Beyond Subculture the Meaning of Style: Chronicling Directions of Scholarship on Dress since Hebdige and Muggleton

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Abstract

Youth and music-oriented subcultures use dress to embody lifestyle, ethos, individuality, and showcase their perspectives. This literature review analyzes academic writing on dress in conjunction with subculture that has emerged since Dick Hebdige wrote a defining text, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* in 1979 and David Muggleton wrote a reaction book, *Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* in 2000. Twenty years later, at the same interval between those volumes, and using Joanne Eicher’s comprehensive definition of “dress,” this article reviews the current topics, methods, theories, and priorities. Findings indicate that academic literature on dress and subculture as joint primary variables remain surprisingly sparse. However, there is growth in including dress as a secondary variable in studies on subcultural lifestyles, and burgeoning incorporation of subcultural content in history of dress texts. The modern topics and citations are often similar to research from 1979 to 2000, though the 2000-2020 approaches differ, as methods have become more online oriented than fieldwork, and the lens to review subcultures has diversified. While publication numbers are limited, exhibitions, mass market publications, blogs, and podcasts have all seen an uptick in this area, indicating a potential gap between public interest and academic formats.

Keywords

Subculture, dress, identity, lifestyle, authenticity, fashion
Introduction

Subcultures such as Lolita, punk, and goth construct dress based upon the ethos and arts of their community. Participants use appearance to express views on modern life, communicate beliefs, visualize identity aspects, and show resistance to mainstream culture. The authors of this paper are scholars of dress and often focus on the relationship of style and subculture. In our efforts to stay up to date on literature we embarked on a review to familiarize ourselves with recent publications and media in this area. This project began in Spring 2020 and by coincidence we recognized that was twenty years after David Muggleton published Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style (2000), which itself was a critical response to the seminal 1979 text by Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style. This catalyzed our focus to determine what has come to light in this area of scholarship over the past twenty years, a similar period of time to that which separated those two publications.

While conducting this review it became clear that because of exposure to an immense amount of mass media and the explosion of the Internet, defining subculture was a challenge as the lines between subcultures, street style, and even at times the mainstream, have become blurred. Muggleton (2000) suggested that postmodern subcultures had begun to splinter and become more indicative of a new subcultural tradition characterized by fluid notions of membership and the accumulation of cultural commodities. Andy Bennett (2011) extended Muggleton’s approach by stating that the concept of subculture reflected a new way to perceive the relationship between musical taste and visual style, but also the ease of constructing (and even rejection of) new notions of the self through visual images (Bennett 2000, 79; Bennett 2011). Hebdige’s 1979 work had to contend with previous scholarship from Chicago School theorists focusing on deviance and concepts of race and class, and Muggleton’s 2000 book on the
expansions of postmodernism on an aging and diversifying underground, both of which are concepts that impact the development of style. Since 2000, the notion of subculture has become increasingly divided yet more accessible as the Internet, and especially social media, rose to prominence. There are entirely new ways to learn about the cultures and become a participant, often behind a screen that is equally anonymous yet highly visual, and thus scholarship on appearance takes on new tasks.

We began this research in a highly formulaic manner, yet quickly it became apparent that subcultural structures are difficult to evaluate in the present. Therefore, we needed to remain flexible on what could be considered a youth or music subculture, while still attempting to remain comparative to the previous works of Hebdige (1979) and Muggleton (2000). Youth is a first challenge, as many of the subcultures have existed for generations, and their participants have grown along with them. Furthermore, music is a second misnomer of modern subcultural parameters, as sport, fandom, sexual interests, and other interests have shaped lifestyles akin to how one would describe a punk or raver, per se. The concept of dress experienced a similar growth with accelerated fashion cycles, fast fashion, wider knowledge of underground trends, and an increasingly reciprocal, yet complex, interaction between subcultural styles and the mainstream.

