

# Sheffield Hallam University

*Finding the female fan: A feminist ethnography of popular music in Sheffield.*

ROBSON, Josephine E.

Available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/20602/>

## A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

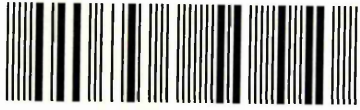
This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Please visit <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/20602/> and <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html> for further details about copyright and re-use permissions.

101 835 369 0



**Return to Learning Centre of issue**  
**Fines are charged at 50p per hour**

**REFERENCE**



ProQuest Number: 10701249

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10701249

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

**Finding the female fan:  
a feminist ethnography of popular music  
in Sheffield**

Josephine Robson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2006

# CONTENTS

Abstract	(ii)
Acknowledgements	(iii)
<b>Chapter one: Introduction</b>	1
Aims of study	1
Methodological rationale	2
Context of study	5
The research journey	8
Thesis structure	11
<b>Chapter two: Discourses of fandom</b>	16
Fandom as pathology	17
Fandom as passivity	22
Fandom as productivity	26
Fandom as pleasure	35
Conclusion	42
<b>Chapter three: Music listeners as music makers</b>	44
Case studies of place: Milton Keynes and Merseyside	44
Motivations for making music	49
Mechanisms of exclusion	56
Conclusion	69
Research themes and questions	70
<b>Chapter four: Methodology</b>	72
Why feminism?	73
Why ethnography?	75
Doing feminist ethnography	79
Generating a conceptual framework	90
Ethical issues	93
Analytical issues	98
<b>Chapter five: Mapping Sheffield's Scene/s</b>	102
Unpacking the scene	102
Steel city	105
Narratives of Sheffieldness	109
Music city	111
From the Little Mester to the music maker	117
Sheffield pathways: dance versus live	121
Gendered strategies of inclusion: competence, collectivism, commitment	128
Mediated scenes	131
Music makers	136
Music listeners	143
Conclusion	148
<b>Chapter six: Belief and Velodrome 2000</b>	150
Becoming a band:	
fandom, friendship and family	151
Belief and Sheffield: the 'local life'	153
Making it narratives: 'belief is everything'	155

Supporter fans	160
Doing display: humour and hardiness	163
Bandmark one: the record company showcase	165
Bandmark two: the band competition	170
Bandmark three: the working men's club	172
Velodrome 2000	178
Becoming a band:	
fandom, friendship and family	179
Velodrome 2000 and Sheffield:	
the 'translocal' life	181
Making it narratives: do it yourself	183
Doing display: 'bending' genders	185
Supporter fans	188
Bandmark one: the independent single release	193
Bandmark two: the John Peel session	195
Bandmark three: the all-women group	197
Conclusion	200
<b>Chapter seven: Pulp and their People</b>	203
Finding fans	204
Becoming fans	206
From the margins to the mainstream:	
'Sheffield's longest overnight success story'	219
Becoming a band	222
Pulp People: community or hierarchy?	227
Pulp and fame: transformation	230
Forbidden fantasies: the dialectic of desire	236
Pulp and Sheffield: re-location	242
Pulp and the 'mainstream': dislocation	246
Pulp and their people: a postscript	250
Conclusion	254
<b>Chapter eight: Conclusion</b>	256
Finding the female fan: empirical conclusions	257
Finding the female fan: theoretical conclusions	267
Finding the female fan: political conclusions	278
<b>Bibliography</b>	285
<b>Appendix 1</b>	
Generating data:	
sample questionnaires, follow up letters and interview schedules	298
<b>Appendix 2</b>	
Preparing data:	
transcription notation features and interview extract	301

## ABSTRACT

Using the female fan as a contradictory metaphor of access and exclusion, this thesis investigates how popular music is used within and forms meaning for women and girls' lives. Relations between music makers and listeners are typically positioned to reinforce difference and inequality, and the image of 'hysterical' female fans screaming at boybands and rock groups is a familiar one. Fandom is thus feminised, sexualised and frequently demonised: rarely is it recognised as the motivating factor for making music.

This is the starting point for a longitudinal feminist ethnography that explores the ways in which gender inequalities are constructed and contested through everyday music use. Drawing on social constructionist perspectives of gender as a 'relational category' (Cohen, 2001) and 'situated doing' (West and Zimmerman, 1991), I examine how gendered musical practices and relationships are shaped through three research themes: meanings of fandom, 'making it' and place. These themes are located in a particular spatial, cultural and temporal (1996-2006) context: the live rock and pop scene/s in the city of Sheffield, England. Building on the ethnographic work of Finnegan (1989; 1997) and Cohen (1991; 1997; 2001), I identify a range of particular and 'extra-local' barriers women face, from masculinist narratives of 'Sheffieldness' to the 'structural exclusion' from male dominated 'pathways', spaces and places. Strategies which challenge exclusionary practices are detailed within three ethnographic case studies, selected to reflect the diversity of genre, gender, generation, social class and success that I have found within Sheffield's music scene/s.

Two case studies of mixed-gender 'amateur' bands and their 'interpretive community' of 'fans' explore the shifting affective alliances and interpretations generated through significant cultural events I call *landmarks*: from the Radio One John Peel session to record company showcase. The third case study investigates the dialectical relationship between 'mainstream' success and gendered access, through analysing Pulp's journey along the 'continuum of success' (Kirschner, 1998). All three case studies shed light on the flexible meanings of fandom, 'making it', scene and place, demonstrating how 'mechanisms of exclusion' (Coates, 1997) and access are negotiated through a complex interplay of spatial, aesthetic, ideological and industrial conditions, which variably serve to construct and constrain women's musical practice within - and beyond - the local.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to all the ‘fans’ that took part in this study and shared their knowledge and lives so generously.

I would also like to thank:

- the numerous people who have supported me at Sheffield Hallam University, including Dr. Caroline Dryden, Ros Brunt, Peter Hartley and Feona Attwood. I am especially grateful to Professor Chas Critcher for believing that I had the ‘right words, if not necessarily in the right order’

- all my friends and family, particularly my dear Mum for her constant encouragement

- members of Respect and Reaction for the collective and creative pleasures of ‘making it’

- Frank Wilkes, and all former staff and students at Red Tape Studios

- Mike Jones and Helen Saunders for their friendship, empathy and inspiration

- Ann-Marie Marshall for initiating the Harmony ‘dream’ and Elly Tams, for working with me so tirelessly to realise it

*The thesis is dedicated to my ‘husbandio’ and best friend, Gerry*



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have enjoyed a life-long fascination and connection with popular music, and through popular music, to others. As consumer and fan, 'amateur' music maker, recording artist, 'failed' pop star, and more recently, music industry lecturer and trainer, these overlapping identities have furnished my social, emotional and professional development. The one common factor that has been reproduced across various contexts is the conspicuous absence of other women - with the exception of 'mainstream' fandom. The impetus for conducting a feminist ethnography of music making and listening in Sheffield, stemmed from a desire to find out 'why'? As this brief biography demonstrates, epistemological decisions about the who, what, where, when and why of research are fundamentally political decisions, informed by the researcher's location and status - both within and without the academy - along with the interests, passions and assumptions we bring to the study. These 'politics of selection' shape the entire research process, but are frequently absent from the final product (McRobbie, 1991, p. 18). The purpose of this introduction is therefore two-fold: to present an overview of the main aims of the thesis whilst simultaneously deconstructing the research rationale.

### **Aims of study**

This thesis explores the representations, experiences, constraints and relationships between music makers and listeners in a particular research 'field' - Sheffield's popular music scene/s - through the analysis of three ethnographic case studies of mixed gender bands and their 'fans.' Being a 'fan' is the most identifiable and widespread of all Anglo-American popular music roles and yet the study of fandom has been pronounced to be in its 'infancy' (Harris, 1998). Fandom is also a construct that has become synonymous with femininity. With the exception of a few key studies however<sup>1</sup>, female pop fandom is an

---

<sup>1</sup> Including McRobbie and Garber (1976/1991), Ehrenreich et al. (1992/1997) and Vroomen (2004). A range of key texts will be reviewed in chapter two.

underdeveloped area of academic inquiry, typically dismissed or stigmatized due to a combination of elitism and male-dominated theorizing, established principally during the *culture and society* tradition and perpetuated within British subcultural studies.

Feminist research has also contributed to this 'discursive exclusion' (Frith, 1992), for whilst the feminist-inspired ethnographic turn in cultural studies over the last two decades has focused on the values and pleasures women derive from traditionally denigrated genres, popular music fandom remains neglected.<sup>2</sup> This exclusion is largely due to the paternalistic legacy of 'passivity', which continues to influence critical interpretations of the subordinate and complementary role that fandom plays in the stabilization of hegemonic gender relations (Bayton, 1997; Coates, 1998). Women performers fare somewhat better<sup>3</sup>, although studies tend to cluster around those artists and groups who appear to subvert the *typical* place of women in pop and rock: Riot Grrrl rather than Girls Aloud. I aim to redress these elitist assumptions and absences by examining how women, and the people they perform with and/or listen to, construct and make sense of their gendered, relational identities - as fans, performers and 'consumers-as-producers' (Willis, 1990) - through everyday music use.

### **Methodological rationale**

Due to my focus on the lived experience and relationships generated through popular music practice, I needed a combination of research methods that would enable me to observe and talk to music makers and listeners in context, and over time. Two landmark ethnographic studies provide the framework for my methodological rationale: Ruth

---

<sup>2</sup> A key example of this continued exclusion is the scholarly anthology, *Theorizing Fandom* (1998), for although not all of the essays are specifically feminist, or all of the fan cultures female-led, the various worlds of female fandom include: science fiction (MacDonald, 1998); slash writing (Cicioni, 1998); 'quality' TV (Harris, 1998); post-war wrestling (Dell, 1998) and 'product refund' (Classen, 1998). Pop is conspicuous by its absence.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Evans (1994); O'Brien, K (1995); O'Brien, L (1995); Raphael (1995); Reynolds and Press (1995); Whiteley (2000) and Burns and LaFrance (2002).



Finnegan's (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making in an English Town*, and Sara Cohen's (1991) *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*. Both texts highlight the benefits of studying local music and related activities as 'social practice and process' (Cohen, 1993), providing detailed empirical insights into the specific conditions that facilitate different kinds of social and musical networks. Crucially, both writers also note the absence of women in the rock and pop 'worlds' of Milton Keynes and Merseyside, an absence that Cohen (1991) defines as 'structural exclusion'. Drawing on notions of 'hidden' musicianship, I situate the themes of exclusion *and* access within the context of Sheffield's rock and pop scene/s, to explore the ways in which women negotiate place-specific and more widely established barriers, in order to participate in musical practice.

Wanting to compare and contrast common and locally produced 'mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion' (Coates, 1997) in a range of social and musical settings, I set out to locate and observe a variety of music makers and listeners in a range of performance contexts. In the first year of research (1996-1997), I attended as many gigs as budget would allow, often going to three or four a week. Out of this preliminary fieldwork as a participant observer, I narrowed the focus to three distinctive ethnographic case studies of 'local' mixed-gender bands and 'fans': pop-rock act Belief; punk-pop group Velodrome 2000; and the more widely known 'alternative pop'<sup>4</sup> group, Pulp. Situating the case studies within the 'contested' (Cohen, 1997) construct of 'scene' enables a holistic, conceptual approach to studying popular music use that contextualises industrial, aesthetic and social dimensions (Straw, 1991/1997).

---

<sup>4</sup> As defined by Nigel Coxon, Pulp's A&R (Artist and Repertoire) worker at Island records (Storey, 2003, p. 235).

For the purposes of this ethnography, the research field operates on three levels. Firstly, as an empirical setting to examine so-called grass roots music making and listening, for popular music practice almost always originates within the context of local scenes; secondly, as a particular place - Sheffield - producing a cluster of material, cultural, spatial and social conditions which, in turn, shape particular musical activities and related social networks; and thirdly, as an imaginative, emotional resource - 'Sheffield' - conjuring romantic constructs of Northern-ness, authenticity and community. I connect to all three levels simultaneously. Sheffield is the place where this study is located because it is the city I live and work in: the place I call home. It also has a rich and varied tradition of popular music making, from Dave Berry and Def Leppard to Pulp, the Human League and Arctic Monkeys. These visible success stories are products of a widespread and habituated culture of aspirant, 'amateur' groups, a culture that the intermittent international success of the few helps to sustain.

The constantly evolving interdependent relationship between the global political economy of music production and local practice is a critical one. As Tony Kirschner succinctly puts it: 'no musician [fan, or indeed researcher] is raised in a void' (1998, p. 251). Whereas Finnegan's ethnography highlights the role of 'hidden' musicians and the value that involvement in musical 'pathways' provides in the context of urban living, Cohen (1991) is more specifically concerned with the ways in which musicians attempt to 'make it' in the wider music industry. Building on Kirschner's (1998) notion of the 'continuum of success', the comparative case studies seek to clarify how meanings of 'making it' and 'fan'/performer relations are variously constructed according to their position on the continuum.

## Context of study

Generating the research themes and ethnographic data has been an interactive and ongoing process spanning the last decade: the context of study can be traced back even further. I began my relationship with popular music as a fan. Although Elvis Presley was an unabashed first love, my adolescent years were shaped by two contrasting and significant genres: disco and punk. Both created cultural spaces within which women became more visibly active - and thus accessible - and I embraced a host of pop and 'punk' performers, including Debbie Harry and Chrissie Hynde. My sister's record collection revealed two further inspirational gems: Carole King's *Tapestry* and Joni Mitchell's *Blue*. Collectively, these role models provided the initial context and stimulus for wanting to create music, but the factors enabling the realization of my subsequent career as a recording artist and songwriter were equally varied.

From an early age, I displayed a passion for singing that was encouraged by my family, developed collectively within church and school choirs, and honed through practice and additional parental support via singing and piano lessons. I began studying music 'O' level, and it was with other people in that class, two of whom were women, that I formed my first band. I had already begun to emulate favoured singer songwriters on a much-cherished home piano, but this was the first time I had collaborated and performed original material with other musicians - generating an affinity for band culture that remains to this day. Making music became a 'way of life' (Finnegan, 1989), as it did for many of my (largely male) contemporaries. I recorded my first original demo<sup>5</sup> in 1981 at the age of seventeen and after years of writing, recording and playing around Sheffield in a number of groups, I finally realized the symbolic goal that spurs the vast majority of

---

<sup>5</sup> An abbreviation of demonstration tape/CD, typically containing three of the act's most definitive songs.

aspirant 'pop acts'<sup>6</sup> to make music - signing what I then considered to be a long-term recording and publishing contract with Chrysalis Records and Music,<sup>7</sup> with the band Respect.

For eighteen months, we lived the life of proto pop stars. We co-wrote and released a single with the Human League's Phil Oakey and spent six months recording the first album in a costly London studio. Before its release however, we - along with approximately one third of the roster - were unceremoniously dropped. When the deal collapsed in April 1991, so did the band, rapidly unraveling a previously close-knit group identity forged on the twin poles of creativity and friendship, and sustained - over a number of line-up changes and years - through a mutual and consciously formulated desire to 'make it'. I subsequently sought refuge in a degree course at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), where I began trying to make sense of what had been a devastating experience.

The context of higher education was empowering in several significant ways. Although popular music wasn't a component of the Communication Studies degree I had enrolled upon, the library contained several classic texts, including Simon Frith's *Sociology of Rock* (1978) and revised *Sound Effects* (1983), which I consumed avidly, realising, with a jolt, that what I had assumed to be personal/professional failings were, in fact, underpinned by a principal economic strategy adopted by major record companies: mergers, takeovers and acquisitions. The late 1980s had been a dynamic period for the global music industry. Multinational hardware/media conglomerates such as the Sony

---

<sup>6</sup> Drawing on Jones (1997), I use this term to refer specifically to popular music makers who, regardless of genre, aspire to popularity beyond the local, to the status of signed musician and the assumed trappings of success: albums, tours, fans and so forth.

<sup>7</sup> As a result of the band's commercial orientation and the combined 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) of two key 'cultural intermediaries' (Negus, 1992): our manager Jack Stevens (formerly of RCA records) and producer, Chris Heaton (formerly of the band, Landscape).



