on lifestyle and enjoyment in older age.

Summary of Chapter Seven

This thesis relates to midlife, also known as middle age. Despite one participant having a serious and life limiting illness, no participant could be described as being in or approaching the fourth age (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015), so it remains a social imaginary for the women in the study. These participants have experienced health issues from minor aches and pains to life limiting illness. Whatever their experience, this chapter demonstrates that for these women, ill health or the bodily effects of age do not feel stigmatising, although others may perceive them as such. Participants were willing to discuss aches, pains, illness and physical limitations and to relate them to changes that take place in their bodies as they age. Equally, the effect of lifestyles and practices,

including punk practices such as attending a gig, are linked to how they are experienced in the body and this enables the women in the research to perceive health not just as something individual but as something that stems from the cumulative effect of everyday life. Participants turned a punk/feminist questioning eye on gendered healthcare experiences. Several women remarked on healthcare experiences that are concerning and this highlights a paternalistic attitude towards women's bodies, especially when they are of child-bearing age. The dismissive attitude taken towards the menopause by anyone other than older women, highlights this.

The women that I interviewed approach the encroachment of seemingly age-related aches, pains and limitations with a similar attitude to which they approach other aspects of their ageing lifecourse, with the Punk and Feminist Toolkits playing their part. This is to say, they find ways of adjusting their lifestyles, making changes so that they can enjoy doing the things that are important to them. This appears to happen quite intuitively and is expressed in several ways. Participants sometimes choose to reduce participation in activities that might have consequences the next day and indeed, participants often frame this as an increased awareness of consequences, as much as an effect of age. Participants also move their bodies differently to compensate for an injury, slow down both pace of life and individual actions to compensate for reduced energy, or ease off at the gym. The women in the study found that adapting or adjusting the way they live their lives, even if it means slowing down or doing less, does not disrupt an innate punk ethos or identity. These women's integration of fluctuating health into their lifecourse could be considered the ultimate act of transageing (Moglen, 2007), because this approach enables participants to maintain their identity and lifestyle. It does not have to be exactly the same as in younger years to be relevant. Participants' accounts acknowledge the influences of both successful ageing and age as loss and decline in their negotiation of midlife, ultimately approaching older age with a pragmatism that acknowledges the reality of ageing bodies and the effect of a long-lived life as far as it is possible to know at this stage in midlife.

Chapter Eight: Thesis Conclusions

This thesis has explored the ageing experience of women in the UK who identify with punk in response to the research's overarching aim, which was to find out about the ageing experiences of women in the UK who identified with original era punk. The move within this thesis to *identify* (with punk) confirms that for the participants of this study, punk culture continues to hold meaning across the lifecourse. I have illustrated how my findings are theorised with the framework of cultural gerontology. Chapter Eight brings together the findings from my analysis chapters and asserts the original contribution to knowledge my research makes in the areas of cultural gerontology and subculture research. I approach each research question in turn, culminating in a final conclusion, and followed by implications for further research and practice.

Key Findings

Research Question One: What is the meaning of 'punk' for older women in the study?

(i) Punk comprises a set of values and practices – a 'toolkit'

Punk continues to hold meaning for women who identify with original era punk. Few women in the study identify themselves as being *a* punk, but all the women in the study identify with the underpinning attitudes, values, and practices that they draw from punk, collectively known as the 'punk ethos'. This led to the conceptualisation of the 'Punk Toolkit' within my study, a set of guiding values that equip older women to negotiate everyday issues. The tools contained in the Toolkit are not the same for each person – imagine them as items available at a punk flavoured pick n mix. I return to Haenfler's 'working definition' of subculture from Chapter One: 'A relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices and objects, and a sense of marginalisation from or resistance to a perceived 'conventional' society' (1991, p16) and find that it fits with participants' experiences of punk. Applied to the lifecourse, punk means a questioning outlook: questioning what is on offer,

questioning what else might be out there, and asking ‘is this for me?’ in tandem with ‘do I want it to be?’ This outlook underpins questions of conformity and non-conformity and informs decisions that shape women’s lifecourses. For most of the women in the study, punk is interlinked with feminism and this led to the conceptualisation of a second model, the ‘Feminist Toolkit’. The ‘Feminist Toolkit’ draws on aspects of the punk ethos but tailors it to negotiate a lifecourse beset by patriarchy, misogyny and sexism. The Feminist Toolkit is of value to all women who identify with punk, even if they resist either the label or concept of feminism, because the women in the study nonetheless resist restrictions, including those related to gender. Josie’s words “if the Sex Pistols could swear on television, I can say I don't want children” encapsulate the dilemma of gendered, heteronormative expectations perfectly.