**Background**

Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) focused on how personal aesthetics were used to elevate niche individuals and communities from the mainstream in post war United Kingdom. He described subcultures and musical genres as woven together in the 1970s; highly visible, instantly recognizable, and often deemed to have a stylistic unity. He explained, “[t]hroughout this book, I have interpreted subculture as a form of resistance in which
experienced contradictions and objections to [a] ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style” (1979, 133). The text shifted the dialogue about embodiment of difference among these people into a nuanced conversation rather than caricature, or with disdain. It built upon the cultural work of the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) to focus in large part on appearance without positioning it as frivolity or deviant, and with consideration of socialization contributing to style development and perceptions. Much of Hebdige’s focus was the production and then embodiment of the style, through the concert of bricolage and polysemy, which involved putting together repurposed items to create new function, fashion, value, and meaning for the wearer and those items. This book became a seminal much cited text, and recently there was an entire book devoted to analysis of it in a modern context (Gildart 2020). Throughout Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style, Muggleton (2000) focused on subculture and its style as more individualized, less structured, and decidedly postmodern, where the wearer experience is positioned as hierarchical to any viewer’s preconceived, possibly outmoded boundaries, although the viewer can go through their own experience with the aesthetics.

Each text was part of a wave of scholarship including other participants such as Thornton and McRobbie in the 1980s and 1990s and Featherstone, Hodkinson, Redhead, McKay, and Bennett in the 1990s to 2000s, expanding the scope and reach of subcultural studies and its subject matter, often with a nod or sometimes deeper focus on style, and creating a sort of canon for this niche. In recent years, authors Hodkinson (2002), Winge (2012), Haenfler (2006), Grimes and Dines (2020), and Williams (2009) have published books that included subcultural style content as well as numerous articles among them. Also, a myriad of others in varied disciplines have been involved in addressing the concepts of an evolving subcultural landscape
that has cultural relevance and historic significance in retrospect, specifically linking style with
gender, aging, new geographies, musical styles, body modifications, and other timely concepts.
For example, authors Strübel and Sklar (in press) examined the repurposing of the Fred Perry
polo shirt by youth subcultures and its simultaneous misappropriation with fringe political
groups, such as the Proud Boys.

**Defining the Aspects of Dress**

*Style* can be defined as, “a distinctive characteristic or way of expression; style in
clothing describes the lines that distinguish one form or shape from another (Kaiser 1998, 4, in
reference to previous authors Kefgen and Touchie-Specht, 1986, 186). The word style does
allude to what a subcultural enthusiast is trying to demonstrate with their appearance, but as
these lifestyles moved further into postmodernism the word *dress* seems more apt with its far
broader scope. We utilized explanations of *dress* from fashion and anthropology scholars Joanne
Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach Higgins (1965, 1992, 2000). First, they clarified the term *dress*
“not only signifies the apparel worn by men and women but also refers to the act of covering the
body with clothes and accessories” (1965, 1). Detail was explained as a system of nonverbal
communication that enhances human beings interaction as they move in space and time. As a
coded sensory system, dressing the body occurs when human beings modify their bodies visually
or through other sensory measures by manipulating color, texture, scent, sounds, and taste or by
supplementing their bodies with articles of clothing and accessories, and jewelry (Eicher 2000,
422). Their holistic and inclusive approach in consideration of the body and its supplements is a
strong match for subcultural style, because they explained body processes as a medium for the
non-verbal communication of identity, and that the context should be considered (Roach-Higgins
This paper aimed to review the progression in scholarship to determine what has evolved as dominant methods, topics, theories, and aspects of the dress experience, and understand the contemporary paradigms for analyzing subcultural identities and capital in a postmodern world.

**Method**

Using qualitative meta-analysis methodology, we explored approximately 125 total texts from 2000-2020. This study incorporated findings and phenomenological descriptions from academically oriented books, book chapters, and academic journal articles, which were then presented in a semi-structured chart system of coding. It is acknowledged by the authors that inherently the dissolving of strict boundaries to be more inclusive and modern also means we could not review every publication; thus, this was a convenience sample of a wide swath of representative content.

**Data Collection**

There are two common types of literature linking subculture and dress: those publications where both variables are primary, and other publications that focus on subculture or dress and discuss the other as contextual. We elected to include the first category as what we were mainly seeking, where subculture and dress were the root of the study. We decided to forego fashion history texts that mention a subculture in brief passing as a contextual time period. We noted the writing on subcultures that spend time on dress as potentially significant, as often there are lengthy elaborations on the dress experiences of their case studies.