Corporation recognised the strategic value of acquiring ‘software’ or artists to complement their portfolios, acquiring CBS Records in 1987 for two billion dollars. This strategy of ‘horizontal integration’ remains common, but the acquisition that impacted on my musical career was the EMI–Chrysalis takeover in 1989, the very year Respect was signed. Initially purchasing 50% of the Chrysalis group, EMI’s £69 million undoubtedly contributed to the rash of new signings around this time, many of whom were also culled, along with employees in roles duplicated between the two companies, when EMI took up the £30 million option for the other half in 1991.<sup>8</sup>

It was also a crucial time of self and social discovery as I found a diverse intellectual framework and language for developing ideas, precipitated by the choice of undergraduate course - the interdisciplinary field of Communication Studies - combining linguistics, psychology and sociology with a range of paradigms, including Marxism and Feminism. This course encouraged the theoretical diversity evident in my work, founded through a growing commitment to several fundamental feminist principles<sup>9</sup> that have similarly been drawn from materialist, postmodern and post-structuralist perspectives - and grounded in a desire to promote social change. Angela McRobbie’s *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991) provided the key introduction and springboard for my subsequent engagement with a range of feminisms, and I continue to find her writings persuasive and provocative. The feminist tenet ‘the personal is political’ also encouraged me to address and re-evaluate a deeper ambivalence surrounding my contradictory experiences as a frequently isolated woman participating in a male-dominated industry and culture, by

---

<sup>8</sup> Along with major buyouts of independent labels, this practice is also evident *within* companies, producing similar consequences. For example, Sony’s restructure from a three-label model (Epic/Columbia/S2) to UK/International split resulted in a ‘rationalisation’ of both staff and artists (*Music Week*, 16/12/02).

<sup>9</sup> Namely, privileging women’s experiences/stories and interrogating gendered power relations (see chapter four).

explicitly seeking out other female performers to play with<sup>10</sup> and talk to.<sup>11</sup> I thus became increasingly fascinated by the processes through which other women and girls negotiate the contradictory discursive and material field of popular music.

In sum, the influences and inspirations for this research have been many. Without those groundbreaking female performers, I would not have pursued a musical career as a legitimate and achievable goal. Without the economic shifts within Chrysalis records, I would not have encountered and then engaged with feminism with quite such hunger. And without theorists like McRobbie, who argues that ‘feminism forces us to locate our own autobiographies and experience inside the questions we might want to ask’ (1991, p. 70), I would not have embarked upon this particular research journey, forged these particular connections or formulated these particular kinds of research questions. These cumulative experiences have therefore been significant in informing the context of study, but I equally recognise their partiality, for as Camille Bacon-Smith observes: ‘The most difficult part of ethnography is not necessarily finding the information that the ethnographer needs, but keeping her eyes and ears open when that information challenges her sense of how the world works’ (1992, pp 283-284).

### **The research journey**

After graduating with a first-class honours degree in 1994, I spent a year teaching various Communication Studies modules and developing the following research proposal, presented to SHU’s funding committee in January 1996:

This study aims to investigate the concept of ‘fan’ within popular music. I will focus upon the ‘lived experience’ of a cross-section of female audience members in Sheffield, in order to explore how acquiring the identity of ‘fan’ impacts upon femininity. I begin from the premise that consumption is the defining ‘moment’

---

<sup>10</sup> Which led to the forming of a mixed-gender soul covers group in 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Resulting in an undergraduate dissertation on ‘girl groups’ in 1994. My enduring friendship with Dr. Mike Jones - initially forged through songwriting rather than research - has also proved invaluable; as a key gig companion, sounding board and introductory contact to the group Belief (see chapter six).

within the music-making process, from which other musical practices emerge and evolve. However, whilst other key moments such as production or performance have been studied extensively, the moment of consumption - being a fan, is neglected within the literature. My interest in this research area is two-fold. I am a practising female musician and a popular music fan, and I will address the tensions between relations of production and consumption in popular music by collating accounts from female fans *and* the bands they follow. I am equally committed to including performers in this study because I argue that musicians are 'always already' fans, thus bridging moments of both production and consumption. Due to the absence of research in this area, this study will 'map' a previously uncharted 'field'. I will develop predictions about 'ideal types' of female fan in order to construct a typology which can then be tested through concrete, empirical research.

In contrast, here is my reflexive response:

January 1996: The best month so far. I finally feel as though I'm beginning to crack it, though it's been a fraught time. The reason behind this impetus has been the dreaded 'research programme' form, dreaded because I have had to make some tough decisions that I've been subconsciously avoiding. The critical questions involving 'why', 'what', 'who' and 'how' have been the most difficult to answer, i.e., Why am I doing this research? What do I hope to find out? Who will be involved? And how, precisely, do I intend to carry it out?! After hours of frustrated dialogue with my long-suffering supervisor, the initial glimpses of a doable programme began to emerge. My anger against bureaucracy (having to produce a seamless report at this early stage) was, in retrospect, motivated largely through fear as I found I literally hadn't got a clue how to begin this study. The problem is of course intrinsic to ethnography in that 'discovery' based fieldwork intersects uneasily with more orthodox research paradigms. A quantitative approach emphasises objectivity and replication - painting by numbers if you will. On the other hand, the naturalistic paradigm rejects the 'myth' of the neutral-free observer, thus allowing scope for creativity but highlighting the frailty of the researcher; hence this journal. So at the end of month four I'm still not 100% clear about my aims but at least I have some kind of framework, a workable and *flexible* plan.

I have included these contrasting accounts for three reasons. Firstly, to disrupt the retrospective logic that invariably shapes reports of longitudinal study (Stacey, 1994) in order to expose 'the conditions of its production' (Skeggs, 1995, p. 1). Secondly, to highlight the distinctive 'public' and 'private' constructs of the research narrative even at this initial stage - as uncertainties, frustrations and a sense of achievement are erased from the official registration document. Thirdly, to illustrate how the focus and epistemological orientations have transformed over time.



I soon found the construct of ‘typology’ too rigid to account for the fluid interplay between relations of music making and listening that I was observing, and thus began seeking theories which offered more plausible ‘explanatory value’ (Skeggs, 1997) for the ethnographic data. Social constructionists such as Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1991) analyse identity-formation as an ongoing process of construction, maintenance and negotiation, and I have appropriated their perspective of ‘doing gender’ to interrogate the hypothesis that ‘musicians are ‘always already’ fans’ through the concept of *doing fandom*.

Social constructionism represents the first of three analytic strands. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of the systematic correlation between social and cultural status, the second examines the significance of ‘fan cultural capital’ (Fiske, 1992) and ‘fan social capital’ (Hills, 2002) in the construction of real and imagined hierarchies between and within fan cultures. I also utilise the more flexible concept of ‘interpretive communities’ (Fish, 1980; Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998) to explore the ways in which notions of ‘distinction’ or ‘musical value judgements’ (Frith, 1996; 1998) are variously negotiated - and converted into ‘professional’ fandom - through the lens of gender, genre and success.

The third analytic strand incorporates my growing awareness of the interdependence between place, policy, productivity and inequality. As indicated earlier, life experiences influence the ethnographic focus and my initial aim ‘to investigate the concept of ‘fan’’ has since broadened - due to my work as a music industry trainer at Sheffield City Council’s Red Tape Studios, and subsequent social enterprise, Harmony Training - to explore the particular and ‘extra-local associations’ (Finnegan, 1989) between geography, cultural policy and socio-structural relations of gender. When assessing the historical trajectory of Sheffield’s ‘pathways’ and scene/s, I apply Taylor et al.’s (1996) concept,



‘local structures of feeling’, to analyse how the city’s industrial identity, folklore and topography produce narratives of ‘Sheffieldness’ that shape the discourse and practice of access and exclusion. Collectively, these perspectives provide a dynamic analytical framework to assess the ways in which meanings of fandom, ‘making it’, scene and place intersect with wider ideological norms to construct and constrain gendered musical practices within and beyond the filter of locality. In the remainder of this introduction, I locate these themes within the relevant chapters and present a brief summary of structure, content, methods and findings.

### **Thesis structure**

In my search to *find the female fan*, chapter two asks - echoing McRobbie and Garber’s questions posed almost thirty years earlier - where are women in the literature and how have female fans been constructed as ‘objects of study’? I interrogate key developments in audience research to establish how the category of fan has been variously constructed in particular socio-historical periods, identifying four discourses of fandom: pathology, passivity, productivity and pleasure. In line with Stacey (1994), these ‘public’ discourses are subsequently contrasted with the ‘private’ narratives of a range of participants. The commonsense links between fandom and femininity also inform the assumption that boys become musicians whilst girls are ‘relegated to the role of fan’ (Bayton, 1993). Chapter three examines this assumption through the empirical findings of Finnegan, Cohen and Bayton, amongst others. I critically assess the key factors that inspire, enable and constrain symbolic creativity, before identifying the specific barriers girls and women face when negotiating the male dominated spaces and normative practices that constitute musical scenes.

In line with the principles of feminist ethnography, I have attempted to develop a research methodology that is action-oriented, reflexive, holistic, comparative, dialogic and

relational (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990; Reinharz, 1992; Cohen, 1993; Skeggs, 1997). All of the methodological and theoretical decisions outlined above have emerged over many years. Chapter four details the ‘messy’ (Skeggs, 1995) process of ethnographic work, addressing the political, epistemological and ethical issues of doing feminist research and generating feminist theory. I discuss the difficulties encountered in my quest to find mixed-gender bands and female fans, and critically evaluate realist approaches to data generation and interpretation, including my initial tendency towards liberal humanism. I also address the ethical complexities of developing relationships in the ‘field’, whilst simultaneously highlighting the benefits of studying everyday activities as ‘social practice and process’, in context and over time.

The main body of the thesis - chapters five, six and seven - present and analyse the empirical data, generated through the ethnographic techniques of participant observation at over one hundred live performances<sup>12</sup>, semi-structured interviews, social surveys and a range of media, from the weekly-produced *Sheffield Telegraph* to Pulp’s fanzine, ‘Pulp People’. Adapting Stacey’s (1994) approach to the organization and interpretation of empirical research, ethnographic data are utilized in three specific ways: illustratively, to outline a range of music making and listening practices; interrogatively, to examine existing theoretical assumptions, and textually, to investigate how the respondents draw upon particular codes and conventions to make sense of their relationship with popular music, and through popular music, to others.

Chapter five provides the context for the case studies, mapping the general ‘scene’ features of local music infrastructure and media, whilst simultaneously noting specificities. I examine the influence of the city’s industrial heritage on local cultural

---

<sup>12</sup> Ranging from the small-scale gig to stadium concert, several of which occurred outside of Sheffield. I was also a participant observer in related settings such as recording sessions and parties.

policy initiatives and the much-debated concept of a ‘Sheffield sound’, in order to assess how narratives of ‘Sheffieldness’ and localized pathways enable or constrain women’s participation. Building on the work of Finnegan (1989) and Willis (1990), I note the interdependency of music makers and listeners in the mutual production of live events, distinguishing two general and frequently overlapping audience categories - *supporter fans* and *sceneists* - both of which are critical to the construction and maintenance of scene/s. Although a quantitative examination of Sheffield music makers reinforces the empirical findings of Finnegan, Cohen and Bayton, and typically shapes the audience dynamic, several factors are identified which disrupt homosocial norms: the presence of mixed-gender bands, which in turn encourage mixed-gender audiences; ‘alternative’ pathways; and chart success. All three themes are developed in the subsequent case studies.

Asking: ‘what are the perceived and material barriers for girls and women as music listeners and makers?’ And ‘what kinds of strategies are developed to overcome them in order to facilitate musical practice?’, chapter six presents a comparative analysis of the ways in which exclusionary mechanisms are challenged and alternative routes of access forged, through the diverse stories of two ‘amateur’ local groups, Belief and Velodrome 2000. Drawing on participant observation and the narratives of the female vocalists and supporter fans, their aspirations and shifting alliances are charted through significant cultural and spatial markers of ‘progress’ that I have coined *bandmarks*. These include an independent single release and John Peel session (Velodrome 2000), a band competition and record company showcase (Belief). Founded on distinct discourses of ‘making it’ that are shaped by the contrasting aesthetic values, and socio-structural positioning of the groups, these bandmarks serve to highlight the underlying ‘logic of access’ (Kirschner, 1998) informing their pathways, representing key moments of articulation and transformation for inter and intra-group relations.

The final case study - chapter seven - combines several key research themes to examine the relationship between success and gendered access and the role of the local in the production of authenticity and belonging. Focusing on the landmark of chart success and its impact on the subsequent 'feminization' of Pulp's fanbase, I identify the fanclub as a critical mechanism in the circulation and legitimation of 'fan cultural capital' (Fiske, 1992). It is simultaneously analysed as a social hierarchy (MacDonald, 1998), underscored by the oppositional constructs of 'old' and 'new' fans generated by the authoritative female editor to delineate 'appropriate' modes of participation and appreciation. I critically unpack a number of gendered assumptions informing these divisions - focusing in particular on the contested notions of 'starlust' (Vermorel and Vermorel, 1985), art versus commerce (Weinstein, 1999) and the mainstream (Thornton, 1995) - to examine the rationale and consequences of what I have called *the paradox of popularity*.

In sum, all three case studies shed light on the distinctive ways in which gendered musical practices are shaped through a complex interplay between meanings of fandom, 'making it' and scene, when positioned and analysed within an 'extroverted' sense of place (Massey, 1994). By questioning the 'taken-for-granted', we simultaneously develop what Susan Starr describes as 'the heretical vision of the possible' (cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 242). Hence, the overall purpose of the thesis is not merely to map out a cultural 'scene' and investigate how things are, but also to intervene in the status quo, and suggest how things could be.

And so finally, a note to you, the reader:

If you have ever sung in front of a mirror, attended a gig with a group of friends, cherished a particular pop song or star, and maybe even fantasised about being one, then I trust that you will engage with this study and these stories. But I want to stress at this



preliminary stage of your journey that the thesis is not about pop music per se, it is about some of the girls and women who listen to it and make it, albeit under conditions that are not of their making. Popular music is only important in this context, because *they* are.

## CHAPTER TWO: DISCOURSES OF FANDOM

Fandom provides an important and yet surprisingly neglected site of social inquiry to investigate how gender inequalities are produced through popular music consumption. This chapter will interrogate some of the key studies and shifts in cultural research to assess how fans in general, and female pop fans in particular, have been historically constructed as ‘objects’ of study. Drawing on Jackie Stacey’s (1994) concept, ‘discourses of stardom’, I have developed the notion of *discourses of fandom* to explore the ways in which ‘cultural meanings are organised and limited within particular boundaries at specific historical junctures’ (Stacey, 1994, p. 260). Four significant discourses organise academic contributions to the field: pathology; passivity; productivity and pleasure. A range of texts will be reviewed in order to critically examine how female fans are variously constructed, theorised and understood.

In *Adoring Audiences* (1992), Lisa Lewis states that fans are the most maligned of all consumer groups, as the following definitions indicate: ‘an over-enthusiastic admirer or supporter’ (*OED*, 1983); an ‘excessive reader’ (Fiske, 1992); an ‘ultra consumer’ (Vermorel and Vermorel, 1985); and a ‘fanatic: filled with abnormal enthusiasm’ (Roberts, 1994). Fans are also objects of derision. As the Vermorels ask, ‘when did you last see or hear an interview with ‘a ‘fan’ which didn’t begin with a chuckle or end in a snigger?’ (1985, pp. 248-249). The very label itself is held to be ‘demeaning’.<sup>13</sup> Lewis argues that ‘fans get such a bad press’ due to the commonsense characteristics of ‘immaturity and femininity’ (1992, p. 136). Below, I assess how these dual markers of subordination are re-worked within the four discourses to limit cultural meanings of female fandom.

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, in response to the question, ‘You’ve said you don’t want to tour again but what about the fans?’, Blur’s Damon Albarn replied: ‘First of all, you shouldn’t refer to yourself as a fan, it’s demeaning’ (The Fannish Inquisition, *NME*, 10/7/99).

## Fandom as Pathology

'Fanatical fans, do they go too far?...Where do you *draw the line* between someone who's into a band and someone who's just completely obsessed?' ('The Ozone', February, 1996).