(ii) Punk provides the freedom to be who you want to be – and you do not have to be ‘punk’

Midlife women in the study experience punk as giving them the freedom to be who they want to be and to resist convention – if they want to resist it. Punk, for these older women, means having the freedom to be unconventional, and punk culture fosters the values and confidence to do this. For the women from Northern Ireland, punk originally offered them the additional freedom *from* the political climate of the time and represented escapism. The freedom to resist convention manifests itself in various ways. The non-conformity of punk reminds midlife women that they do not have to submit to being the same, or looking the same, as everyone else if they do not choose to do so. Punk’s ethos is also perceived as granting the freedom to *not* be punk, instead remaining true to individual identity and practices, rather than any collective sense of ‘punk-ness', although the collective sense is articulated through the punk ethos. Several participants identified the dichotomy in punk culture that advocates for the celebration of difference but condemns its members for the failure to look or be sufficiently punk and they rejected it as incompatible with the punk ethos. In this thesis, *not* focusing on appearance can be perceived as unconventional behaviour for a midlife woman, linked to the resistance of gender stereotypes.

(iii) Punk provides continuity through its values, including social justice principles

Punk provides continuity across the lifecourse because its framework – the toolkit or ethos - is carried forward to negotiate an ageing lifecourse. For many women in the study, the punk ethos means looking at the world through a social justice lens, whether wider issues that affect everyone, or personally experienced issues at the intersection of sexism, ageism and ableism. Social justice principles guide many of the women in the study in their choice of work and retirement plans. These principles have led to women working in areas such as academia, nursing, community work and research, areas which show a social justice focus and one participant asserted that she will use her existing skills to be an activist as the main focus of her retirement.

To summarise, these findings merge to form two key points that respond to Question One. First, a punk ethos or 'Toolkit' equips the midlife women who carry it, to resist conformity and convention, including resistance to gender and age stereotypes. Second, punk provides a sense of continuity across the lifecourse, including informing work choice and retirement plans. This is the meaning of 'punk' for older women in the study.

Research Question Two: What is the ageing experience for women in the study who identified with UK punk cultures?

(i) *A continual awareness of age*

The ageing experience for women who identified with punk occupies a space where ageism and punk ethos meet. Women who identify with punk are subject to the same experiences of ageisms as anyone else, yet their punk ethos assists them to resist and reject age expectations. However, this is not a straightforward process and Cruikshank's 'hyper awareness of age' (2003) provides some explanation to why this might be. In accordance with the principle of hyper awareness, the women in the study are continuously aware of their age, the age of the people they are with, *and* the expected age for the place they are about to enter or the activity they are about to do. This is not to say that this restricts their movements but it manifests itself in an internal dialogue that acknowledges age expectations, considers them, considers resisting

them and ultimately makes a decision of whether to resist or accept. This is a constant tension. When resisting ageism in the form of age expectations, midlife women are nonetheless aware when they are transgressing age norms, and it must be noted that some enjoy the feeling of transgression, of rebelling in a way that resonates with their subcultural experience.

(ii) *Ageism is experienced, observed and perpetuated*

The ageing experience is that midlife women routinely encounter ageism. Its insidiousness can be discerned in the way that these women talk about age and describe their lives but also in their assertions that they *do not* encounter ageism, which would be more persuasive, if only descriptions of ageism did not follow assertions such as these. The women in the study experience, observe and indeed perpetuate ageism in the way that they talk about age. Midlife women often struggle to see ageism in relation to themselves but observe it more easily, when ageist acts are perpetuated against their age peers. This seems to demonstrate an internalisation of ageism that is comparable to the assimilation of sexism highlighted through the activisms of #MeToo and #everydaysexism. The social justice lens of punk equips women to recognise when they are being treated unfairly, but sometimes it takes a bit of thought for them to recognise it as ageism.