The authors did keep track of over twenty museum and gallery exhibitions for comparison. Fashion in exhibition has become one of the audience drivers to archives in recent years and is now a growth industry, and we know this is an important parallel to consider. Furthermore, one of the authors of our study also works in the museum sector. Exhibitions and
their catalogues run in parallel to academic publishing and are generally scholarly and at times they are peer reviewed, including a growing movement to have university exhibitions count in the United States toward the tenure and promotion process. However, exhibitions are infrequent in nature due to the vast undertaking to mount a show. Although not all shows have a catalogue, some use an online format or video to document their content, and sometimes there is no secondary piece that has a lasting format for viewing and that might therefore be included in our review. As a result, the researchers of this study kept notes on this avenue without including exhibitions in the main analysis alongside academic publications.

The research also included for comparison a less comprehensive review of research and media including mass-market books, podcasts, documentaries, and online content such as Instagram feeds and blogs. As with exhibitions, journalism and the mass market content are frequently not peer reviewed, even if it is sometimes edited, and is often shorter in length, sometimes not using primary sources, and frequently does not include citations, all of which are accepted within those disciplines but not applicable for comparison in this study. However, we were interested in wider mediums as they have a faster dissemination speed, fewer barriers for entry, and provided context of research directions of public interest. This presented the opportunity to determine if academic publishing has caught up or matches the variety featured in the other formats. Also, as the concept of subculture can be inherently anti-structural, featuring outsiders and outliers, and consequently there is some self-publishing that by design is not meant for academic confines and unknowing audiences.

**Subject Selection**

We attempted to follow many of the same subcultures that Hebdige and Muggleton focused on such as punk or goth as they remain viable, and considered numerous others that
maintain similar characteristics such as straight edge, ravers, lolita, metalheads, emo, Riot Grrrl, and mods. To gather data, we performed numerous subcultural key word searches as well as reviewing citation lists from articles and from publisher websites.

We acknowledged some of the overlap of youth/music subcultures from fandom, but they do maintain their own aspects, so we excluded the numerous cosplay studies. Hip hop and LGBTQI+ scholarship is so comprehensive and the concepts so large that they were no longer deemed subcultural in the same manner as the scope of this study. But it is notable that within them are niche subcultures that did meet our parameters.

Finally, we also removed style groupings, consumer tribes, and trend influencers like modern festival bohemians, and criminal groups like street gangs, as well as hobbyists such as modern craft enthusiasts. These are all related to subculture, especially in the way social media has grown to create algorithms alluding to whole lifestyles structured to re-enforce these interests in style but differ from the root we were looking into.

**Data Analysis**

The publications were analyzed, and data was coded then entered into a spreadsheet that included: author, publication year, subculture featured, theory/concept addressed, research method. The spreadsheet also parsed out Eicher’s definition of *dress* into components including: “Modification of the body by manipulating color/textures/scent/sound/taste”; “Supplementation of the body with clothing, accessories, jewelry and other supplement items”; “Body modifications and supplements for a specific time and place/context”; “Non-verbal means of communication that enhances interaction”; “Body modifications and supplements that a specific social group makes available to members”; and “Body modifications and supplements function as alterants of body processes or as media for communication” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992; Eicher, 2000)
Data was also managed using NVivo software in order to discover patterns for determining methodological trends, priority aspects of dress, common subcultures, and other developments in the study of dress and subculture in this twenty-year window.

**Reliability and Limitations**

In an attempt to remove coding bias, the researchers utilized a flexible definition of subculture but with general parameters to have a scope of this paper and placed those against a clear definition of dress. Research reliability was demonstrated through four authors reviewing the content. Generational differences among the research team and differing levels of familiarity with subcultures further reduced bias and expanded the content included. However, consistency in the data assessment indicated that there was high interrater reliability. Reliability was further confirmed when the second author independently rated the data and analyzed the coding using thematic analysis in NVivo.