Pathology refers to the study of a physical or psychological disorder and 'fanatical', 'crazy', 'obsessive' and 'excessive' are familiar adjectives describing pathological representations of fandom. Fans are constructed as deviant because they are perceived to exceed the rational codes of consumption. Moral and psychological boundaries are therefore drawn between "us" and "them" - the casualties of a fragmented, 'sick' society, underpinned by declining family values and increased secularism. The rise of the Hollywood star system, cult of celebrity and mass media correspond with the discourse of fandom as pathology (Jensen, 1992).<sup>14</sup>

Joli Jensen outlines two distinctive pathological stereotypes, the obsessed loner and the frenzied crowd, each held to suffer respectively from the 'disease' of 'isolation' or 'contagion' (1992, p. 13). The obsessed loner, characterised by the recent coinage 'stalker', underwrites the image of the fan as ultimately destructive of the object of adulation. In the second representation, the isolated individual joins the hysterical crowd to experience collective disinhibition. This notion of deindividuation or 'group mind' underpins perennial fears surrounding 'mob' passions and serves to reinforce the us/them dichotomy. Indeed, Jensen argues that the primary function of the discourse of pathology is to gain reassurance that 'we', the rational majority, have not succumbed to the perils of modern life.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The Vermorels identify the origins of the mass consumer age somewhat earlier, 'round about the 1880s' (1989, p. 126).

<sup>15</sup> Although Jensen has been criticised for failing to consider more positive discourses of fandom (Barker, 1993), Lyn Thomas notes how the title of the official Archer's fan club, 'Archer's Addicts' draws on the pathological stereotype of the 'obsessed' fan, 'though it may also imply an ironic, or gently self-mocking 'take' on this image' (2002, p. 104).

In direct contrast, the Vermorel's work (1985; 1989; 1990; 1992) focuses almost entirely upon this 'often concealed aspect of adulation' (1985, p. 249), claiming that 'it is not any particular fan who is 'extreme', so much as the condition of fandom itself' (ibid., p. 247). The pop 'machine' is fuelled by systematic 'provocation' and they argue that violence and anger are legitimate responses to the frustration of unfulfilled star/fan relationships. Indeed, when referring to the murder of John Lennon, they suggest that 'annihilation' is one 'plausible' response to the 'cultural logic' of consumption, a logic that is weighted in favour of those tempting but unavailable stars.<sup>16</sup> Thus, whilst providing a vital platform for fans themselves to speak out, the Vermorels reverentially uphold notions of 'otherness'. Alternatively, Jensen argues that we need to examine points of commonality as well as difference in order to challenge the correlation between fandom and pathology. Both concur that studying the practices and processes of fandom can shed light on the shifting cultural politics that affect all media audiences.

Although the sheer quantity of material - including letters, poems, photographs and media reports - collected by the Vermorels highlights the implicit connections between fandom and femininity, their celebratory tone precludes in-depth analysis. Jensen addresses social class but fails to engage with the particular consequences of the discourse of pathology for women. In order to develop her thesis, we need to deconstruct the twinned concepts of mania and hysteria from a feminist perspective.

### *Hysterical Girls*

'In a perfect world these girls might be climbing trees. Instead they have this work to do. Being the GIRL. Screamer, nubie or fan. Spreading their joyful *virus of desire*' (Vermorel and Vermorel, 1989, p. 122).

---

<sup>16</sup> And similarly, when writing about Mark Chapman, Elliot (1999) argues that 'the relation of fan and celebrity is troubled because violence is built into it' (cited in Hills, 2002, p. 96).



Markers of gender and youth are inextricably bound to popular music's story. From the bobbysoxers of the 1950s to teenyboppers of the 1990s, female fans have provided a source of both amusement and 'moral panic'. The concept and social phenomenon of the teenager had a profound effect on post-war, 1950s America. Increased disposable income and leisure time coincided with the commodification of a 'new' musical genre that was to radically change the field of popular music - rock 'n' roll. While teenage consumers were constructed as an ever-expanding market<sup>17</sup>, the perceived excesses of youth cultural practices became a cause of increasing adult anxiety. Jon Savage notes the corresponding rise of new media for young women as an attempt to police their increased visibility and arguable freedoms:

The adult worries coded into such manuals [as *Dear Teenager*] had a sound basis in fact; young women dictated the new sexual map. Their hysteria, triggered by key pop figures and film stars was one of the first indices of the new age, the factor that made post-war stardom and sexuality different from what had gone before. Only the extraordinary scenes that had occurred on the death of Rudolph Valentino...had hinted at what was soon to become commonplace: *the dervish power of aroused young women* (Savage, 1988, pp. 142-3, emphasis added).

The audible marker of fan 'hysteria' is screaming. Whilst noting that female fans first began screaming at bebop concerts in the 1930s - 'much to the surprise of the musicians' - the Vermorels also identify the emergence of public displays of eroticism by "screamagers" in post-war America.

The whole fan show of screaming and seat wetting...first emerged during early 1950s Johnnie Ray concerts. This all seems to have been an international and spontaneous phenomenon. Old timers, from St. John's ambulance men to concert hall officials, tell the same story of surprise and outrage at finding "knickers under the seats and things like that. It was disgusting". Nobody could recall anything like it before (1989, p. 24).

Jensen and the Vermorels cite numerous examples of media intervention and construction of this 'spontaneous phenomenon'. The *Sunday Pictorial* (1955) employed its very own 'Bobby-Sox doctor' to attend a Johnnie Ray concert and explain this unprecedented fan

---

<sup>17</sup> Single sales increased from 4.5 million in 1955 to 43 million by 1959 (Frith, 1983).

behaviour. 'If any girl were to behave alone as she did in the mass audience then a doctor would diagnose her condition as hysteria' (ibid.). Medical metaphors abound. Ray is accused of performing mass hypnosis, but he is also referred to as a 'modern medicine man of music', as the 'doctor' reasons that:

it is unlikely that Johnnie Ray does any harm. I think the girls feel better after a session with him. His fans are mainly young people who feel they are tiny cogs in a huge machine, people who live from pay day to pay day... They are growing up in a society that is failing to integrate the lives of us all... What Ray does is to break down self-consciousness, to make his fans feel they are no longer mere cogs, no longer alone (ibid., p. 26).

Jensen's thesis is reinforced as the *Sunday Pictorial* locates the discourse of pathology within a nostalgic critique of modernity, drawing on the key tropes of 'alienation, atomization, vulnerability and irrationality' (Jensen, 1992, p. 14) to help explain - and therefore contain - the 'dervish power' of female fandom. When analysing the subversive pleasures post-war female audiences derived from male wrestling, Chad Dell (1998) draws some useful parallels between these strategies of containment across cultural spheres. 'Attempts to gain power over individuals by gaining power over their bodies has long been a familiar tactic in human history... As Foucault points out, the "discovery" of the specifically female disease "hysteria" is but one particularly relevant example of attempts to assert power over the human body' (1998, p. 101).

The notion of sexually charged young women is clearly threatening to dominant ideologies of femininity, and screaming has been positively analysed as a 'defiant' fan practice (Ehrenreich et al., 1997). Indeed, when writing about the rise of what was revealingly coined *Beatlemania*, Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs argue that white young women on both sides of the Atlantic were rebelling against the crushing sexual double standards of 'female teen culture', by 'asserting an active, powerful sexuality' (1992, p. 90). Given the vast numbers involved, they claim that this

fan movement 'was, in its own unformulated, dizzy way, revolutionary' (ibid.). Much to the consternation of the moral majority, public performances of transgressive female desire are equally concerned with loosening, rather than just losing, control.

Arguably, the symbol of unleashed female sexuality is the eponymous groupie, and some feminist theorists claim that the term is used as a 'put-down' for *any* woman involved in the male-dominated arena of popular music (Garratt, 1984; Cline, 1992). Others however, reclaim the concept and practice as 'a form of autonomous female activity' (cited in Garratt, 1984, p. 149). The Plaster Casters are probably the most infamous of the so-called 'star fuckers', as the Rolling Stones famously put it<sup>18</sup>, but to suggest that all women involved in popular music are potential groupies is both misogynist and reductionist, demeaning female music makers and personnel as well as the crucial element of fantasy in the star/fan relationship (Twersky, 1995). Elaine Showalter also takes issue with heterosexist, stereotypical notions of the hysterical fan, arguing that 'screaming' is a learned behavioural form of Western group expression through which both male and female 'fans' 'demonstrate excitement, enthusiasm and passion' for their sporting and musical groups (Woman's Hour, Radio Four, 11/6/04). Moreover, as Sheryl Garratt reminds us, 'girls scream at girls too' (op. cit).

Within the discourse of pathology, fandom has become irrevocably connected with its etymological root - fanaticism - and female-dominated fan cultures are frequently labeled as an illness or mania. For young people, particularly girls, the 'cure' to 'hormonal lunacy' (Cline, 1992, p. 70) and restoration to 'normalcy' (Jensen, 1992) is seen to be maturity, as they develop and form 'real' relationships (McRobbie, 1991). Jensen usefully locates this pervasive discourse within wider social and academic anxieties about

---

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Jonathon Green's (1997) preface to Jenny Fabian and Johnny Byrne's 'novel', *Groupie*.

fragmentation, alienation, and the loss of cultural certainties offered by the 'grand myth' of high modernity (Miller, 1997, p. 23); anxieties that are equally apparent within the second discourse of fandom I identify - that of passivity.

### **Fandom as Passivity**

On the whole, the word 'fan' when applied to women is derogatory. It is always assumed that they are attracted to a person for the 'wrong' reasons, that they are uncritical and stupid. As an audience, they are usually treated with contempt by both bands and record companies. The 'real' audience is assumed to be male (Garratt, 1984, p. 150).

Long-standing concerns with the nature of mass or popular culture have been highly sensitive to the debasing effects of commercialised, often American, popular entertainment. Whereas cultural pessimists such as F. R. Leavis feared the decline of moral standards and *their* social and cultural authority, the explicitly Marxist Frankfurt school argued that the products and processes of 'the Culture Industry' actually maintained capitalist domination, by depoliticising the working classes (Story, 1993, pp. 101-102). Out of this perspective came Theodor Adorno's influential essay, *On Popular Music*, published in 1941.

Contrasting 'good serious music' against popular music product, namely Tin Pan Alley compositions and jazz, Adorno's pessimism stems from the premise that all popular music follows an essential structure 'that divests the listener of his (sic) spontaneity and promotes conditioned reflexes' (Adorno, 1998, p. 201). Standardized music is made to appear distinct through a process of 'pseudo-individualization', offering the 'halo of free choice' whilst simultaneously keeping 'the masses' toeing the ideological line. 'Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them...Pseudo-individualization...keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or 'pre-digested'' (ibid., p. 203).



Adorno's 'theory about the listener' presents the most damning indictment of how the organisation of mass culture shapes the socio-psychology of mass consumption (Frith, 1996). Firstly, popular music serves to organise leisure time, reflecting a 'dual desire' for release from 'boredom and effort'. Thus, pop becomes a channel through which to momentarily escape the monotony and strain of working lives under capitalist modes of production. It mustn't stimulate the listener too powerfully however, as pop's main function is that of distraction: 'Listeners are distracted from the demands of reality by entertainment which does not demand attention' (Adorno, 1990, p. 310). Work and leisure under capitalism therefore serve the same ends. The Culture Industry provides pleasure, which in turn promotes resignation, as a capitalist economy needs a resigned workforce in order to survive.

Secondly, popular music functions as 'a social cement' through a process of adjustment and reconciliation to the status quo, generating two forms of 'mass' behaviour: 'the 'rhythmically obedient' type most susceptible to a masochistic adjustment to authoritarian collectivism' (Adorno, 1998, p. 207), and 'the 'emotional' type', not surprisingly identified as female, who achieve 'catharsis' via a 'temporary' emotional release. In short, Adorno argued that the primary function of popular music was to reinforce social dependency and diffuse any of the revolutionary possibilities that 'serious art' promoted through 'the negation of everyday life' (Frith, 1996).<sup>19</sup>

Writing in Britain in the 1950s, Richard Hoggart similarly argued that popular culture had lost its community base and human agency, replaced by a standardised Americanised blandness. The 'candyfloss world' of this 'newer mass art' was tempting

---

<sup>19</sup> A position subsequently reclaimed by Frith when stating that 'the utopian impulse, the *negation* of everyday life, the aesthetic impulse that Adorno recognized in high art, must be part of low art too' (1996, p. 20).

and readily available but lacking in spiritual substance, thus creating greedy and dissipated consumers. Despite 'an earnest minority' 'who continue to search for a more nourishing food' (1957, p. 321), young 'underintelligent' men, seduced by an excess of vacuous pleasures, were at risk. By singling out 'juke box boys' - 'hedonistic but passive barbarian[s]' (ibid., p. 250) - as a particularly vulnerable group and an ominous 'portent', Hoggart introduced a new slant on the old fears: the negative effects of a mass-produced popular music on its main consumers - *young people*.

The discourse of passivity continues to thrive in popular and political discourse, as the 'passive masses' are assumed to lack the critical faculties to resist the pernicious effects of a manipulative mass media. This assumption underpins the establishment of the Parents Music Resource Centre (PMRC) in the United States in the mid 1980s, as a response to the rising suicide rates among adolescents (Grossberg, 1992a). Simplistically, popular music genres such as gangsta rap and hiphop have been isolated. Lawrence Grossberg points out that the greatest irony of the PMRC is that these parents were also raised on 'the devil's music,' rock 'n' roll. Musicologist Susan McClary identifies similar contradictions in a variety of texts, from Plato to Adorno: 'Denouncements of the... twin threats - subversion of authority and seduction by means of the body - recur as constants throughout music history' (1995, p. 441). Casting a feminist perspective on recurring moral panics, she identifies the fear of 'emasculatation' at the root of the discourse of fandom as passivity.

Gendered distinctions are also reproduced through genre. In *Rock and Sexuality* (1978) for example, Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie examine the late 1950s era of popular music, contrasting the decline of rock 'n' roll with the increasing popularity of 'sweet black music', the girl group sound. They call this transition one of 'feminization', from 'active' rock to 'passive' pop, and audiences are similarly determined. Whilst these

commonsense dualisms are frequently referenced in marketing parlance, Frith acknowledges that 'the most misleading of our original arguments was the distinction we made between male activity and female passivity when, in fact, consumption is as important to the sexual significance of pop as production' (1990, p. 422).

Historically, relations of production and consumption have been determined in opposition, but in critiquing the material determinism of the base/superstructure metaphor of culture by developing more elastic theories of negotiation (Gramsci, 1971) and appropriation (de Certeau, 1984), researchers began to view popular culture as a key site of ideological struggle over cultural meanings. For example, in Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's 1964 study, popular music is identified as a 'popular art'. Whereas Adorno distinguished between 'serious' and 'light' music, including jazz, Hall and Whannel hold up jazz as the preferred art form against pop. Where they dramatically differ from Adorno is in their view of the audience. The inattentive masses are replaced by active, teenage consumers, for although much 1960s pop may have lacked 'authenticity', the emotions it dramatized were genuine: 'Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing pasture for the commercial providers' (1990, p. 29).

Hall and Whannel outline the tensions between the valid psychological and sociological function pop fulfils and the commercial media set up to promote and contain these needs. Thus, popular songs articulate both 'emotional realism' and 'fantasy fulfilment', used as 'guiding fictions' that simultaneously identify particular teen concerns but also limit the framework of reception. Their overall aim therefore was not to condemn popular music but rather, to educate a young audience to develop more sophisticated 'tastes':

It is a genuine widening of sensibility and emotional range which we should be working for - an extension of taste which might lead to an extension of pleasure. The worst thing which we would say of pop music is not that it is vulgar, or

morally wicked, but more simply, that much of it is not very good (Hall and Whannel, 1998, p. 67).

The third discourse of fandom I identify shifts the epistemological focus in order to relocate value in the 'moment' of consumption, thus neatly - but as we shall see, problematically - sidestepping Adorno's entire thesis (Frith, 1996).

### **Fandom as Productivity**

The body of research drawing on, and constructing discourses of productivity, represents a sustained attempt to reclaim fandom as 'an act of cultural work' in the negotiation and production of identity (Hills, 2002):

Fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate. What do fans produce? Fans produce meanings and interpretations,...artwork,...communities,...alternative identities. In each case, fans are drawing upon materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures (Jenkins, 1992, p. 214).