(iii) *Reciprocity is vital if midlife women are to retain full participation in society*

Reciprocity is a vital part of the social world for ageing women. Regardless of their experiences of punk visibility, the experience of midlife invisibility is recognisable to most of the women in the study and for this to change, an anti-ageist culture must lead the way. Older women must be responded to, interacted with and valued by other people. Not because of some potentially misplaced idea of aged wisdom, or respect earned through longevity, but because they are human beings and are therefore not exempt from the humane social interactions that anyone would expect. Reciprocity applies to places too and as Everyday Ageism notes, when women feel that their interest in places is not reciprocated, that they are not welcome, then they are excluded from full participation in society. The Punk and Feminist Toolkits can be drawn on for confidence or a questioning attitude but this is not always enough. This leads to my

concept of the ‘Ageist Forcefield’, which I developed as a response to the intangible nature of identifying what prevents women from accessing some places as they age. Cultural gerontology identifies various factors, including the way that places are talked about and marketed as being for ‘young people’, and the way that older age is talked about as being increasingly home based and sedate. Nonetheless, when midlife women plan to go out yet feel some intangible pressure of ‘it’s not for you’, *this* is the Ageist Forcefield, operating in such an elusive way that it is interpreted as individual preference. This is everyday ageism at its most pervasive.

(iv) *Retirement is approached with anticipation, but with trepidation regarding finances*

The women in the study experience midlife as a time of preparation for retirement and most of the women in the study had already given it thought, although plans, preparedness and economic resources varied widely. As only one woman in the study receives a state pension and has fully retired from work, it is not possible to draw conclusions on the experience of retirement. However, expectations and plans prove a rich source of data about age expectations. Retirement is approached by the women in the study with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation, the latter of which is entirely caused by financial concerns. The sense of anticipation relates to the idea of retirement as an opportunity, where punk identities are maintained, and interests including punk practices can be pursued. Several women expect to keep on working at the point that they expect or hope to receive a pension, due to financial necessity. These financial concerns highlight ageist propaganda because the women in the study, whilst largely resistant to issues of inequality and oppression, nonetheless absorb notions that older people are to blame for pension deficits and pressure on healthcare services. The women in the study articulate their distrust in the government's ability to provide an adequate or timely state pension and this contributes to a sense of unease about how they will manage financially in retirement. However, this does not prevent the other blame narratives from flourishing. The women that have adequate financial resources are already planning for retirement and I will discuss this shortly. However, for the women that cannot see how they will manage financially when they leave work, retirement plans take less of a clear shape. For these women, the only solution that

they can see is that they resign themselves to a poor old age, or they continue working in some way. This contributes to a sense of unease about how they will manage financially in retirement.

(v) *The relationship between work and conformity becomes clearer as retirement approaches*

Midlife women do not always perceive the continuation of work into retirement as negative, but the allure of work pales into insignificance when contrasted with the idea of retirement freedoms, when removed from its financial constraints. Retirement offers opportunities both through what it removes (work and restriction) and what it offers (free time and opportunities). The restrictions of employment come into focus as women imagine their retirement and realise that *further* freedoms would come into play when work ends. This is about more than having free time, although women name this as a significant advantage. For midlife women, the cessation of work also represents not having to think about the words you use, the clothes you wear or the things you do, and these are all small changes that reinforce how conformity creeps into an ageing lifecourse. This shapes retirement as a time of opportunity in the midlife imagination and I will discuss this further in response to Question Three, as punk values and ageing expectations come together to demonstrate the impact of punk on the ageing lifecourse for women.

(vi) *Health issues cause midlife women to confront age*

Participants articulate the experience of ageing as one that entails adapting to the embodied effect of decades of wear and tear on the body. Health issues cause the women in the study to confront age, even while admitting that health issues can arise at any age. There is something about experiencing a health issue or disability in older age that causes midlife women to feel that illness and death are inevitable, and this feeling is exacerbated by illness or death in age peers. Nonetheless, despite the seeming correlation of age and illness, the women in the study do not appear to find ill health stigmatising and instead accommodate it as a natural part of the ageing lifecourse. Participants acknowledge the wear and tear on their body across the lifecourse and adapt the way they live their lives to accommodate this, making changes

to the way they pace themselves, use their bodies, or live their lives. Indeed, they integrate changes seemingly without thought and participants' experience of the punk DIY ethos provides a template for *finding a way*.