**Results and Discussion**

**Dissemination and Publication**

While this research highlighted the diverse nature of subcultures in the modern century, it was apparent that the scholarship since Hebdige (1979) and Muggleton (2000) has continued their lineage, paid homage to it, contrasted their themes, and developed new angles. Scholars following them have continuously studied subculture and dress from both the old and new perspectives and continue to cite Hebdige especially as a landmark work. For example, book chapters in edited volumes including Suzanne Szostak-Pierce’s 1999 *Even Further: The Power of Subculture Styles in Techno Culture* and Maria Buszek’s 2019 *Clothes Clothes Clothes Punk Punk Punk Women Women Women Women* both speak on dress and subculture from a modern perspective. An article by Chaney and Goulding entitled *Dress Transformation, and Conformity*
in the Heavy Rock Subculture (2016) also centered around the topic and provided great insight into how certain subgroups view dress within their subculture. Andi Harriman’s Some Wear Leather Some Wear Lace (2014) and Vivien Goldman’s Revenge of the She Punks (2019) are both on academic imprints and emphasize the intersection of dress and subculture.

There is an increase of subcultural publications that can be attributed to a variety of factors, including a general acceptance of the material within academia, the increased publication requirements of professors’ workplace advancement, or simply the longevity of the subculture that provides more material to reflect upon. There are generations of scholars who grew up entirely within the context of postmodern subcultures, and they are now in positions to professionally document those worldviews. Conceptually, subculture has always been more diverse than the literature acknowledged, therefore new writings about it allow different perspectives to be addressed. Enough time has passed that many of the 1960s-1990s subcultures have witnessed the gradual evolution of their respective streetstyle and subcultural style, which have had a lasting impact on mainstream fashion cycles. In previous decades, academic work on subculture had been marginalized as it was outside of the standard for scholarly inquiry, but now it is more normalized. Individuals who came from within those cultures are increasingly hired into research position where they write self-reflective works. Furthermore, funding agencies recognize the value in the work as it has shown longevity and influence. Additionally, there are more outlets for publication with journals and publishers that have specialized focus, such as Punk and Post-Punk, the Journal of Popular Culture, Metal Music Studies, and the Journal of Youth Studies.

There were multiple articles that included discussion of additional characteristics of the subculture such as community, subcultural symbols, performance, motivation, theory, and
consumption. While those papers were primarily focused on a different variable, they included considerable dress content.

There are few academic books chronicling the dress of specific subcultures. History books and biographies by leading authors of the origins of punk style development and marketing, for example, are starting to be published by mass market publishers including *The Life and Times of Malcolm McLaren* by Paul Gorman (2020), *Defying Gravity: Jordan’s Story* by Jordan Mooney herself and co-author Cathi Unsworth (2019) and numerous texts on Vivienne Westwood. There are, however, multiple books about *street style* and subcultures that straddle the academic and mass-market, written by curators, historians, fashion designers, and consultants. Examples started prior to 2000 with titles such as *Surfers, Soulies, Skinheads, and Skaters* (1996) by Amy de la Haye and Cathie Dingwall which was object specific and reflected upon the curatorial ideas, practices and methodologies employed, and more recently an increase in publications such as with *This is a T-Shirt* (2019) by Bobby Hundreds, and *The World Atlas of Street Fashion* (2017) by Caroline Cox, not to mention Ted Polhemus’ seminal publications especially his overview of subcultures and their dress in *Streetstyle* (1994) and other texts (1988, 1996, 2000, 2020) that pre- and post-date Muggleton’s 2000 work. There has been an increase in mass-market books that highlighted this content such as King Adz and Wilma Stone’s (2018) *This is Not Fashion* or Magnus Walker’s (2017) autobiography *Urban Outlaw*. Viv Albertine’s autobiography, which presents extensive detail on the subculture and dress, is a noteworthy mainstream publication coming from the subculturalist who was not directly involved in the fashion industry. Outside of academia, podcasts such as *Dressed, Articles of Interest/99% Invisible*, and *Radikaal* sometimes have episodes about the interface of dress and subculture.
Finally, there was also more emphasis in academia on dress and style, with a high number of works that highlight subculture. Examples included the Metropolitan Museum of Art *Punk Chaos to Couture* exhibit with its corresponding catalogue (2013) and the *Dress Body and Culture* series from Bloomsbury that features titles that are monographs and edited volumes, a few of which address aspects of subcultures.