Henry Jenkins' (1992; 1997; 1998) research applies literary theories of cultural appropriation developed by Michel de Certeau to demonstrate how fans employ 'tactics' to 'poach' producer spaces and texts, thus producing highly creative and frequently subversive re-readings and rewritings. These include filking, which involves 'writing, performing and recording fandom-related songs' (Harris, 1998, p. 8), and slash writings, generally concerning homoerotic fantasies of TV characters and overwhelmingly produced by women (Bacon Smith, 1992; Penley, 1992; Green, Jenkins and Jenkins, 1998; Cicioni, 1998).

Indeed another key contributor, John Fiske, argues that girls and women engage in many 'extreme' examples of textual productivity, due to their 'limited access to the means of producing cultural resources' and the necessity of 'making do with what they have' (1989, p. 151). For Fiske, fans are endlessly productive in the 'art of making do' at



textual, semiotic and enunciative levels, whereby meanings and identities are produced through fan talk and semiotic engagement with commodities. Fans create texts out of bedroom walls and dress codes: 'rock audiences dressing and behaving like the bands become part of the performance' (1992, p. 40). He also claims that fans actively discriminate in terms of 'social relevance rather than aesthetic quality'. 'Choosing texts is choosing social allegiances and fans form themselves into a community much more explicitly than do the middle-class appreciators of highbrow art' (1989, p. 147).

Many studies espousing the discourse of productivity highlight the creative and collective aspects of fan cultures. Paul Willis for example, found that popular music was 'central' to the lives of the young people in his research, thus reclaiming fandom as a 'common' cultural experience (1990, p. 59). He also critiques the great divide between creative production and passive consumption, arguing that these divisions are 'blurred in musical practice' (ibid., p. 82). 'Symbolic creativity' is the term he employs to explain how the divide is bridged. Indeed, Willis argues that whilst consumers are equally creative, 'most pop musicians begin as fans and create by copying sounds from records and cassettes: they become producers as consumers' (ibid., p. 60).

Noting similar routes of transition in Doctor Who fandom, Matt Hills sharpens the economic context:

The movement from 'hobbyist' to paid 'expert' depends...upon specific leisure pursuits being constructed as niche markets...in which fans' values and authenticities are, equally precisely, sold back to them. And thus who is better placed to produce this material – which by definition must draw on immersion in fan culture and its forms of knowledge and competence – than the fans themselves...through the figure of the 'professional' fan (2002, p. 40).

He concedes that not all fans can access these transitional opportunities. Contrasting the male-dominated cultural world of Doctor Who fandom with that of Star Trek, 'where fan writers are far more likely to be women' whose prospects of generating paid employment

are constrained, he states that ‘whether gender is a contingent rather than ‘determining’ issue in relation to fan professionalism remain questions to be explored’ (ibid., p. 188). Feminist ethnographer Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) has explored this question, but whilst critiquing her realist methodological approach and findings, Hills fails to incorporate her reformulation of ‘amateur’ cultural productivity *as work* (1992, p. 286) - albeit the creative labour of textual poaching and identity formation that is ‘celebrated’ in Jenkins’ research on television fans.

Although these studies present a significant analytic challenge to discourses of pathology and passivity, both Fiske and Jenkins have been accused of romanticising the active, resistant fan<sup>20</sup> (Hills, 2002). The populist ‘positive mass consumption’ model has also been criticised for reproducing the reductionist equation of quantity=popular=valuable/political (Frith, 1996). Frith bemoans ‘the *relentless* politicizing of consumption, the deployment of vacuous sociological terms (resistance, empowerment) at the expense of aesthetic categories, the constant misreading of the mainstream as the margins’ (1992, pp 179-180).

The discipline that first gave rise to notions of empowerment and resistance against dominant norms is Subculturalism, and the groundbreaking studies of the 1970s focused upon the oppositional leisure activities of disaffected youth groups. A whole range of elements contributed to the ‘bricolage’ of subcultures: dress; language; use of space and pop music. Much of the symmetry of the analyses rested on demonstrating what Willis (1978) called ‘homology’: the fit between different elements in the subculture. Musical affiliations were those appropriate to the whole ‘way of life’ of the subcultural group, and

---

<sup>20</sup> Although Jenkins himself (1996) acknowledges his ‘tactical’ approach to presenting positive representations of fandom as a means of challenging ‘negative’, academic stereotypes (cited in Hills, 2002, p. 10).

teddy boys, mods, rockers, skinheads and punks selected genres that meshed with their symbolic worlds (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). Yet in this enterprise there were three glaring deficiencies. One was the lack of ethnographic data. Musical and subcultural styles were interpreted semiotically, read for their intrinsic meanings (Hebdige, 1979). Only rarely (Willis, 1978; Corrigan, 1979) were young people's accounts of their musical involvement elicited.

Secondly, the cultural activities of 'ordinary' youth, by definition outside subcultures, remained unexamined (Clarke, 1990). In neglecting or demeaning 'the mainstream', subcultural theorists were therefore responsible for reinforcing - and simultaneously constructing - new sets of 'us-versus-them social maps' (Thornton 1995, p. 92). Finally, and most damningly, the focus was almost exclusively on males. The feminist critique emerged early (McRobbie and Garber, 1976) and was subsequently developed:

[They] have focused on boys to the exclusion of girls and sex-gender relations. Not only have these studies failed to discuss the savage chauvinism of male youth culture but often the descriptions of rock bands, skinheads and the cattle market atmosphere of the local dance hall have embraced a 'celebration of masculinity'. These studies have not merely accepted sexism uncritically, they have often, through depicting them romantically, extolled sexism (Lees, 1986, p. 13).

Male researchers were castigated for romanticizing resistant subcultures whilst failing to recognise their patriarchal and conformist roots. Location was another critical omission, as McRobbie (1991, p. 19) observes: 'Few writers seemed interested in what happened when a mod went home after a weekend on speed. Only what happened on the streets mattered.' Successive feminist studies therefore focused upon how young women appropriated street subcultures (Sharpe, 1977; Smith, 1978; Campbell, 1981) or mainstream pop culture (McRobbie and Garber, 1976/1991), highlighting the gender differences formerly dismissed and naturalised within spectacular youth cultural studies.

The 'subcultural pop music myth' is a remarkably pervasive one however. When revisiting some of the key studies of popular music, Frith argues that they represent 'academic [rather than] working-class fantasies', for 'what's at stake in such writings are what it means to be male, to be white, to be middle class' (1992, p. 181). As Frith points out, one of the greatest ironies in this enduring fascination with masculinity is that 'the figure of 'the fan', conventionally and empirically female, is translated into the 'feminized' man...the ideal male consumer, subject to the confirming gaze of other men!' (ibid., p. 182). Hills also identifies an underlying elitist strand informing the fandom as productivity discourse, in the analytic move away from the 'taint' of consumption (2002, p. 30). Abercrombie and Longhurst for example, have developed a typology whereby the consumer moves through various fannish states: from 'cultist' and 'enthusiast' through to 'petty producer' (1998, p. 141). Consumers are positioned on the spectrum according to the level of specialisation, social organisation of interest and material productivity engaged in, thus reproducing what Hills coins a 'moral dualism', by casting 'good' fandom in opposition to the 'bad' consumer' (2002, p. 29). What is of particular interest are the ways in which academic constructs intersect with everyday popular music practice to exclude female participation.

### *Professional fans*

For example, music journalism provides one well-trodden route to the status of 'professional fan' (Frith, 1983), a route that is typically shaped through the accumulation of what music journalist Lucy O'Brien coins 'The Knowledge' (1995, p. 422). 'I started writing as a music journalist' she explains, 'just because I felt emotionally about the records and identified emotionally with the bands, but that didn't necessarily equip me with the knowledge to really assess that and to write about it with authority' (Books and Company, Radio 4, September 1995). O'Brien consequently adopted a more quantitative



approach to collating musical information<sup>21</sup>, claiming this conversion was necessary in order to access the male-dominated world of rock journalism.<sup>22</sup> One particular ‘mechanism of exclusion’ (Coates, 1997) that merits further interrogation is the discriminating function of what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has coined ‘cultural capital.’

In his ‘magnificent’ (McRobbie, 2005) study, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu applies the metaphors of economic, cultural and social capital to illustrate how hierarchical systems of cultural distinction correspond to structural positions of social class. Cultural capital represents ‘the linchpin of a system of distinction in which...people’s tastes are predominantly a marker of class’ (Thornton, 1995, p. 10). It is the complex combination of capitals, including: income, inheritances and property (economic); knowledge (cultural) acquired through ‘institutionalized’ means such as Higher Education; and relational networks (social), that systematically confers value and status on certain ‘objectified’ artifacts and ‘embodied’ behaviours, enabling their exchange into ‘symbolic capital’. As Skeggs confirms, ‘legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power’ (1997, p. 8).

Central to Bourdieu’s analysis, taste is defined as ‘the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices... [as] a unitary set of distinctive preferences’ (1984, p. 173). He extends this argument to the form, function and modes of appreciation in popular and bourgeois entertainments: ‘In one case it is constant, manifest (boos, whistles), sometimes direct (pitch or playing-field invasions); in the other it is intermittent, distant, highly ritualized, with obligatory applause’ (ibid., pp. 487-488). Fiske develops the notion of ‘proletarian

---

<sup>21</sup> For example, setting up an alphabetical index system and developing an ‘objective’ critical stance on the merits or otherwise of guitar riffs and production techniques.

<sup>22</sup> In Aizlewood’s 1994 collection of fan essays penned by music journalists, 15 out of the 17 contributors are male.

cultural practice' to privilege mass cultural practices against the distant, critical appreciation of the bourgeoisie (1989, p. 147). Jensen however complicates this crude binary by arguing that middle-class sensibilities about music or literature can be equally passionate, concluding that it is not the embodied emotional intensity of consumers that defines and divides class fractions, but the accessibility and status of their 'objects of desire' (1992, p. 19). 'If the object of desire is popular with the lower or middle classes, relatively inexpensive and widely available, it is fandom; if it is popular with the wealthy and well-educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise' (ibid.).

According to Hills, Bourdieu's theory 'neglects the possibility that struggles over the legitimacy of 'cultural capital' may occur between and *within* class fractions, communities and subcultures' (2002, p. 49). Skeggs agrees that the model is somewhat mechanical but points out that 'the different forms of capital... are essentially *metaphors*, they are not descriptors of empirical positions' (1997, p. 10, emphasis added). Consequently, although Bourdieu fails to conceive how these struggles might be 'internally inconsistent' (op cit., p. 48), his analysis of cultural distinctions has proved illuminating in the hands of other theorists.

In *Club Cultures* for instance, Sarah Thornton addresses the 'problem of cultural status' (1995, p. 4) in the social organisation of hierarchical club cultures, developing the notion of *subcultural capital* to demonstrate how popular cultural status is legitimated through the values of 'hipness' and authenticity, 'objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections' (ibid., p. 11). By highlighting the significant role of media absent in Bourdieu's study, she notes it is 'aficionados,' as knowing players in the 'game of 'hipness'', 'who become the writers, photographers and editors of the subcultural consumer press,' thus espousing similar 'underground' values and investments to their readers to create 'a fraternity of interest' (ibid., p. 153). As O'Brien

(1995) acknowledges, accumulating specialist forms of ‘fan cultural capital’ (Fiske, 1992, p. 42) is vital to this process, as indeed is ‘fan social capital’ - ‘the network of fan friends and acquaintances that a fan possesses, as well as their access to media producers, and professional personnel linked with the object of fandom’ (Hills, 2002, p. 57) - characterised as the ‘old boy’s network’ (ibid., p. 47). Crucially, Hills suggests both types of capital must be considered when assessing how fans build up different levels of status and distinction.

The masculinised stereotype of the avid record collector is embodied in Nick Hornby’s novel *Hi Fidelity* (1995). As Will Straw points out, competing and often contradictory reasons are given for supporting this stereotype: ‘record collections are seen as both public displays of power/knowledge and private refuges from the sexual or social world’ (1997, p. 4). He argues that ‘the nerdish homosociality’ created within popular music aficionado-hood, ‘is as fundamental to the masculinism of popular music as the general valorisation of technical prowess and performative intensity more typically seen to be at its core’ (ibid., p. 15). Whilst Straw usefully highlights the interdependence of cultural and social capital in perpetuating ‘the masculinism of popular music’, he simultaneously reinforces a masculinist model of connoisseurship that is a critical mechanism in the differentiation and discrimination of female consumers. The following letter to *The Quill* (August 1954), the official magazine of the society of autograph collectors, vividly underlines this point:

It is a great pity that a large number of famous people do not put themselves into the shoes of the average collector. If they did they would surely appreciate the genuineness and sincerity of true collectors and would be able to tell, instantly, the difference between us and the so-called “bobby-soxers” who are doing so much harm to our hobby. Editors reply, ‘Well spoken’ (cited in Vermorel and Vermorel, 1989, p. 62).

In this narrative, ‘collectors’ and ‘bobbysoxers’ are positioned according to the assumed differing functions conferred upon the object of fandom: the cool, aesthetic appreciation



of curatorial exchange versus the specious heat of sexual use.<sup>23</sup> Thornton identifies similar modes of discrimination in a culture ‘riddled with hierarchies’:

The objectification of young women...is not primarily a vilification or veneration of girls’ sexuality (although that gets brought in), but a position statement made by youth *of both genders* about girls who are not culturally ‘one of the boys’...Disparaged *other* cultures are characterized as feminine *and* girls’ cultures are devalued as imitative and passive. Authentic culture is, by contrast, depicted in gender-free or masculine terms *and* remains the prerogative of the boys...Subcultural capital would seem to be a currency which correlates with and legitimizes unequal statuses (1995, pp 104-105).

This line of analysis confronts the high/low, aesthetic quality/social relevance distinctions generated by Bourdieu and Fiske. As Frith confirms, ‘what needs challenging is not the notion of the superior, but the claim that it is the exclusive property of the “high”’ (1996, p. 16). The commonsense assumption that men are at the cutting edge of taste and action *within* the ‘popular’ is further endorsed by HMV’s marketing manager, David Terrill:<sup>24</sup>

The group leading the market and establishing trends is 70% male. They’re down at the clubs voting with their feet. By the time a group has hit songs they’re onto the next one. The other group is pop, and here women are 60% in the majority. They pursue chart activity once it becomes chart activity - they’re less concerned than young men about pursuing the credibility factor.<sup>25</sup>

In short, when gender rather than social class is foregrounded within us/them distinctions, it is male obsessions and passions that are legitimated through the acquisition of ‘extra-curricular’ knowledge (Thornton, 1995) and ‘traded up’ (Skeggs, 1997) into ‘professional’ fandom. It consequently appears that the transitional routes from ‘amateur’ to ‘professional’ fan are masculinised *across* cultural sites. The common theme of elitism

---

<sup>23</sup> ‘Matinee girls’, a derogatory label bestowed upon female theatre goers by male critics, were similarly denigrated for allegedly lusting after male actors rather than appreciating the play (Auster, 1989, cited in Jenkins, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Recent marketing statistics confirm this ‘gender bias’ in retail trends. ‘Music specialists attract more males than females while supermarkets attract more females than males... To an extent, females aged 25+ are something of a ‘lost demographic’ for the music industry. It is presumed that females somehow ‘lose interest’ in music and are therefore not worth marketing to. Must it take market turbulence to point out to retailers and labels that this is not the case at all?’ (*Five Eight*, issue 22, September 2003, p.7. Source: BPI/Taylor Nelson Soffres June 2003).

<sup>25</sup> From an interview with O’Brien (1995, p. 435), referring to the Annual Tracking Study Report devised by BMRB for HMV UK, 1993-4.



evident in all three discourses was challenged by developments in the cognate field of media studies, giving rise to the fourth discourse of fandom I identify - that of pleasure.