To summarise, these findings merge to form four key points relating to Question Two. First, ageism is an everyday experience for midlife women, whether resisted or not. Second, the concept of age-appropriateness manifests itself in internal debates whereby midlife women negotiate an inner battle with an ageist voice, against a punk resistance to convention and labelling. Third, women acknowledge health issues but integrate changes and lifestyle adjustments into their ageing lifecourse so that they can continue what is important to them. Fourth, retirement is anticipated as a time for rejecting work conventions and using the time to engage in activities that are meaningful to each woman's sense of identity. However, the financial landscape of retirement remains a concern. This is the ageing experience for women in the study who identified, and *identify*, with UK punk cultures.

Research Question Three: What is the impact of punk, if any, on the ageing lifecourse for these women?

(i) *An unconventional appearance disrupts ideas of age-appropriateness*

The seeds for discussion of Question Three have already been sown in response to my first research question, which establishes that for the midlife women in this study, punk continues to hold meaning for them. The Punk and Feminist Toolkits can be drawn on across the lifecourse and there are multiple ways this influences and informs the ageing lifecourse for midlife women. Punk helps to disrupt ideas of age-appropriateness by troubling the way that these women are perceived by other people. This recognises that when people struggle to attribute age, they may also struggle to apply age expectations. Some women in the study state that they do not attempt to hide their age, and indeed feel that they look their age, yet the impact of a punk facade is that it confounds expectation and disrupts attempts to apply an age. This is not

foolproof, as one participant remembered overhearing ageist comments focused on an older punk woman.

(ii) *Punk and Feminist Toolkits provide strategies for an ageing lifecourse*

The Punk and Feminist Toolkits provide midlife women with tools to resist ageism, sexism and conformity and to notice when they are not treated fairly. All the women in the study, whether feminist or not, were aware of gender inequalities to some extent and their punk ethos is part of an armoury of tools to challenge and resist sexist attitudes. What differentiates the Punk Toolkit from the Feminist Toolkit represents a common female experience, because while the punk ethos and toolkit can be integrated into everyday life relatively unobtrusively, the Feminist Toolkit cannot. Women may practise everyday acts of resistance in relation to gender expectations, but the rejection of sexism requires a collective and vocal response. As the Feminist Toolkit chapter advises – feminism must be *owned*. Everyday acts of resistance involve living differently in one's body, being visible, vocal and resisting cultural pressures to *be lesser* in older age, and punk experience sets a precedent for women to do this. Ahmed's (2017) 'Killjoy Manifesto' from her book *Living a Feminist Life* became a useful influence in this thesis, its key messages of 'be willful' and 'take up space' offering validation of the punk ethos.

(iii) *Moments of conformity do not compromise a punk ethos*

The punk ethos moves in and out of significance across the lifecourse, and participants' accounts of *moments of conformity* highlight this. The women in the study identified moments of conformity, which amount to months or years and often connect to family life. Motherhood often influences the way that these women participate in punk, coloured by ideas of maternal respectability. Within this research, participants do not articulate their moments of conformity as compromising their punk values in a concerning way because the punk ethos exists as a set of values that can be picked up at any point. Midlife women could identify the Toolkit's potential in an ageing lifecourse, and consider how their punk ethos might come into play in a future older age, linking it with reflections on health, illness and dependency.

(iv) *The punk ethos informs retirement plans*

Participants anticipate a retirement that carries the strong thread of their identity forward, providing the opportunity, time and space to develop existing interests, but also to pick up interests that may have been on hold. Examples of this include planning to learn bass guitar or wanting to join a band. Not all planned activities are punk, and punk is not an important factor but the punk ethos can be discerned behind these women's plans to create a retirement that is personal and individual to them. The toolkit also provides strategy for adjusting to the changes that participants expect from age, with the DIY ethos of punk providing experience of creatively finding a solution should they become ill or need assistance as they age. These women spoke of adapting to new circumstances in a way that appears pragmatic.