In summary, while there were more publications that contain some content on both subculture and dress, there were few that distinctly examined them as the main topic. An increasing number of pieces that focused on subculture within the humanities and social sciences included discussion of clothing, yet it was rarely a primary topic. The data suggests the publication of journal articles on the association of dress and subculture peaked in approximately 2011-15. In 2020 there were more writings than before, but not as many as the researchers of this study speculated to match the pace of the mass media formats and increased opportunities to publish.

**Aspects of Dress in Scholarship**

Within Eicher’s broad definition of *dress*, some components are more frequently explored than others during this twenty-year analysis window. Considering and reviewing dress as nonverbal expression was identified in multiple papers. This was as a signifier of community, knowledge, or identity performance, or embodiment.

In the texts where dress was the primary variable authors provided a more complex examination of Eicher’s explanation of dress. On the contrary, in those texts where dress was more a label, or secondary variable at best, utilized some base characteristics from Eicher, such as the idea of adornment, but did not parse out multiple aspects of the robust definition.
Another popular way to consider dress was contextually. The context of the wearer included, but was not limited to daily life, conventions, meetings, themed parties, concerts, festivals, galleries, online forums, and specific geographic areas. This was especially true of discussions of dress in subcultural spaces, such as shows, but other times exploring variability of their dress choices in other arenas, such as work and family life. One example was Spracklen and Spracklen (2014) who discussed goth dress at festivals and in their everyday lives and Weiner, (2018) with the discussion of punk dress of the 1970s and 1980s England that was not based on art, design, and spectacle, but used everyday dress and mass market products.

At the time of this writing, there was a noticeable focus on body modifications or supplementation, which corresponded with the growth in tattoo, piercing, consumer culture, and social media quick scroll visuals. Those are contemporary topics, but some texts also reviewed those characteristics in historical context.

For example, Gregory (2002) discussed male performers in the glam subculture and their use of “glittery, shine and soft fabrics such as velvet, satin and lurex, leather clothing, spangled, shiny or brightly colored platform soled shoes and soft flat slippers (39-40).” Another example is Winge (2012) who explained “The Lolita aesthetic emphasizes features of Victorian-era girls’ dress, such as lace, ruffles, high necklines, and voluminous skirts” (48) or “Accessories may include a small purse, stuffed animal (i.e., teddy bear or Hello Kitty), and/or a parasol” (53).

Few texts focused on the production or consumption of dress with the exception of the aforementioned Goldman book on female punks with its chapter Money: Are We Our Stuff. Author Sklar’s 2018-2021 publications frequently focused on this merchandising and consuming arena with pieces about learning, expression, community bonding, gender, and history centered in the making, acquiring, wearing, disposal space of subcultural ephemera.
Major Groups Within the Scholarship

Punk, lolita, goth, and rave (EDM) have been subcultures of interest in the past and still maintained relevance in the contemporary studies we examined. While large subcultures have been studied considerably, research on smaller subcultures was very difficult to find. There are a variety of singular, or less frequently studied groups, that have minimal publications, such as a straight edge (Haenfler 2012; Williams 2006) and retrofuturistic groups, such as steampunk that exist primarily online (e.g., Strübel 2014; Strübel et al. 2016). Thus, much of the content remains focused on the traditional subcultures, but there are publications covering new demographics, subcultures, and niches within.

The other way in which new content developed and was observable was in some growth regarding diversity and inclusivity. Subcultures are being examined from new perspectives around race, geography, gender, and sexuality. But again, this provided increased documentation on those lived experiences within dress, often as adornment or in context, but rarely was it a complete conversation about the intersectionality issues of race or geography, subculture, and dress, for example.