### **Fandom as Pleasure**

Established concerns with the analysis of production systems and textual meanings have been reoriented to questions of consumption and pleasure. There are points of convergence between discourses of productivity and pleasure, and elements of the work of key contributors such as Fiske, Jenkins and Grossberg can be located in both paradigms. Grossberg, in particular, focuses on the 'economy of meanings' generated through popular music consumption, arguing that pop engenders social and emotional 'structures of feeling' in the realm of 'affect'. 'Affect refers to that dimension or plane of our lives that we experience as moods, feelings, desires, and enervation. It is related to meanings but not reducible to them [because] music is more than language' (1992c, p. 164).

As a 'feeling of life' (1992b), affective alliances with texts and others shift according to the social and historical contexts within which they are lived: 'affect is what gives 'color', 'tone' or 'texture' to our experiences' (1992b, p. 57), determining how 'invigorated' we feel. 'It defines the strength of our investment in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings and pleasures' (ibid.) and for fans, certain moments of investment are not only 'saturated with affect' (ibid., p. 59), but provide strategies to gain some sense of control over their affective lives. Because Grossberg works at the abstract and general rather than empirical and specific, I find his writings provocative, but not especially illuminating about the ways in which gender shapes fan identities and produces particular 'affective alliances' in particular socio-historical contexts. Arguably, the first pioneering study to combine both critical elements is that of McRobbie and Garber

(1976/1983/1991), in which they examined the 'teenybopper' or so-called bedroom subculture. It is to this study, and related feminist research, that I now turn.

### *Teenybopper Girls*

The 1970s heralded the extension of fan culture 'age-wise into pensionable regions and (especially) into the hearts and minds of weenydom' (Vermorel and Vermorel, 1989, p. 55). Prepubescent girls were inundated by an unprecedented number of teenybop idols, including: the Bay City Rollers; The Osmonds; The Partridge Family and spin-off David Cassidy; representing a merchandising dream (Shuker, 1998). The increasingly sophisticated political economy underpinning pop consumption was also mirrored in media representations, as 'desire' was now acknowledged and analysed as a key principle of pre-teen fandom. For example, an article called *The astonishing rise to power of the Weeny generation* states that: 'Sexuality may be the basis of their passionate devotion to their pop idols but their fantasies aren't geared to actual physical contact. They indulge only in unattainable dreams, imagining themselves as lead singers or actually getting close enough to a pop star to touch him' (op. cit., p. 55).

McRobbie and Garber draw similar conclusions. By shifting the 'subcultural' focus from the street to the home, the bedroom and a best friend are identified as key elements of a democratically organised teenybopper culture that 'carries no strict rules and requires no special commitment to internally generated ideas of 'cool'' (1991, p. 13). In this 'culture of femininity', girls can listen to music and stare at posters of pop heroes - 'especially the crotch' (ibid.) - in a *safe* environment, enabling them to establish and explore their emerging sexuality. Crucially, they contest the discourse of passivity by arguing that girls are active participants in the commercial mainstream, for as powerful consumers, they can make or break a star's career. Conversely, their thesis reinforces the gendered inequalities between music makers and listeners, as they state that these 'fantasy

relationships...depend for their very existence on the subordinate, adoring female in awe of the male on a pedestal' (1983, p. 221). Thus, while highlighting the sociable pleasures generated through teenybop, the assumed heterosexuality of the star/fan relationship remained unchallenged.

In her later work however, McRobbie notes significant shifts in modes of femininity represented in the girls' magazines of the 1990s, such as *Just Seventeen*, 'reflecting a new climate of confidence and self-esteem amongst their readers' (1994, p. 166). 'Meta narratives of romance' have been replaced by an 'avalanche' of celebrity information about TV, film and pop stars, providing 'the raw material of fantasy' for readers' multiple desires. She also identifies a corresponding ironic shift in the editorial tone, whereby 'superficiality and pastiche allow readers to position themselves at a distance from the subordination of being 'just' a fan or just a silly girl' (ibid.).

The significance of the all-female friendship group and a playful pop media are melded in Jude Davies' study of the Spice Girls, whereby the slogan 'girl power' functions as a key marketing 'scam' and 'ideological' rallying cry to their prime teen, female audience. Davies also notes that pop stars serve different needs for female fans. Whereas boybands are marketed as 'objects of desire', girl groups are marketed 'in terms of identification, emulation and female collectivity' (1999, p. 161). The articulation of 'girl power as sisterhood' is summarised in poster magazine *Hotshots!* 'The Spice Girls are the switched-on best mates every teenage girl dreams of' (ibid., p. 164). Davies successfully charts a measured path through this rich material, illustrating both the imagined freedoms and hegemonic constraints of the mass consumption of 'girls' by 'girls'.

Although much less critically addressed, Melanie Lowe also identifies an emergent feminist sensibility in the adolescent girls in her focus groups, who appropriated the

mantra of 'girl power' to articulate 'girl solidarity, self-sufficiency and equality' (2004, p. 86).<sup>26</sup> Lowe thus claims a political element in the evasive strategies - 'to hear but not listen, to see but not read' (ibid., p. 93) - of teen fans. 'As much of their engagement with teen pop involves an attempt to distance themselves from aspects of this culture they find morally questionable, tweens ironically find *in* the mainstream an opportunity to resist their perceived oppression *by* the mainstream' (ibid., p. 81).

One further study highlighting the meaningful connections between female music listeners and makers comes from Laura Vroomen (2004), who provides a significant contribution to the field through her focus on 'older female fans'' relationship to the artist Kate Bush. Vroomen too stresses the contradictory pleasures and investments generated through older fandom, representing a 'complex mixture of resistance and conformity to social norms' (2004, p. 238). Hailed as an artist of 'quality', allying with Kate Bush enabled these widely-dispersed fans to distinguish themselves as 'listeners of distinction', set apart from two dominant fan stereotypes: the 'prurient' male fan and 'mindless', 'hysterical' teenage girl. 'Thus, the respondents did not challenge the derogation of the female fan but rather their own inclusion within that abject category' (ibid., p. 245).

Notwithstanding, there is a paucity of empirical research on female pop fans. The irony of this continued absence is that much of the 'new' focus on the audience was driven by feminist concerns to validate distinctively female pleasures in popular culture (Baehr and Gray, 1996). Feminist study has focused on a range of textual engagements, from soap opera (Hobson, 1982; Ang, 1985; Gray, 1987; 1992; Baym, 1998) and so-called 'quality' media (Brower, 1992; Harris, 1998; Thomas, 2002) to romance reading (Modleski, 1982;

---

<sup>26</sup> Whilst simultaneously dismissing Britney Spears as a "slore" - an abbreviation of slut and whore (Lowe, 2004, p. 85).



Radway, 1984/1987); foregrounding the social context to demonstrate how women derive a range of pleasures from these frequently denigrated practices and genres.<sup>27</sup>

According to Stacey (1994), the 'naïve populism' informing many of the earlier audience studies supposed that pleasure equated to activity, 'and activity is necessarily resistant, being the opposite of passivity, which is assumed to mean collusion' (1994, p. 46). She argues instead that women may be active consumers 'in the sense of *actively* investing in oppressive ideologies' (ibid., p. 47). These contradictions are highlighted in Janice Radway's study of romance reading, for whilst the act of reading is one of asserted independence from domestic responsibilities, the content of romance novels emphasises women's dependence on men. As Tania Modleski confirms:

While popular feminine texts provide outlets for women's dissatisfaction with male-female relationships, they never question the primacy of these relationships...Indeed, patriarchal myths and institutions are, on the manifest level, whole-heartedly embraced, although the anxiety and tensions they give rise to may be said to provoke the need for the texts in the first place (1982, p. 113).

Writers addressing their own fandom have experienced similar dilemmas. In *Sexing Elvis* (1990), Sue Wise offers some persuasive insights, organised around the premise 'that to be a feminist *and* an Elvis fan is problematic' (1990, p. 390). She charts her developing political and sexual awareness against her diminishing fandom, until Elvis was finally 'rejected', along with the other 'sexist junk', to the depths of 'false consciousness' (ibid., p. 393). Wise identifies two reasons for this rejection. Firstly, that in the subsequent, laudatory accounts of rock 'n' roll and the early 1950s, Elvis came to be understood as the last word in 'rampant male sexuality' (ibid., p. 396); a male-writ perspective that was clearly antithetical to her feminist principles and relationship with Elvis, the 'teddy bear'. The second issue relates to the gender politics of fandom itself: 'being a "fan" of any description was...highly suspect, unless the "star" was a certified right-on woman

---

<sup>27</sup> Although they are frequently expressed in terms of guilt and are thus 'hidden' (McRobbie, 1994).

like...Joan Armitrading, for "*being a fan*" was to collude in one's own oppression.' (ibid., p. 394, emphasis added). Only as a 'mature feminist' has she felt secure enough to 'come out' as an Elvis fan, although 'not without some trepidation' (ibid., p. 390).

Both Norma Coates (1997) and Arlene Stein (1999) have also addressed their 'feminist guilt' at 'loving' the 'misogynist' Rolling Stones.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Wise couldn't recognise her version of Elvis in masculinised accounts, Stein couldn't 'find herself' in the passive and pathological images - 'dupes of men, prisoners of lust or both' (1999, p. 215) - of female fandom. By embracing 'the aggressive loudness of the music', noise became a significant element in her 'secret gender rebellion' (ibid., p. 226). On the other hand, Coates identifies the Rolling Stones' sound 'as unmistakably phallic, and masculine' (1997, p. 50). And whilst finding the reductionism of fandom to 'false consciousness' 'unsatisfactory' (ibid., p. 51), she locates herself - and women in rock - as rock's 'object other'.

In a later essay (1998), Coates attempts to reclaim "'femininity"' from its exile in abjection' through the strategy of 'spatial reterritorialization', by returning 'the object... to rock' (1998, p. 92). This strategy doesn't incorporate other female fans however, or the few feminist writers who have analysed them:

[Such writers] and by extrapolation, the female audiences they describe, are making oppositional readings to a cultural form with a dominant reading inscribed within it. They are not challenging the dominant meanings associated with rock, including its tight association with performative masculinity. In this way these approaches reinforce and further replicate the binary construction of masculinity and femininity that stabilizes masculine hegemony in rock (ibid., p. 98).

In line with Modleski, the contradictory tenets of female pop fandom can be summarised

---

<sup>28</sup> Black feminist writers articulate similar dilemmas concerning their contradictory pleasures of recognition and expulsion to the misogyny promoted through some hip-hop and gangsta rap (Kolawole, 1995; Hampton, 1995; Morgan, 1995).

thus: fans are active agents responding creatively to conditions of subordination, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the patriarchal relations that create these conditions. Caroline Sullivan's (1999) story certainly appears to uphold this critical stance.

As a Bay City Roller fan between 1975-9, Sullivan formed the 'The Tartan Tarts' with four teenage friends and 'obsessively' followed the group whenever they toured America. 'Roller chasing' entailed driving and flying across the country, ingenious detective work to find out where they were staying, and then booking the same hotels in the pursuit of meeting and - in direct contrast to theories of 'unattainability' (1999, p. 111) - ultimately sleeping with their idols. Three issues are immediately striking. Firstly, the vast amounts of time and money invested in these fan careers - taking impermanent day jobs to finance their 'work'. Secondly, despite encountering hostility, contempt and downright misogyny from the group and their personnel, just quite how persistent and predatory these young women were. Thirdly, it is fascinating to note Sullivan's constant and contradictory negotiation of the 'object' discourses of fandom: 'we looked like...groupies. Or, worse, fans' (ibid., p. 93).

They were clearly fanatical and obsessive, subordinate but never passive, and endlessly productive and curatorial - from the obligatory scrap books to Sullivan's fanzine, *The Tartan Pervert*. Her subsequent career as a successful rock journalist<sup>29</sup> has an impact on the narrative finale, as the 'balance of power' began to shift and was ultimately overturned. Thus, rather than reinforcing the male hegemony of 'rock', Sullivan's fandom arguably furnished her with strategies to infiltrate it. Another 'professional fan', Sheryl Garratt, also recalls her immersion in UK 'Rollermania' as a period of liberation and self-discovery: 'In the brief time when the majority of girls are actively involved as fans, the

---

<sup>29</sup> Two further 'Tarts' also progressed to prestigious jobs in the music industry.

fun and the thrills are unlike anything most men will ever experience. For us, in 1975, the real excitement had little to do with the Bay City Rollers; *it was about ourselves*' (1984, p. 150). In short, the most instructive contributions to the field of fandom come from fans themselves.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to problematise academic constructs of fandom through the lens of pathology, passivity, productivity and pleasure, noting how each discourse positions fans as 'feminine' in ways that are disempowering to women and girls. I conclude that as Cultural Studies has opened up and legitimated a celebratory space to examine the significance of fandom, the 'ideal male consumers' and 'professional fans' of popular music have simultaneously colonized this space. In other words, now fandom is heralded as a producerly activity, it has been re-appropriated as a male preserve. A fundamental consequence of the lack of research considering female fandom is that the 'subcultural pop music myth' remains unchallenged: that is, that a collective and active involvement in popular music is a peculiarly male domain, produced by the 'boys' for the 'boys'. So although each discourse refocuses questions about 'the audience', academic study contributes to the 'discursive exclusion' (Frith, 1992) of female pop fans.<sup>30</sup>

Jensen's work is significant, for in problematising the 'seduction of separateness' (1992, p. 26), she persuasively blurs the us/them binary by urging that researchers 'respect and value other people as though they were us, because they always are' (ibid.). Accordingly, whilst theories highlighting the productivity and pleasures of fandom have most

---

<sup>30</sup> Barbara O'Dair, editor of the *Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, provides further insight into this 'discursive exclusion'. She too identified with the familiar rock canon, writing: 'in almost every instance it came more naturally to me to want to be Mick than Marianne, Dylan than Baez, Bowie than Joni. As a fan, identifying across my gender was easy and fun. *For men it appears not to be so*' (1999, pp 249-250, emphasis added).



resonance for my research, rather than focusing upon discourses of fandom per se, I aim to investigate how *actual* girls and women negotiate typically derogatory, feminised markers of fandom when constructing identities as music listeners and makers, ‘producers-as-consumers’ (Willis, 1990). Searching for more empirically grounded accounts of music listening and making led me to the work of Sara Cohen and Ruth Finnegan, who claims that ‘for the great majority of people, it is the local amateur scene that forms the setting for their active musical experience’ (1989, p. xii). The following chapter examines this statement in the light of these themes.

## CHAPTER THREE: MUSIC LISTENERS AS MUSIC MAKERS

The last chapter focused on the most accessible role for young women in popular music, that of fandom. I identified four principal discourses of fandom: pathology, passivity, productivity and pleasure, noting how the academic work informing each discourse has contributed to the exclusion or derogation of female popular music fans. In contrast, this chapter reviews a range of ethnographic research exploring the rituals and practices of actual music listeners and makers in actual places. Two ethnographic studies will be examined in depth: Finnegan's (1989; 1997) work on the musical worlds of Milton Keynes; and Cohen's (1991; 1997; 2001) investigation of Liverpool's rock 'scene'. I assess how these studies and other empirical research have constructed the relationship and 'boundaries' *between* music makers and listeners, and the ways in which gender is constructed through various musical activities, roles and alliances. A range of motivational and ideological factors encouraging symbolic creativity will be evaluated, before addressing the particular barriers aspirant women music makers face.

Focusing predominantly on Bayton's comprehensive research (1990; 1993; 1997; 1998), three particular 'mechanisms of exclusion' (Coates, 1997, p. 51) are identified - technology; genre ideology and the gendered use of space and place - and their significance in the production of gender inequality critically assessed. I will also examine the concept of 'scene' and various approaches to analysing audience/performer relations to consider their theoretical relevance for my own research. Specific research themes and questions will be presented at the end of the chapter.

### **Case studies of place: Milton Keynes and Merseyside**

Finnegan's groundbreaking ethnographic study investigated a range of 'grass roots' musical groups in the 'new town' of Milton Keynes in the early 1980s, identifying seven

particular forms of musical activity: classical orchestras and choirs; brass bands; operatic and musical drama groups; jazz bands; folk and ceildh groups; country and western bands and rock and pop acts. Each of these diverse musical worlds shared two broad characteristics:

First they depended on the *active and shared participation* of a range of people – and they needed to be active to engage in music. Secondly their participants were enabled to engage in these joint activities through the existence of a set of *socially accepted conventions*. They were not just the one-off actions of independent individuals (1997, p. 120).