To summarise, these findings merge to form three key points that respond to Question Three. First, punk helps to disrupt ideas of age-appropriateness. Second, moments of conformity in the ageing lifecourse do not matter that much, because an internal punk ethos remains present. Third, the punk ethos informs retirement plans. This is the impact of punk on the ageing lifecourse for these women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the themes of the three research questions brought together, the overarching contribution of my research is that it illuminates the ageing experience for punk women, drawing together the elements of punk and female ageing. Although the male ageing punk experience has been explored previously, the female experience has not and while elements of the existing research (Bennett, 2006) are transferable to my own findings, they do not capture the entirety of the female ageing experience, which includes a lifecourse of gendered expectations and the continual scrutiny that a woman's appearance elicits. Women who identify with punk are subject to the same ageing expectations and ageism as everyone else. They sometimes recognise ageism and resist it but the insidiousness of ageism means that it is not always recognised for what it is. Nonetheless, these women recognise age expectations, most noticeably in reference to their appearance, but also in relation to the places they go and things they do.

My research found that the participants of the study juxtapose their ageing experiences with a punk ethos which remains of significance across the ageing lifecourse. This ethos comprises values and practices which together create a personal 'Punk Toolkit' and this is something these women draw upon, anticipating ways in which this could be useful as they age. The Punk Toolkit's sister, a Feminist Toolkit, ensures that women focus the same challenging and questioning gaze on all things sexist, and this Toolkit can also be drawn upon across the lifecourse. Both Toolkits inform these women's life decisions and offer a powerful way of looking at the world and maintaining agency over the shape of their lifecourses, but it is not straightforward. Ageist cultural pressures are powerful and this often results in a time-consuming inner narrative, whereby exhortations to be 'age-appropriate' and exhortations to 'resist conformity' or 'be individual' are pitted against each other. The punk side often wins, but it is a tiresome process, indicative of the tyranny of ageism.

To summarise, my research develops three concepts that can be used to understand the temporal conflicts of the ageing lifecourse, the concepts of the 'Ageist Forcefield',

‘Punk Toolkit’ and ‘Feminist Toolkit’, and these contribute towards both the fields of cultural gerontology and subculture research. The experiences of the women in the study reflect a common finding in cultural gerontology - that ageist representations of older people depict homogeneity which does not represent the wide spectrum of diverse experiences and interests, but my research adds a subcultural perspective. The relevance of the concepts of the Punk Toolkit and the Feminist Toolkit as tools for an ageing lifecourse have been established within this thesis and these are joined and complemented by the concept of the ‘Ageist Forcefield’, which illuminates the experience of feeling cast out age-wise from places and situations. This concept captures the dissonant and disorientating *feeling* that ageing women experience, when they are subject to a sense of age-exclusion with no easily identifiable source.

Implications for Further Research and Practice

In an ageist culture, my research findings are resonant to anyone attempting to understand the lived experience of an ageing woman, attempting to negotiate an ageing lifecourse amidst the ‘double jeopardy of ageism and sexism’ (Sontag, 1972). My research demonstrates that punk and female ageing interact to provide an alternative perspective on the ageing experience, one that fits within the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology. Taken away from their punk context, the facets of the Punk and Feminist Toolkits are usable in a wider context. Just as the women in the research pick and choose the parts that are important to them, so ageing women who do not identify with punk could equip themselves with selected tools against ageism and ageing expectations, with examples such as ‘If you fancy doing something, just do it’, ‘be politically active because this creates change’ or ‘be true to yourself’ working as a mantra for ageism resistance. Without a questioning attitude, ageism may be interpreted as a personal experience rather than a problematic social structure. If older women understand that ageism and the ‘Ageist Forcefield’ function like patriarchy, as a disciplining force to restrict their social worlds, then there is surely the opportunity to recognise and resist their forces.

The limitations of my research mean that there is the potential for further work to be done. The midlife age range of my participants is discussed within cultural gerontology

as the privileged face of older age when older age is discussed, because research on ageing often focuses on the middle years, those capable of 'age passing', at the expense of people who are undeniably 'old', meaning that the true extent of age oppression remains unknown. The participants reflect on their future old age, yet they have not experienced it. Just as Woodward (1991) notes that illness tests the limits of the cultural construction of older age, so further research with punk identifying women in ten or twenty years time could explore the limits of the Punk and Feminist Toolkits for negotiating older age. And while in the course of interviews, participants made links between their punk identity and their ageing lifecourse, there were other factors at play. Moglen's (2008) theory of 'transageing' proved invaluable in the analysis of my findings and while subcultural identity is one facet of identity that participants threaded across the lifecourse, other facets are equally relevant. Further research could explore the articulation of non-subcultural identity across the lifecourse and the factors that enable or inhibit its expression. The practice of 'bricolage' (Hebdige, 1991) functions as an alternative concept to explore continued identity, values and practices across the lifecourse and has particular meaning for punk.