As previously mentioned, Hip Hop and LGBTQ+ scholarship became so broad, and moved into the mainstream enough, that when their texts dive into their subcultures’ dress it is a place where intersectionality shines. For example, texts on the Afro punk movement (e.g., Pritchard 2017; Ramírez-Sánchez 2008) however mostly in the popular media and not in large numbers with academic journals and publishing houses (e.g., books such as Amber Clifford-Napoleone’s 2017 Queerness in Heavy Metal Music featured a chapter on leather, and Shaun Cole’s 2000 Don We Now Our Gay Apparel featured a chapter called Trash Glamour Punk.

Common Methods
We also assessed the publications based on how the research was performed and its relationship to the analysis of dress/subculture. Researchers of any oeuvre develop the best methodology to learn about a topic according to the context and time the research is performed within. Thus, in this era of our study from 2000-2020 it was expected using the Internet (e.g., netnography) would be a popular method to identify and connect with the people within a subculture, as well as see the dress ephemera and observe data pertaining to their topic. There were still some projects where the main methods of research included but are not limited to ethnographic study, interviews (informal and formal and in-person usually), and participant observation at settings of mutual engagement (e.g., festivals, conventions, shows, both online and in-person). This is presented in Table 1 in the appendix.

The popular method of virtual qualitative studies (i.e., netnography) within active use of chat rooms, online interview participation, sampling of blogs/social networks/online platforms including YouTube began to thrive in approximately 2010 and has continued to flourish since. In the years shortly prior, those scholars were starting to do more online work booking at films, forums, social networks, blogs, online platforms, and using the Internet in a varied way.

One goal of this research was to determine if researchers’ access to subjects grew or diminished, with less participant observation and more Internet surveys in chat rooms, or if it was the contrary where the researchers knew of more events to go to and had the ability to talk directly to more people online. This method of using social media, chat rooms, online surveys, and email expands the reach of many researchers and access, however there are different possible perspectives than when doing fieldwork, as online is more anecdotal or curated imagery than seeing people in their live settings and talking to them in real time. Therefore, the Internet offers both positive and negative considerations when examine dress. Online observations can
offer large amounts of suitable and readily accessible information about dress, but it lacks the
richness of the natural setting where one can see how clothing was embodied and utilized. That
method has value but challenges. Analysis of descriptions of dress, or seeing static images, is
always different than real-time field work. Therefore, it is more suited to historical analysis.

Another consideration is the impact of material culture studies, where the researchers
take a body of material (i.e., objects) as the prime focus for study (Prown 1982). Since the 1990s
this approach has gained increasing usage and recognition but is a place where continued growth
is possible for examining symbolic communication and metaphorical cultural expression.
Clothing is significant to daily life, and an examination of it as material culture provides
evidence of how people understand themselves, because life histories and meaning are embodied
in the objects by the people who created and/or used them (Grassby 2005; Prown 1982).

A general lack of items in institutions is logical as up to this point there has been less
focus in institutions to collect subcultural content, combined with dress objects being large,
requiring specialized preservation techniques, and often due to the nature of their frequent wear
and fragility of textiles, and sometimes ephemeral relationship to youth, they are less commonly
preserved within the community. This also has been a challenge for the authors who have done
archival research, and as mentioned, one works in the museum sector, and there is a dearth of
subcultural dress objects within institutions. More commonly, scholars utilize observational
analysis and examine dress as material culture and insights on human relationships without
access to historic artifacts. For example, Chaney and Goulding (2016) explored the construction
and performance of identity in the heavy rock subculture by examining stylization and dress as a
form of material culture, specifically as a means of ritualistic self-transformation for
participation in rock festivals and communities. Amy de la Haye’s *Travellers’ Boots, Body-

Material culture has generally been examined by individual researchers with private individuals or collectors. Examples include closet ethnographies or similar approaches such as Sklar (2012) who videoed and photographed self-identified punk participants showing items from their closet and when available put on their bodies their workplace attire and their “punk” attire. Niche collectors have been a source of material culture scholarship such as Live Love Shirts: A Collection of Hardcore Clothing by t-shirt collector Orhun Oner. The subcultural style collectors who function within the resale markets eBay, Stock X, Real Real, Instagram are often using material culture practices to become vastly knowledgeable about the history and disseminate this content on social media and their websites.