Appropriating Becker's theory of 'art as collective action', which emphasises the collaborative involvement of social actors in creating and maintaining an 'art world', Finnegan highlights the social and aesthetic dimensions of everyday musical practices, usefully exploding the amateur/professional division that informs elitist assumptions about what kinds of practice are deemed to be work - and therefore worthy of study - or merely a hobby. 'One of the interesting characteristics of local music organization is precisely the *absence* of an absolute distinction between the amateur and the professional' (1989, p. 15). Consequently, she describes all the participants as 'musicians', *including audiences*, as skilled practitioners actively involved in the construction and continuation of musical worlds.

What is immediately striking were the numbers involved: 'several hundred functioning musical groups based and performing in and around the locality, and hundreds of live performances each year' (1989, p. 19). This proliferation can be partly explained through social and economic conditions of the town. At the time of study, Milton Keynes was a prosperous 'new town' with a progressive arts policy, widespread employment and a younger demographic than that of the national population. Of equal significance were the enduring musical traditions and institutions<sup>31</sup> that already existed in surrounding areas.

---

<sup>31</sup> Namely brass bands, operatic groups and choirs.

Cohen similarly emphasises the centrality of Liverpool's musical heritage in stimulating local rock productivity.<sup>32</sup> Both studies highlight the fundamental role of local infrastructure such as independent record labels<sup>33</sup>, specialist equipment and record shops, recording studios, rehearsal facilities and performance venues in developing musical 'scenes'.

Finnegan applies the metaphor of 'pathways' to explain how specific habitual traditions, and the musical worlds or genres associated with them, become established walks of life. Pathways represent 'a series of known and regular routes which people chose - or were led into - and which they both kept open and extended through their actions' (ibid., p. 305). Some pathways are much narrower and less established; 'highly particularistic' and individualised (ibid., p. 324). These are more difficult to navigate, less well trodden and may disappear. The metaphor equally highlights the part-time and dynamic aspects of much local music activity and the ways in which pathways overlap and interconnect with other activities and interests - referred to as 'social pathways' - in people's lives. 'They were not all-encompassing' - although some participants were involved from 'cradle to grave' (ibid., p. 324) - 'or always clearly known to outsiders, but settings in which relationships could be forged, interests shared, and a continuity of meaning achieved in the context of urban living' (ibid., p. 306). Above all, pathways take collective commitment and hard work to become established and developed. These demands are balanced against great personal rewards, creating a meaningful context for self-expression and social identity.

---

<sup>32</sup> The Beatles' legacy and the notion of a 'Liverpool Sound' has been something of a mixed blessing however; a source of pride, identity, influence, restriction and resentment.

<sup>33</sup> Such as Probe Plus (Liverpool) and Concrete Cow (Milton Keynes), although Cohen also noted key 'gaps' in provision for music makers and a resistance from them to organise and articulate their needs (1991, p. 225).



By mapping the specific features and rituals<sup>34</sup> of Milton Keynes' musical worlds, Finnegan found that each pathway generated particular characteristics in terms of ideology and ethos; venues and institutions; and demographics. Involvement in the brassband or classical world couldn't be read as a straightforward product of socio-cultural positioning however: 'one of the striking features of local music was ... the overall *mixture* of people practising it' (ibid., p. 312). She also explodes the assumption that popular music is the preserve of the young, by illustrating how musical activities become 'frameworks for living' and frequently extend beyond teenage years.

Local rock and pop worlds attracted the most concentrated participation, with a 'swarm' of around one hundred and seventy 'small' groups identified over a four-year period, but this prolific small-scale productivity also paralleled wider exclusionary norms. Out of a survey of one hundred and twenty-five 'players', only eight were women. No other pathway was so resolutely male-dominated or segregated. 'Girls were often (though not always) the singers in rock bands while boys were drummers, PA experts and drivers' (ibid., p. 315). There were however 'plenty of exceptions' to this gendered division of labour in other musical worlds, and Finnegan maintains that 'these gender influenced roles were general expectations rather than absolute requirements...most musical pathways depended on the co-operation of both men and women' (ibid.).

Focusing explicitly on pop and rock, Cohen's findings are considerably more damning. Whereas female audience members were present in Milton Keynes, Cohen writes of her astonishment at the 'overwhelming absence of women in the rock music scene on Merseyside, not only in the bands themselves but in their audiences and many of their

---

<sup>34</sup> Finnegan describes the use of the term ritual thus: 'some quality of being an end in itself rather than utilitarian or technological; somehow set apart from (everyday) routines; in some sense obligatory and repeated, with some kind of set and expected programme; a collective and jointly stated enactment; and some symbolic, religious or at any rate deeply evaluative or in some sense externally validated meaning' (1989, pp 352-353).

social activities' (1991, p. 202). She vividly describes the everyday sexism and practices that served to preserve this homosocial world, characterised by 'male aggression', bonding and 'fragile male egos' (2001, p. 233). The 'narcissistic celebration of male power' performed at small rock gigs in mid-eighties Liverpool (and beyond) served to 'structurally exclude' women (1991, p. 102 citing Taylor and Laing, 1979). Partners were viewed as a 'threat' and readily 'scapegoated' for band splits and bad gigs<sup>35</sup> and women who were visible, particularly those 'hanging out' at recording and rehearsal studios, were labelled as groupies (1997, p. 31). Either 'ignored' or objectified, women were thus 'actively' expelled from the male camaraderie of the gig, rehearsal room and recording studio.

In her ethnographic work on the spatial organisation and audience distribution at 'well attended' indie rock gigs, Wendy Fonarow (1997) also identifies marked gender differences, as women typically constituted only 35% of the audience. Mapping the indie gig terrain in an age-related framework, she identifies three zones of audience distribution, with zone one, 'stage side and the pit', representing 'the domain of greatest and most frenetic activity, the youngest audience and strongest statement of fanship' (1997, p. 361). The most 'acute gender distinctions' are also noted in this proximity zone, where specific ritual 'modes of participation' such as crowd surfing and moshing, represent particularly 'frightening' dangers for women.<sup>36</sup> She does point out however that 'the indie community is fairly welcoming to female performers' (ibid., p. 360).

In direct contrast, Cohen found women musicians provoked hostility and distrust from bands and audience members alike, as well as music industry personnel. All-women

---

<sup>35</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, girlfriends were also 'important... audience members', frequently called upon to finance recordings and subsidise gigs (1991, p. 33).

<sup>36</sup> Issues that were explicitly addressed through the feminist reclamation of zone one at riot grrrl gigs, see below (Leonard, 1997).

bands were viewed as a 'gimmick' and it was assumed women were present in male bands to add 'sex appeal' rather than any meaningful musical contribution to the performance (1991, p. 206). Indeed, one of the few women managers Cohen identified felt she had to 'distance' herself from other female players because they 'were so despised' (ibid., p. 208). Although detailing a range of masculinities produced through Liverpool 'indie' rock for over a decade, Cohen insists that there is nothing 'natural' about a male-dominated 'scene': 'rather, it is actively produced as male through social practice and ideology, contributing to the process through which patterns of male and female behaviour...are established' (1997, p. 34). She thus concludes that in its structures and discourse, practice and traditions, Liverpool's indie rock 'scene' could best be described as 'a performance of gender' (ibid., p. 33). I will now unpack some of the key ideological and sociological factors that encourage both the proliferation and male-ness of popular music makers, beginning with the unruly notion of 'making it.'

### **Motivations for making music**

#### *1) Success*

Pop music is 'powerful magic' (Jones, 1997) and many musicians aspire to the associated trappings of wealth, recognition and fame. The complex factors enabling (and indeed, constraining) pop success are typically obscured however<sup>37</sup>, and the most familiar 'making it' narrative - that of being 'discovered' due to a combination of 'luck' and 'talent' (Frith, 1983) - has become one of pop's most enduring myths. Kirschner argues that the potential financial rewards associated with 'success' are a significant incentive for aspirant musicians, contrasting professional and amateur bands thus: 'those who make a living playing music and those who wish they could' (1998, p. 265). Cohen also found that music making was perceived as a career choice for many Liverpool groups,

---

<sup>37</sup> Despite an abundance of 'how to...' 'recipe' books and 'reality' TV programmes, which serve to perpetuate rather than demystify 'making it' myths.

identifying three stages to 'making it.' First is the joining or forming of bands, writing material and playing live, thus establishing a profile and identity within the locality. The second is signing a recording contract and producing records and the third is achieving international recognition and success. Most bands at the first stage aspired to 'the deal', although the vast majority failed to realise this goal. Even the ones that did rarely reached the third - attaining and sustaining a career as so-called rock stars (1991, p. 131).

Identifying over 10,000 rock groups in the greater area of Los Angeles, Kirschner states that what virtually all these bands have in common is a 'desire' for success (1998, p. 250). He argues however, that the notion of success - 'a central trope in popular music, informing and motivating the entire domain of rock culture' - needs to be carefully examined (ibid., p. 252). Rob Strachan (2004) also draws attention to the 'narrow' framework within which 'success' and 'failure' are frequently defined, in line with the economic imperatives of multinational conglomerates. Along with the more typical quantitative measures of fans and record sales, Kirschner suggests success should equally be considered qualitatively, in terms of cultural impact and influence on a peer group. A band like Nirvana can be deemed a 'quintessential' success because they fulfil all three measures (1998, p. 251).

What becomes increasingly apparent is that the complex combination of aspirations and pleasures that inspire symbolic creativity cannot be reduced to perceived financial rewards. As Frith asks: 'What pushes people into wanting to be performers or wanting to create? This can't be answered in terms of their wanting to make money, it involves too a desired social experience' (1992, p. 184). Cohen identifies a second critical dimension, that of creativity. 'That so many were attracted to making music as a band and that music-making was relevant to them and to their audiences cannot be understood through social



and commercial factors alone; far more important is the creative activity of making music itself' (1991, p. 134).

Finnegan draws a further distinction between musicians who play cover versions of established songs and those who write 'original' music, representing a significant 'channel for individual [and collective] self-expression' (1989, p. 307). Whilst acknowledging the difference, Kirschner points out that the relationship between the two isn't 'cut and dried'. 'Most "original" bands play a few covers, and cover bands often play a few originals, but the distinction nevertheless remains important since upward mobility is directly tied to notions of originality' (1998, p. 265). Popular music is also perceived to offer an alternative lifestyle, identity and ideology (Becker, 1997). It symbolises a 'way out' from convention or locality, an escape route from everyday norms and lack of opportunities (Cohen, 1998, p. 279), or as 'a path to bohemian freedoms' (Frith, 1983, p. 75), beyond the confines of social class.

I have consequently identified five narratives of 'making it': romantic - as a means of achieving fame and fortune; economic - as a means of earning a living; social - as a means of forging a sense of community; creative - as a means of self-expression, and ideological - as a means of making a difference, or reaffirming difference from others. It is important to bear in mind that these dimensions are frequently interrelated. For the bands of Liverpool and Los Angeles, it was the combination of creativity, sociability and potential commercial success that encouraged the majority to make music. Focusing on the first of Cohen's stages, the following section examines the sociological and ideological factors informing early musical practice, exploring the role of the family, media and education system in stimulating symbolic creativity and the ways in which these key institutions limit music making opportunities for women and girls.

## 2) *The family, media and school*

The family plays a vital role in encouraging children's musical engagement. 'Parental support was of the essence' (1989, p. 308) writes Finnegan: 'their facilitating of instrumental practice at home, joining in playing or singing, and providing material resources all laid foundations for people's musical pathways later in life' (ibid., p. 195). What she calls 'the family basis of musical pathways' (ibid., p. 311) was more evident in other musical worlds however. On the other hand, Liverpool's potent legacy of pop success stimulated a masculinist tradition of band culture that has been passed down from father to son. Cohen found that girls were usually musically active until the onset of adolescence when they became immersed in the 'culture of femininity', but she also stresses that this practice of self-exclusion was particularly heightened due to the intimidating, masculine culture of Merseyside. Central to home life, Liverpool women were 'very much present...despite their absence' (1997, p. 21), and she emphasises the 'hidden importance' of mothers and other female relatives in providing financial and emotional support, along with a social and domestic context within which music making for young men could flourish (1991, p. 211).<sup>38</sup>

Within an educational context, the majority of younger musically-active Milton Keynes' pupils were girls, an imbalance, Finnegan notes, that was 'partially corrected later on, and also offset by the larger involvement of teenage boys in rock groups *outside* school' (1989, p. 203). Most rock musicians were self-taught, with the emphasis on self-achievement, although about one third had received some sort of training, either from specialist tutors or family members. Similarly, 'many' Liverpool 'rock musicians...learned to play their instruments at home under the influence of male relatives, with few learning in school' (Cohen, 1997, p. 19).

---

<sup>38</sup> Green (1997) also highlights the contribution of women, as mothers and teachers, to the process of musical transmission and continuity.

In *Music Gender and Education* (1997), Lucy Green shows how recent changes in music education, including a popular music remit in the National Curriculum for Music<sup>39</sup>, have created gendered divisions *within* English schools. Drawing on data generated through questionnaires distributed to music teachers in seventy-eight Secondary co-educational schools in 1992, along with face-to-face interviews with a range of pupils, Green found that girls were involved in ‘classical’ orchestral practice<sup>40</sup> and choirs<sup>41</sup>, whereas boys preferred popular music activities, both within and without the classroom. I cite one of many similar teacher observations: ‘At GCSE level boys veer to Pop Music performance – with the willingness to imitate performers/styles on guitar, drums, keyboard. At this stage girl performers tend towards classical orchestral performances or pop ‘vocals’’ (1997, pp 177- 178).

Green’s analysis of teacher perceptions is equally telling. Girls involved in classical music were frequently characterised as more mature, focused, co-operative and conformist. In a popular music context however, they were constructed as ‘passive’ and/or starstruck listeners (ibid., pp 180-181). Boys were almost always referred to in active and creative terms, thus constructing and confining gendered musical practices within an active/passive binary (ibid., p. 183). Both teachers and pupils negotiated these discursive ‘truths’, producing what Green, drawing on the theoretical perspective of Walkerdine (1990), identifies as ‘a deep conservatism’ and ‘desire’ to conform to patriarchal constructs of masculinity and femininity (ibid., p. 191). Bayton’s research recognizes considerably more interplay than Green allows for however. Whereas girls’ orchestral playing is analysed as an affirmation of femininity and conformity, many

---

<sup>39</sup> Established in 1992, requiring children to ‘sing, play, compose, improvise, appraise and listen to music’. The GCSE syllabus (1986) has also undergone significant changes (see Green, 1997, pp 144-148) that have stimulated wider participation of both young women and men (ibid., p. 246).

<sup>40</sup> With flute and violin identified as the most ‘typical’ instruments. Green argues that piano and acoustic guitar are equally widespread, due to a historical association with private performance that is translated in the educational sphere. Along with singing, she argues that these instrumental choices are ‘relatively affirmative of femininity’ (1997, p. 160).

<sup>41</sup> Finnegan also notes the ‘chronic’ shortage of men in choirs (1989, p. 315).

women 'rock' musicians identified their classical training as an important entrée point to diverse popular music worlds (Bayton, 1990; 1998).<sup>42</sup>

Other studies confirm that 'on average, girls invest more of their time and identity in doing well at school. Boys, by contrast, spend more time and money on leisure activities like going out, listening to records and reading music magazines' (Thornton, 1997a, p. 204, citing Mintel 1988 and Euromonitor 1989). As noted in the previous chapter, the 'subcultural' music press provides an important source of 'extra-curricular' knowledge for a predominantly male readership, thus perpetuating a 'hegemonic masculine view' (Bayton, 1998, p. 3). This is further reinforced by sexualised representations of women in the specialist media. In her survey of trade magazines for example, Bayton found that women were 'scantily dressed' and used primarily to sell guitars, rather than advance the idea that women could actually play them (1997, p. 38). More popular titles such as *Mix Mag*<sup>43</sup> further perpetuate the notion of 'woman as sexual commodity.' Articles about women players are, by contrast, rare, resulting in few accessible role models for teenage 'women' to emulate (Bayton, 1997; 1998).