I also propose that the concept of the 'Ageist Forcefield', alternately described as an 'Age*ism* Forcefield', is further developed as a concept to understand the experience of ageism. I believe that this has relevance for cultural gerontology but also has value in social work practice. My proposal is that the concept is utilised as a tool for reflective practice for anyone working with older people. This means challenging established thought about the places that older people live and go to, the activities they take part in and the rationale behind this. This has further implications for social care and housing policies because age segregated care facilities are underpinned by licensing agreements with age thresholds. Nonetheless, there is a further consideration for social care workers or service providers to take into account. Although participants could imagine negotiating older age with the help of their punk ethos, several women in the study advised that they could not imagine living in residential or nursing care and this related directly to the fear of services catering to a homogenous stereotype of old age. Participants could not recognise themselves in this scenario and this draws attention to the need for services to recognise the spectrum of values and interests that older

people might have. So, two guiding principles (1) Do not assume a person can be known by the fact of their age (2) No Mariah Carey on the communal area stereo…

As a final proviso, in this thesis humour has been identified as a tool for coping with ageism and age. I would not want to deny the place of humour as a coping mechanism because it functions as such in so many otherwise intolerable situations. Yet when looked at in the context of sexism and the experience of being a midlife woman in a patriarchal culture, there is simply nothing to smile about. Ahmed's (2017) 'Killjoy Manifesto' reminds women to remain stony faced in the face of sexist 'humour', to refuse to respond to it with the complicity of a smile. It is difficult to establish a rationale for why this should be different for ageism and my conclusion is that while older women may laugh at the ridiculousness of age-based expectations, they should also recognise that anger is justified and that these moments do not deserve a good-humoured response. In fact, it is appropriate that I end my thesis with the same punk attitude:

***Oh Ageism Up Yours*!**

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Appendix A: Glossary

Definition of terms used in this thesis

Child-free: Not having any offspring.

Identify with: the *personal* experience of feeling an affinity/connection with something.

Midlife: The term frequently used in this thesis to describe the participants in the study, who are middle aged. This term has been chosen for its brevity, but also for its connotations of age as an experience, or a *place* almost, rather than an identity.

Middle Age: Aged 50 plus. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines middle age as age fifty or older, and a sub-section of 'old', which is defined as age sixty-five or older. The participants in this study, aged 50-65 are all characterised as 'middle aged'.

Older/Older Age/Older People: In this thesis, this refers to age fifty and above. While the WHO definitions are used as a guideline, age and ageing are subjective definitions and experiences. It would be impossible to state (on behalf of others) where 'old' begins. Therefore, 'older' reflects the subjective experience.

Original Era: UK Punk in the 1970s and early 1980s**.** There is no consensus about the beginning and end dates of punk, or indeed if dates exist. Nonetheless, the term 'original era' is used to differentiate all punk culture that grew from its earliest incarnation, from much later versions, such as pop punk band Green Day in America in the 1990s.

Punk: A subculture that emerged in the UK in the mid/late 1970s, memorable for its music and equally notorious for its anti–authority attitude, DIY ethos (anyone can have a go at anything) and the unconventional appearance of those associated with it. Punk cannot easily be defined and it meant different things to different people.

Appendix B: Information Sheets for Potential Participants

Dear potential participant,

I am looking for women to interview for my PhD research project **'The Ageing Experience of Women in the UK who Identified with Punk Cultures'.** To take part you must be (a) a woman aged 50+, and (b) who identified with original era/1970s punk in the UK. *It really does not matter whether punk is important to you **now**!*

- Interviews will take around an hour and be recorded.
- All interviews will be anonymised.
- I will send you a copy of the interview transcript if you would like that. You can then let me know if you want to clarify or add to anything said.
- You are free to change your mind about participating at any point, up until the analysis of data.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [Email address redacted] or [Tel No redacted] to either find out more, or arrange an interview. I can call you back. If you are interested, great – and thank you very much in advance! I will bring a consent form along to the interview for you.