While not always material culture, there are an increasing number of archives that feature subcultural content including related aspects of dress including the Museum of Youth Culture in London that has photography and some dress objects, the Leather Museum in Chicago that has catalogues, photography, and a few dress items that overlap with music and youth subcultures, punk archives at the DC Public Library, Emory University, New York University, University of Maryland that all have zines, correspondence, and print media that indicate advertising, styles, and where production and shopping happened, and places such as the National Museum of African American History and Culture or the ONE Archive as University of Southern California have comprehensive archives on hip hop or the LGBT+ movement and within those there are catalogues, fliers, or other routes to do scholarship on dress niche subcultures within the scene, but not lots of dress items themselves. Graduate student, Summer Lee, has been collecting items from the 2000s emo scene as an approach to rectify this, and larger, Lethal Amounts Gallery in
Los Angeles has been exhibiting and writing on subcultural style artifacts themselves, as mentioned throughout this paper that exhibitions and related are a growth area, and now some galleries have begun collecting to promote more scholarship, as have some university collections that are changing their collecting missions to promote diversity and inclusivity, as well as connect to popular culture and contemporary student curriculum. The Victoria & Albert Museum in London not only stores subcultural artifacts but has also examined subcultures, marginalized groups, and fringe groups in Great Britain through notable exhibitions, such as Carol Tulloch’s 2004 exhibition, *Black British Style* that featured hip hop fashion and the 2014 exhibition, *Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s* that featured a variety of clothing from the London club scene.

**Dominant Concepts and Themes**

The results indicate there were themes that dominated the results of the scholarship. Certainly, there may be articles supporting or contrasting the cultural zeitgeist, but trends emerged in scholarship including within this niche. The most common themes are discussed below. In addition to these themes, there were articles that included additional variables of their subculture, such as common community behaviors, subcultural graphic design symbols, performance, motivation, theory, and consumption.

Related, we integrated information on how the papers were structured, such as models, frameworks, concepts or citations that were used to construct the content. Almost all work in this area cited Hebdige, either as a point of foundation or to provide contrasting new perspective, yet fewer cite Muggleton although his work did advance the idea of postmodernism that would become so much of the Internet era. This includes his style-related ideas around bricolage and its design components, especially as works around do-it-yourself (DIY; Luvaas, 2013) have grown
more common and overlap with scholarship around vintage and alternative economies (Le Zotte, 2017) as well as the modern craft movement (Winge and Stalp 2014; Campbell, 2005). Theories and concepts around authenticity or identity were dominant, and sometimes these were partnered with intersections around concepts such as aging in works from Andy Bennett and others, including how appearance manifestations change.

Overall, most do not use named theories or models. Grounded theory research focused on social and historical narratives are more common. Thus, the methodological location for data collection has changed, but the data analysis has not shifted greatly. The body of literature around dress grows as it is highly interdisciplinary, and methodologies and models from material culture and consumer behavior, for example, expand the perspectives.

**Streetstyle as potential subculture**

As previously discussed, there are multiple publications that overlap or conflate subcultural style and street style (i.e., the metaphor for everyday style; Polhemus 1994) and chronicle its history as their main publication concept. In addition to the aforementioned mass market or cross over texts, there are publications on academic presses and journal articles pertaining to this. *Sneakers: Fashion, Gender, and Subculture* (2016) by Yuniya Kawamura is an example of multiple that can overlap with subculture in many ways, but also deal with mass market trends, individual style, and it can be confusing where the lines are. The same was true back in 1994 with the Victoria & Albert Museum 1994 exhibition *Street Style* curated by Amy de la Haye, Ted Polhemus, and Cathie Dingwall. Much of what was discussed has been dubbed *subculture* by others, and this may have contributed to the blurred language, as well as internationally there may be differences in how the two phrases are employed.