Gender stereotyping is equally crucial. Girls as young as eleven identified 'singing' and 'dancing' as 'girls' jobs' which boys consequently rejected as 'uncool' or 'cissy.' On the other hand, boys were attracted to sport and 'mucking about with the instruments' (cited in Green, 1997, p. 174). In sum, traditions transmitted through place and family, gender stereotyping, differing educational expectations, teacher perceptions, media representations, consumption practices and the consequent accumulation and legitimation

---

<sup>42</sup> Although this conversion is not without its own attendant value problems, for 'rock' is typically characterised by 'feel', 'improvisation' and the use of electronic amplification, a value cluster clearly at odds with the classical mores of sight reading, 'natural' amplification and so forth. Some women working within popular music have consequently labelled their classical background a 'disadvantage' (Bayton, 1990, p. 240). Other key influential factors identified are boyfriends, lesbianism, drama, art and bohemianism, rebellion against gender stereotypes and role models (1993, p. 191; 1998).

<sup>43</sup> 'Stressing glamour rather than ability' when advertising 'the UK's first all-girl DJ club tour' (cited in Whiteley, 2000, p. 5).



of gendered forms of 'fan cultural capital' are all significant factors shaping perceived and material gender differences. Green also notes exceptions to these exclusionary norms for young women with 'exceptional talent' (ibid.), a contentious point that demands further interrogation.

### 3) *Talent*

In the target paper *Is Everyone Musical? (The Psychologist, 1994)*, Sloboda, Davidson and Howe begin by challenging the folk psychological perspective that musical talent is innate (1994, p. 349), identifying two key factors that encourage musical practice. Intrinsic motivation 'develops from an intense pleasurable experience with music (of a sensual, aesthetic, or emotional kind) and contributes to the development of a personal commitment to music in and of itself' (ibid., p. 353). Reception - consuming and appreciating music - is central to this first type. Achievement and approval are the extrinsic motivators. Whilst seemingly useful categories for exploring the socio-psychological dimensions that encourage creativity, they are in fact explicit descriptors of 'classical' music practice, highlighting the dogged exclusivity of high/low musical divisions that Green paradoxically reverses through an active/male/popular-passive/female/classical binary.

One of the peer commentaries in *The Psychologist* attempts to challenge the taken-for-granted elitism informing the classical/popular dualism within schools, by claiming equal status for the 'non-specialist musician',

who is likely to be male, who has had no conventional specialist teaching, who cannot read or write music, but who enthusiastically plays pop music as a spare time hobby, and who is quite likely to have experience with music technology and to possess equipment at home... [thus] everyone has the chance to be 'musical' to a far greater extent than the authors suggest, since the classical specialist view of being musical is not one with which the majority of secondary school pupils will readily identify: indeed, what the authors describe as *intrinsic* motivation is much more likely to develop in those forms of music with which pupils are most familiar (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 358).

Ironically, Hargreaves' democratic appeal also serves to exclude young women from 'the chance to be musical' by normalising the typical male ownership of 'home' technologies<sup>44</sup>. He does however usefully blur the boundaries between consumption and production by emphasising the symbiotic relationship between music listening and making, whatever the genre. Clearly not all fans want to become musicians, but as we have found thus far, the 'hurdles' (Bayton, 1998) for aspirant young women are manifest. They are further compounded by the first of three 'mechanisms of exclusion' I now address in greater detail: the relationship between gender and technology.

### **Mechanisms of exclusion**

#### *1) Gender and technology*

It is widely recognised that technology is a site that women and girls are traditionally excluded, or exclude themselves, from. As one teacher in Green's research noted: 'despite my best efforts, boys tend to monopolise computers, multi-track recorders, sequencers etc. and girls mistrust the technology' (1997, p. 175). 'Technophobia' (Bayton, 1997) is therefore produced through two complementary modes. Firstly, the ideological correlation between the technical, rational and masculine and secondly, the material consequences of the hegemonic equation of 'toys' and 'boys', affecting both perceptions and access, from the computer lab at school to the male domination of particular occupational categories, including engineering and music production (Bayton, 1998; Milestone and Richards, 2000; Yeandle et al., 2004).<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Assumptions that are explicitly addressed in a later comparative study (Hargreaves, Colley, and Comber, 1995), which draws similar conclusions to Green (1997). With reference to the use of technology in composition, girls are seen to be 'safer' and boys more 'experimental' (cited in Green, 1997, p. 196).

<sup>45</sup> Yeandle et al. identify a 'gender pay gap' produced through the occupational segregation and vertical integration of women in 'feminised' areas of work. Thus, '95% of [British] childcare workers are women while the overwhelming majority of engineering workers are men' (2004, p. 41).

In popular musical terms, 'technology' ranges from the drums, bass guitar<sup>46</sup>, mixing desk or turntable, to that classic symbol of 'cock rock', the electric guitar: '(Male) musical skills become synonymous with (male) sexual skills' (Bayton, 1997, p. 43). The technical discourse pervading sound checks and recording sessions, and the intimidating atmosphere of specialist shops, all serve to inhibit young women. '[They] are put off by the multitude of electronic and electrical components, which are a basic requirement for a rock performance...they lack confidence' (ibid., p. 42). Hargreaves' observation is also reinforced by the gendered division of labour in dance/club cultures, 'where an increasing sophistication in technology has been accompanied by yet another history of marginalisation' (Whiteley, 2000, p. 4), with men tending to colonize the economically rewarding occupations of programmers, mixers, and the re-claimed status of DJ (Goodwin, 1992; Thornton, 1995).

Whilst acknowledging sexist discourse and practice in the world of rock, Kirschner argues that in his experience, male musicians are 'often thrilled' to work with women who occupy traditionally masculinised roles such as sound engineer or lead guitarist; claiming that 'competence is the primary issue' (1998, p. 263). Competence is far from the neutral category he suggests however, extending beyond the process of acquiring requisite skills to the subjective practice of how skills are judged - and by whom (Milestone and Richards, 2000). Green's work also serves to perpetuate the loaded interdependence between competence and technology, by arguing that the 'the higher the level of technology involved in women's instrumental performance, the more interruptive that performance is to patriarchal constructions of femininity' (1997, p. 75).

---

<sup>46</sup> Bass guitarists and drummers are both identified by Bayton (1990) as a particularly scarce and therefore precious commodity for all-women bands.

Green's perspective is usefully complicated by the following statement from 'middle-aged' punk performer, Vi Subversa: 'All of technology is dominated by men...but I'm fucked if I'm going to say it belongs to them. It's ours! Right? Every single wire that's been put together was made by a man who was fed, nurtured, supported by women somewhere' (cited in Bayton, 1997, p. 49). This statement of refusal also renders visible the 'hidden' role of women highlighted by Cohen, whilst reinforcing the host of ideological and institutional factors that deter many girls and women from the creative and social pleasures afforded to male players. Indeed, when outlining the systematic range of ideological and material 'hurdles' women musicians continue to face, Bayton (1998) goes as far as to suggest that it is remarkable that there are so many, rather than so few. Not surprisingly, she calls the minority of women who traverse these barriers 'exceptional.'

Although Bayton's long-term work in this area has proved invaluable, I do take issue with her dismissive approach to female fandom. 'Male fans identify with their guitar-heroes and seek to emulate them by learning to play themselves. In contrast, female fans fantasise about sex, love, marriage and babies with their idols. Male fans buy a guitar; female fans buy a poster' (1997, p. 40). And while she has subsequently acknowledged an active component in pop consumption, conceding that 'fans are not unthinking record-fodder'; she continues to uphold the great divide: 'for all their adventurousness, they are still consumers and not producers of the music' (1998, p. 11). A hierarchical distinction is likewise established between musicianship and singing, with the role of vocalist described as a 'circumscribed space' (1993, p. 177).

Green also identifies singing as a 'display' 'coded as feminine' (1997, p. 28), due to the 'natural' use of the body as a 'sound system', coupled with the contradictory connotations of threat and sexual availability produced through 'public' performance. Moreover, she



elaborates on the gendered hierarchy by claiming that singers ‘affirm’, instrumentalists ‘interrupt’, and composers ‘threaten’ patriarchal constructs of femininity. When critiquing similarly reductionist arguments, Coates asks some extremely pertinent questions ‘which are foreclosed by such hegemonic lines of reasoning’ (1997, p. 60).

Why is the male lead singer valorised while the female lead singer is not? Is the fact that this question is not considered by academics writing about rock a symptom of the hold of gender hegemony on all aspects of the rock complex? ... What would happen to theorising about rock if the singer was accorded equal status, despite gender? Might this now be happening? (ibid.).

For Bayton, clearly not, as she states that ‘it does not, in a sense, matter how many women sing in bands, since, even if *all* singers in bands were female, rock itself would remain masculine’ (1998, p. 13). The assumed correlation between genre and gender further limits the popular music pathways women and girls can enter and it is to this second mechanism of exclusion that I now turn.

## 2) *Gender and genre: rock versus pop*

As with all cultural stories, myths are generated that make up the very fabric of Anglo-American popular music history. Studying the development and significance of genres provides one way of mapping the story, as varying sounds and associated styles signify key points of reference in both industry and ideological terms. Definitions are inherently problematic however, given that genres are dynamic and frequently interpreted in different ways (Frith, 1996; Cloonan, 1998). Finnegan (1989) draws attention to this flexibility, along with the multiple and specialist sub-genres located within the ‘elusive’ typology of rock and pop. What concerns me here is the categorisation of these dynamic labels as ideological markers in the historical construction of gender difference.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the ‘feminization’ of 1950s popular music, characterised by the girl group genre, has been pejoratively equated with the decline of

‘active’ rock ‘n’ roll (Frith and McRobbie, 1978/1990). The subsequent ‘commercialization’ of rock is similarly defined as ‘a process of ‘masculinization’’ (1990, p. 384). However ‘crude’, this line of analysis continues to resonate in commonsense judgements that seek to polarise and simultaneously fix the ‘slippery’ (Frith, 2001) boundaries of ‘active’ rock and ‘passive’ pop.

Two critical factors contributed to the demise of the girl group genre. Firstly, the collapse of the Brill Building system,<sup>47</sup> precipitated by the changing status of performers as they became songwriters,<sup>48</sup> and secondly, the emerging distinctions between commercial teen pop and ‘progressive’ rock (Greig, 1989). According to Frith (1983), the folk revival of the mid-1960s reversed the democratic principle underpinning rock ‘n’ roll as a youth music anybody could make. Rock ‘progressed’ to embrace a Romantic sensibility, emphasising individual skill over collective experience and originality over ‘banality.’ The major record companies responded by initiating a rock/pop binary in 1967 that made ‘sociological as well as commercial sense’ (1983, p. 214), employed as a marketing device to construct two distinct areas of sales, singles and albums, that both catered for and encouraged the burgeoning rock audience. These socio-economic shifts provided the context for what is arguably the defining ‘myth’ of Anglo-American rock discourse: art versus commerce (Weinstein, 1999; Strachan, 2004). Not surprisingly, art/commerce and rock/pop dualisms ‘can easily be overlaid’, as Barbara Bradby succinctly puts it, ‘with a gender analysis’ (1990, p. 341).

Whereas rock in its various mutations, from punk to grunge, is assumed in commonsense terms, to represent an authentic mode of expression magically produced in isolation from

---

<sup>47</sup> A system predicated on the creative divide between the professional songwriter and performer.

<sup>48</sup> Vividly highlighted by The Beatles’ shift from a cover band (1957-62), drawing directly on girl group songs such as The Shirelles’ ‘Baby It’s You’ (Burt Bacharach) on their first album, to the most successful and widely celebrated songwriting team of the twentieth century (Greig, 1989; Frith et al., 2001).

the taint of commercialism, pop by contrast, is disposable and manufactured. As Whiteley notes of the most successful girl group of the 1990s: 'it would seem that the old debates surrounding authenticity and cultural value were being resurrected to pass judgement on the Spice Girls and that popular commercial success was again being associated with the ideological evils of mass culture' (2000, p. 233). Thus, the spurious connections drawn between genre and gender highlight ideological rather than musicological distinctions (Frith, 1996). Whilst the correlation between pop and femininity can therefore be problematised, rock remains a potent symbol of 'male sexuality, dominance and prestige' (Cohen, 2001, pp 231-2). From heavy metal (Weinstein, 1990; Walser, 1993) to indie (Cohen, 1997; 2001), theorists argue that rock represents a key site in the production of performative masculinities, as a 'technology of gender' which expels the 'abject' (Coates, 1997).

In similar ways to the feminist 'fans' detailed in chapter two, feminist musicians have been forced to grapple with the symbolic male-ness of rock. Bayton describes how these struggles had a profound impact on what she calls 'musical essentialism', producing what has since become known as 'women's music':

Attempts to...define a 'female' music proved to be impossible. It was far easier to specify what 'women's music' was not: loud, noisy, driving 'cock rock'...The problem was that so much music had been labelled 'male' that only the folk area was considered ideologically safe. Paradoxically then, the feminist challenge looked likely to result in retreat from rock and amplified music altogether (1993, p. 185).

When approached in market terms, what Frith (1996) describes as 'the logic of labelling' can be identified in the subsequent sales category, "women's music", which has since expanded beyond the realms of 'spirituality' (Bayton, 1993, p. 186) to incorporate a range of disparate genres that continue to be defined ideologically '*against* other ways of

making music' (Frith, 1996, p. 87): namely the assumed 'oppressive patriarchal structures of [the] mainstream' (Whiteley, 1997, p. xxxi).<sup>49</sup>

The less explicitly separatist label, 'women in rock', materialized as a media construct in the early 1970s, representing 'a generic mushy lump' (O'Brien, 1995, p. 3) that includes an equally diverse roster, from Janice Joplin to P.J. Harvey. It can also be defined ideologically, but as a means of restating women's outsider status to rock (Coates, 1997), thus reinforcing their 'fetishisation' (Green, 1997) and 'inauthenticity' (Kearney, 1997). Rather than rejecting the label, Coates suggests that this process of marginalisation can be combated through reclaiming the label 'women in rock', *by* 'women in rock' (1997, p. 62). Similar contradictions are evident in the final genre-gender alliance I examine, that of the contested relationship between punk, 'riot grrrl' and feminism.

### *Feminism and punk: Do It Yourself*

In opposition to the Romantic value cluster informing the genre codes of rock, the DIY ideology of 1970s punk rock was founded on an ethos of 'anti-professionalism' (Bayton, 1993), promoting an 'access aesthetic' (Rosen, 1997) which encouraged women to participate as music makers. Punk's liberatory potential for women is much debated nevertheless (Laing, 1985; Kearney, 1997). Bayton (1993) for example, charts the 'problems and contradictions' experienced by feminist instrumentalists and all-women bands expounding the principle of inclusion by aiming to eradicate the audience/performer divide. At all-female gigs, the power dynamic between audiences and performers was certainly diminished, but democratic relations between these two 'interest

---

<sup>49</sup> Rather than claiming any characteristic sonic features, Bayton identifies a range of political/personal values in feminist-oriented music making, such as the issues of motherhood and the menopause (1993, p. 179), and co-operative rather than competitive inter-group relations.



groups' (Frith, 1998) are difficult to realise, let alone sustain. As one feminist musician concedes:

There's definitely a differentiation I've never been able to quite come to grips with: the whole thing between the audience and the group. Because you can't really get into this thing of "we're all here together enjoying ourselves", because it's not quite like that...they've actually paid to see you and you're getting paid for playing. You're in a different position (cited in Bayton, 1993, p. 180).

Playing to all-female audiences within the social and political context of a feminist event was an empowering experience for many fledgling all-women groups, but the restrictions also caused deep frustrations. For many audience members, these were primarily social occasions, with the emphasis on dancing and networking rather than musical appreciation. Similarly, whilst creating vital opportunities and safe spaces for women to begin playing, those who wished to develop their expertise and professionalism were often 'castigated' for appropriating masculinist principles, thus highlighting the 'dialectic of value' (Hills, 2002) enabling and constraining feminist musical practice founded upon an ethos of 'anti-professionalism.'