Regards,

Alison Willmott (Ali)

PhD Student

Centre for Women, Ageing and Media

University of Gloucestershire

Appendix C: Consent Form

Information sheet and consent form for participants

Many thanks for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project '*The Ageing Experience of Women in the UK who Identified with Punk Cultures'.* There are some points you need to be aware of before you take part.

- Interviews will last around an hour.
- You are free to change your mind about participation up until the analysis of data (my analysis of the interviews, when they are complete).
- Your contribution will be anonymous. Written up transcripts will not include your name, address or any other detail that could be used to identify you.
- Interviews will be recorded onto a Dictaphone and then written up word for word. You have the opportunity to see the written version of your interview if you would like to.

I look forward to meeting you,

Alison Willmott

PhD Research Student

University of Gloucestershire

Name……

I have read the information sheet above and agree to be interviewed under these conditions.

Signed…….participant
Date…….

Signed…….researcher
Date…….

Appendix D: Participant Details

Name	Age	Occupation	Relationship Status	Children ?	Lives	Ethnicity	Class
Liz	51	Artist	Male Partner	Two	SW England	White British	'Bohemian'
Heidi	51	Childminder	Husband	Two (adult)	SW England	White British	Not a class
Bridget	54	Web Design/Artist	Husband	One	SW England	White British	Not a class (but middle class upbringing)
Flo	54	Self- employed Events Management	Husband	One (adult)	Central England	Jamaican/Indian	Middle Class
Paula	50	Home Educating/ Former Manager	Husband	Two	London	White British	Middle Class
Ellen	58	Financial Investigator	Single 'Spinster'	No	London	White British	'Middle Class?'
Heather	50	Nurse	Husband	Five 'blended family'	North England	White British	Middle Class *now*
Faith	58	Freelance Editor	Male Partner	No	Scotland	White Scottish	Working Class
Chris	57	University Lecturer	Male Partner	No	Scotland	White Scottish/ European	Working Class
Caroline	53	**Retired** Former DV Researcher/ Manager	Wife	One (adult)	North England	White British	Working Class
Michele	53	Academic	Husband	One (adult)	Wales	White British/ European	Working Class
Kat	51	Local Government	Single	No	Central England	White British	Working Class
Rosalind	57	Self Employed – Dog Care	Single	Six (mostly adult)	London	White British	Working Class
Dee	53	Retail	Husband	Two (adult)	SW England	White British	Not a class
Josie	64	**Retired** Former Librarian	Male Partner	No 'child free'	Central England	White British	Not a Class
Wendy	65	**Retired** Former care worker	Male Partner	One (adult)	North England	White British	Not a Class
Alex	60	Photographer	Husband	Two (adult)	Northern Ireland	White Irish	Not a Class
Mary	53	**Retired** Nurse/Civil Servant	Single	Two (adult)	Northern Ireland	White Northern Irish	Middle Class 'if you take a world view
Gina	53	Civil Servant	Husband	No	Northern Ireland	White Northern Irish	Not a Class


That creeps up on you, that being a hermit, that does creep up
have to make a real effort to go places and I do find that a bit
sed ideas of
s for them, not
on, 1998). As
d compare her
ot other people
d undesirables
eping the male
in wider society
s were as likely
Not sure about this word
because you could be in the middle of nowhere and
with a leather jacket and dyed hair and think 'oh thank god.
It meant a lot then and it still does now.
. I think it would be unbecoming, for me
ut there's a lot of...it's not age, it really
voman and think 'she shouldn't be wear
ge and think she looks great in that,
there was only seats for about
ten people, it was like this is an ageing population,
really of gig goers.
You know, an awful lot of people are not being catered for.
Intro
Preceding
to explor
Nonethel
rejection
'I don't
Clothes, I just wore all my scruffy clothes reall
transgressed 'feminin
existing (continuing
transgressi
in the mirror and think 'oh yeah, not too many wrinkles, don't look to
h a few things, you know'. Although you shouldn't really think like that, co
he heck you like but, it's other peoples' problems how they perceive
dle aged woman are me and my contemporaries and I should
xpectations are you do what you want in the way that you want to do it. I suspe
vironment, no not every environment is going to allow that to happen. Bu
think there's some women who don't necessarily want to take
peppermint tea. Yeah, well punk
o do and I worry that I'm just going to run out of time to do them all. Which is why I
oney or their class or their looks. I think it was an amazin
Is the right one: consider revising?