**Social Roles**
Another common theme in subcultural research emphasizes the use of dress to communicate and react against prescribed roles in society, such as age, gender, and sexuality. In studies of women in punk and men in goth, dress was frequently used for role distancing or the performance of identities that contradict societal expectations. For example, Riot Grrrls often subverted sartorial accoutrements elements of childhood and femininity to ironically disrupt stereotypes of girls and women (Hopkins 1999; Marcus 2010; Schilt 2003)

**Commodifying Style**

Reaction against commercialization of style is an angle there were multiple studies addressing. There were ideas about alternative economies as well as overlaps with the mass marketing of subcultural style and reaction, opposition and appreciation of products being made for wider audiences. There were discussions of bricolage from the perspective of item acquisition, which often refer to Hebdige (1979), and the re-use from subcultural members of mass products and then mass products re-using subcultural style. This also relates to some papers on the production methods of the items themselves.

**Authenticity**

Much of the above relates to discussions around authenticity. There is an ongoing dialogue of authors such as Thornton (1995), Williams (2009), Lee and Ferrarese (2016), Haenfler (2006) that examined how specific items and ensembles present authenticity. These conversations were generally around differentiation between those with the lifestyle and content knowledge, such as musical involvement, and those who are unknowing or uninvolved yet utilize the styles (i.e., the *poseur*). This resulted in studies about the rise of subcultural style diffusion and its challenges with authenticity because of the wider knowledge through the internet and fast fashion, and lower barriers for entry to acquire the artifacts. There were papers about affirming
community involvement, individual expression, and how one gathers the subcultural capital and knowledge to be considered authentic to themselves and others.

**Escapism**

There were some texts that described the use of clothing as a way to escape from everyday life. They discussed a sense of alienation, prolonged childhood and deferring adult responsibilities, costume as performance, and joy from having two senses of self visually explored and embodied. This work is often tied to fandom culture and cosplay, focused on free imagination, fantasy, fulfil urge to perform, sense of curiosity, but some has shown up in the subcultural studies included in this analysis. For some, dress exploration has been a gateway to drift from one identity to another before committing to other aspects of life.

**Conclusions and Implications**

In the forty-year span since the publication of those fundamental writings, there has been continued shift in subculture and in dress. Within academic publishing, this content has been explored and researched on the topic is expanding more than ever, with more researchers capable of providing fresh demographic angles and their own reflexive perspectives. Moreover, the forty-year period has provided more opportunity from which to draw a wealth of new content. Because subculture is reinterpreted with each generation, research on dress within active niches is still relevant. However, while academic publishing on subcultures and their dress has increased it did not match the interest from the public, which is evident in media formats outside of academia. The amount of scholarship focused on uniting subculture and dress is still minimal in general dress and subcultural studies.

We concluded that while many individuals wrote about subculture and acknowledge the presence and primacy of dress, many did not make it a core variable of their study. The number
of pieces in our study that were focused on subculture, yet also addressed the importance of style in some manner to add depth to their context, validated that there could be more subcultural studies with it as a primary topic of interest to that readership. The number of pieces in our study on dress that highlighted a subculture were fewer, but their parity and lack of depth provides great room for growth with the impact on the fashion industry, on trends, and on cultural heritage especially in marginalized cultures. As fashion and dress journals and publishers aim to cover more content and increase diversity and inclusivity, this certainly provides areas for future research and possibly by many of the same researchers and their data re-analyzing it from that perspective to write companion pieces.

The recent shift from the physical dimension to the frequently virtual realm has affected individuals’ way of visual communication regarding subculture and opened many new opportunities for how to analyze the lived experience. The rise of the Internet, fast fashion, technology, and new methods of communication have changed the way people express their subcultural embodiment, and also unlocked a wealth of historical documents and images to reinvestigate with a modern lens.
References


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*Clothing Cultures*, 6:2. doi: 10.1386/cc_00015_1


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**Appendix**

*Table 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment of Years</th>
<th>Popular Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2005</td>
<td>• Lit review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examination of press, magazines, films, newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observation of visual cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2010</td>
<td>• Participant observation and collection of Phenomenological Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2011-2015</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation (online, in-person)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview (single person, focus group at places of mutual engagement and set-up/scheduled interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual resources - photography, performance, textual, music videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sampling of SOCIAL NETWORKS and ONLINE SPACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More authors are active scene members so personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2016-2020</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fieldwork at conventions and places of mutual engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Almost always ethnographic methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less formal interviews (stories via participants and less structure)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>