Punk's role as the 'father figure' of early 1990s riot grrrl is equally disputed (Kearney, 1997, p. 208). Whereas Marion Leonard argues riot grrrl can be located 'in its ongoing tradition' (1997, p. 237), Marie Celeste Kearney identifies feminism as the 'mother figure' of the genre and, in what is proving to be a familiar narrative motif, that it was not primarily a musical but political phenomenon. Both agree that feminism was pivotal to the mobilisation of this 'scene', as a range of feminist issues, from date-rape to voter registration, were addressed through a 'translocal' (Schilt, 2004) network of 'underground zines'<sup>50</sup> and concerts. The typical power relations between audiences and performers were similarly problematised, with bands such as Britain's Huggy Bear and America's Bikini

---

<sup>50</sup> Leonard (1997) applies the concept of 'networks' to emphasise the collectivism of the women involved, highlighting the centrality of zines as a fundamental means of communication connecting women across geographically dispersed areas.

Kill explicitly challenging the spatial, heterosexual (with the identification of queercore) and gendered politics of access, by reclaiming the critical front-stage space of 'zone one.'

As Leonard writes of their 1993 joint tour:

Before their shows they issued handouts requesting that girls and women stand near the front of the stage rather than toward the back. The handout commented that the front of the stage usually excluded women due to the violence of slamdancing or the potential for harassment. Moreover the text stressed the importance of female address and identification stating: 'I really wanna look at female faces while I perform. I want HER to know that she is included in this show (1997, pp 233-234).

In the spirit of DIY, women and girls were also encouraged to form bands and produce fanzines, 'to move outside the "bedroom culture" of female fandom and into the realm of subcultural producer' (Schilt, 2004, p. 115). Conventional notions of feminine 'display' were also subverted through a juxtaposition of 'particularly feminine dress codes' and language - writing SLUT and WHORE on their bodies as a pre-emptive strike (Leonard, 1997, p. 235). Despite the short-lived prominence of this 'scene',<sup>51</sup> referred to as 'post grrrl' by 1994 (Schilt, 2004, p. 127), these various writers claim riot grrrl made a fundamental contribution to women's musical practice by producing a host of 'empowering' role models performing more disruptive displays of femininity.

All the literature reviewed thus far presents a vital contrast to discourses of fandom by illustrating, instead, how music makers and listeners are mutually engaged in the construction and appropriation of music as social practice. I particularly embrace theoretical perspectives that 'blur' the production versus consumption binary. Kirschner usefully extends these arguments beyond the sphere of 'grass roots' musical activity by arguing that 'modes of consumption are the end result of production processes; [but] at the same time they are an integral part of music making, since audience approval and commodity consumption are tied up with most people's definition of success' (1998, p.

---

<sup>51</sup> Due to media hype and 'internal conflicts' produced through accusations of 'selling out', classism and racism (Schilt, 2004).

252). He suggests that audience/performer relations can best be evaluated along what he calls a 'continuum of success.' At a 'low level', there are many amateur bands, each with a 'few fans'. This ratio is inverted along the continuum until at the highest level of success, we find the 'major label superstars', of which there are relatively few, who command 'vast international audiences' (ibid., p. 250). Crucially, he argues that the continuum of success is governed by 'the logic of access', restricting progress for the 'vast majority of...music-makers seeking upward mobility. The logic of access guarantees that the production of music is completely bound by relations of power' (ibid., p. 253).

Frith unpacks these power relations to assess how competing 'musical value judgements' are formed by three significant interest groups. First, are the music makers, whose values emerge 'from the constraints of collaboration...from the constraints of craft ...[and] from the experience of performance (revolving around a sense of difference)' (1998, p. 574). The second group he details are 'producers', the vast array of people involved in the hit and miss process of commodification, converting music and artists into hits and stars. 'The obvious values of productive efficiency in this group are overlaid, perhaps unexpectedly, by a Romantic belief in genius and originality, in the 'mystery' of both musical creation and audience taste' (ibid., pp 574-5). Last but not least are consumers, who again bring a range of mediated values - from fantasy to community - to the relationship. These differing value systems create inevitable tensions between music makers and listeners indicated by Frith's repetition of 'constraint', implying that musicians frequently measure their artistic values *against* the market and audience needs. Drawing on the work of Becker (1952), Frith points out that these 'value gaps' 'lead almost invariably to...a contempt for their popular audience' (ibid.), an imagined audience that is 'othered' as female (ibid.).

In sum, power relations between music makers and listeners are shaped and gendered differently along the success continuum by a cluster of access 'logics' determined by specific genre codes or 'pathways' which are, in turn, influenced by the particular places in which they are produced. This summary brings us full circle to the third 'mechanism of exclusion' I want to consider, extending the notion of 'spatial reterritorialization' (Coates, 1998) beyond the gig to examine the wider impact of spatial politics on women's mobility.

### *3) Gender and place*

The metaphors of 'public' and 'private' have frequently been appropriated to highlight significant gender differences in terms of access and ownership of space; a critical omission, as McRobbie and others have pointed out, that fundamentally skewed the subcultural celebration of 'the street.' Ethnographic study provides a vital resource for shedding empirical light on the particular conditions producing relations of gender inequality, for as feminist cultural geographer, Doreen Massey, asserts:

From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places, and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood (1994, p. 179).

Thus, Liverpool's indie rock 'scene' was produced through the socio-economic conditions of the city. Its virtually obsolete port industry, fiercely working class heritage and clearly demarcated use of space both reflected and perpetuated 'a male lineage, canon and legacy' (Cohen, 1997, p. 30). The city's physical infrastructure also contributed to its 'scenescape' (ibid., p. 25), comprising a run-down milieu of rock venues and related institutions situated in poorly lit back streets which clearly restricted access for many women concerned about personal safety, as I discuss below. Instead, Cohen notes that many young women and men preferred the more luxurious settings of city centre



nightclubs. The social pathways of older women were equally shaped in significantly different ways:

Many Liverpool women have different priorities and responsibilities than men that restrict their participation in rock music scenes...but they also tend to have different social and leisure interests, suggesting that they are not just discouraged from involvement with rock culture, but that *they might not even need or want it* (ibid., p. 22, emphasis added).

Other studies (Taylor et al., 1996; Milestone and Richards, 2000) also highlight the ways in which the distinctive masculine characteristics of particular Northern, English cities impact upon the use of urban public spaces, describing those in the cities of Manchester and Sheffield as ‘overwhelmingly male places’, ‘‘ordered’ in gender terms along the dimensions of time and space’ (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 226). A detailed street survey revealed that only 32% of city users after 6.30 pm in Sheffield were women, who cited ‘a fear for personal safety’ as a key reason for avoiding certain spaces and places after dark (ibid., p. 228). The researchers conducting this comparative analysis write of their ‘astonishment’<sup>52</sup> at both the absence of women in powerful occupations or positions of influence, and the taken-for-granted male domination of city life by the women in their focus groups. Instead, these women constructed ‘adaptive strategies’ to minimise perceived dangers, ranging from avoidance to activism.<sup>53</sup>

Local socio-economic conditions have a profound impact on women’s spatial and social mobility, as recent research conducted by the Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University (Yeandle et al., 2004) illustrates. The resulting report, ‘Gender Profile of South Yorkshire’s Labour Market 2000’, highlights two major findings. Firstly, that ‘entrenched’ socio-economic deprivation affects all areas of South Yorkshire life, and secondly, that women in the most acute areas of deprivation are doubly disadvantaged by

---

<sup>52</sup> Echoing Cohen’s initial surprise as an ‘outsider’ to the mores of Liverpool life.

<sup>53</sup> For example, reclaiming ‘de-industrial wastelands’ through forming community groups such as The Don Valley Forum.

their local and social status. Moreover, as Katie Milestone and Nicola Richards observe (2000), the gendered use of space and place raises significant implications for the ‘night time economy’ of de-industrialised Northern cities, and I will assess these implications, in the context of Sheffield’s Cultural Industries policy, in chapter five.

The complex interaction between the musical, social, spatial and material is most usefully highlighted in the burgeoning theory and literature on scenes. Although ‘contested’ (Cohen, 1997), a range of writers have appropriated the concept in an analytic move away from the more static notion of subculture (Olson, 1998; Peterson and Bennett, 2004). Will Straw’s thesis, *Communities and Scenes in Popular Music* (1991/1997), similarly draws a distinction between ‘older notions of a musical community’ and a ‘musical scene’, arguing that:

[A musical community] presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable...and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage. A musical scene, in contrast, is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices co-exist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilisation. Clearly, the point is not that of designating particular cultural spaces as one or the other, but of examining the ways in which particular musical practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes (1997, pp 494-5).

Straw explains how various ‘coalitions’ and ‘alliances’ cohere around particular musical styles informed by particular aesthetic values and ‘scene logics.’ Thus, as the overview of riot grrrl illustrates, scenes are not only considered as geographical manifestations of local musical practice, but also as dynamic ‘translocal’ settings where producers, consumers and musicians construct and ally around shared cultural reference points in and beyond a locality.<sup>54</sup> Mark Olson highlights three dimensions that illuminate the fluidity between local and translocal scenes: movement, authenticity and belonging,

---

<sup>54</sup> Scenes are also defined virtually, largely focusing on internet use in building alliances around particular genres (Lee and Peterson, 2004).

arguing that these dimensions ‘are integral to understanding scenes not only as places produced but as productive places’ (1998, p. 275). Strachan’s (2004) detailed portrayal of the interlocking industrial, ideological and aesthetic elements of what he coins the ‘pan-local’ ‘UK DIY Independent scene’ further complicate traditional geographically based perspectives. These various approaches to analysing audience/performer relations, scenes and notions of value - along with the discourses of fandom identified in chapter two - provide the theoretical framework within which specific research questions are located. Their ‘explanatory value’ (Skeggs, 1997) will subsequently be assessed with reference to the social and spatial alliances and pathways analysed in the ethnographic case studies.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, both contrasting literature reviews have identified two key ‘mechanisms of exclusion’: firstly, the ‘discursive exclusion’ (Frith, 1992) of female fans, and secondly, the ‘structural exclusion’ (Cohen, 1991) of women within ‘local’ ‘scenes’. Overwhelmingly, ethnographic study confirms that the vast majority of visible aspirant popular music makers are male. I would therefore argue that the actual ‘hidden musicians’ - drawing upon Finnegan’s more inclusive interpretation of musicianship - are female, a hypothesis initiated by my own less systematic but experientially grounded understanding of music making and listening. When I first embarked upon this research journey in 1996, I *knew* that there were other ‘hidden’ women on Sheffield’s rock and pop scene/s. At the time, I was playing with two other women in a cover group that attracted sizeable female audiences to gigs occasionally organised by female promoters. These two areas of knowledge have shaped a number of research questions, organised around the following three themes: the significance of fandom, place and success on gendered musical practices.

## Research themes and questions

### 1) *Meanings of fandom*

How do women and girls negotiate competing discourses of fandom to make sense of, and construct their experiences and identities as popular music fans (chapter six and seven)? What factors encourage women to identify and participate as ‘mainstream’ (chapter seven) and/or ‘local’ ‘fans’ (chapter five and six)? What are the circumstances that encourage women to become ‘producers as consumers’ or ‘professional fans’ (chapter five, six and seven)? And how are listener/maker, fan/performer alliances articulated and experienced when ‘the performers on the pedestal’ are female (chapter five and six)?

### 2) *Meanings of place*

How do Sheffield’s rock and pop scene/s compare and contrast with those of Milton Keynes and Merseyside? How do ‘local structures of feeling’ (Taylor et al., 1996) or ‘Sheffieldness’ (Frith, 1993) shape particular gendered musical practices (chapter five)? What are the ‘mechanisms of exclusion *and* inclusion’ for female music makers and listeners in Sheffield? What kinds of barriers do they face, how are they perceived, and what kinds of strategies are developed to facilitate musical practice (chapter five and six)?

### 3) *Meanings of ‘making it’*

How are meanings of ‘making it’ variously constructed and negotiated by the groups in this study and how does wider industry recognition impact upon Sheffield’s scene/s? What are the typical *bandmarks* associated with ‘upward mobility’ and how does the ‘continuum of success’ shape the relationship and ‘logic of access’ between bands and ‘fans’ (chapter five, six and seven)? In short, how do perceptions and levels of success mediate these roles, relationships and practices?



The key purpose of the thesis is to generate some detailed, empirical data to explore these 'hidden' issues more closely. Collectively, the work and method of Cohen and Finnegan are exemplary and provide a vital springboard for my own research methodology. The following chapter will discuss the significance of a social constructionist approach to the study of gender and consider the strengths and potential pitfalls of doing ethnography from a feminist perspective.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the narrative of the ethnographic investigation, outlining my approach to participant selection, data generation and theoretical analysis from a social constructionist feminist perspective. Although the longitudinal study spans a decade, I focus predominantly on the three years of intensive fieldwork (1996-1999) when I attended over one hundred live performances, generating primary data through: participant observation at these and related events; the comparative case studies of three bands and 'fans'; eight semi-structured interviews and forty-four questionnaires. Secondary data sources include local and national media, fanzines, cultural policy reports and social surveys of Sheffield life. If this feminist ethnography had been designed more recently, websites would undoubtedly feature more prominently. I may have even cited the internet as a primary research site in the development of 'virtual communities' or 'scenes' (Bennett and Peterson, 2004). Although mediated more widely of late, live performance remains central to the discourse and practice of Sheffield's scene/s and this chapter will assess the methodological, epistemological and ontological perspectives I adopted to interpret and simultaneously construct this ethnographic 'field'.

I begin from a widely recognised but contested premise that no research is value-free: it is always conducted in the interests of a particular group and informed by assumptions about the status and purpose of knowledge generation. For Ien Ang, what distinguishes the 'critical edge' of ethnography, as both method and political practice, is the 'process-oriented, fundamentally dialogic and dialectical character of knowledge acquisition' (1998, p. 530). Such knowledge is acquired on three levels: we learn about the 'object' of study, the appropriateness of the methods and theories employed, and about ourselves (Reinharz, 1992). I will consider each of these elements, assessing how debates about the

status and purpose of feminist ethnography have influenced my own ethnographic practice.

McRobbie (1991, p.71) poses a critical question: 'who do we produce the research for?' My preliminary response - for the girls and women of this study of course - has proved idealistic, even 'patronising'. The project has nevertheless been motivated by a political aim to highlight - and later challenge, through the delivery of training courses - the multiple barriers that discourage women and girls from participating in musical practice. According to McRobbie, in order to have any significance to those 'outside the movement', feminist research should address 'existing assumptions' within feminism. It is to these assumptions that I initially turn.

### **Why feminism?**

Feminism - as a political and intellectual movement - has created unprecedented opportunities and rights for Western women, including suffrage, contraception and legal rights to equal pay, enshrined in principle if not in practice (Oakley and Mitchell, 1998, p. 4). Feminism has carved out discursive sites from which multiple voices now speak about women's issues; not only in the academy but also the media, workplace and home (McRobbie, 1994; 2003). Studies by Chris Griffin (1996) and Jane Pilcher (1993) illustrate how many women recognise the legitimacy of equal rights, whilst denying allegiance to feminism. Moreover, the 1990s heralded a 'backlash' (Faludi, 1992; Oakley and Mitchell, 1998), as commonsense opinion pronounced that gender equality had been achieved. The question 'why feminism?' is therefore a pertinent one to address.

Political divisions emerged during the 1970s 'second-wave' of feminism. 'Liberals struggle for reforms to the present system, radical feminists struggle for the overthrow of patriarchy (which will entail capitalism) and marxist feminists struggle for the overthrow

of capitalism (which will entail patriarchy)' (Ramazanoglu, 1989, p. 16). Consequently, whilst all feminisms seek to challenge the mechanisms through which power is exercised and resources unequally distributed, these struggles are differently focused, theorised and practiced. The recent paradigmatic shifts of postmodernism and poststructuralism herald two further developments: the rejection of universal 'metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984) and the so-called 'death of the subject'. These shifts appear to chime with broad feminist aims to challenge androcentric theories which naturalise women's subordination, through serving the needs of the unitary, rational subject - 'man'. Feminist critiques of methodological objectivity also anticipate and confirm postmodernist thought (Lather, 1992; Cohen, 1993).

Points of 'common ground' (Creed, 1998) and 'borrowings' (Morris, 1998) are complicated by postmodernist attempts to dismantle 'grand theories' such as emancipation, thus challenging the foundational tenets of the women's movement: liberation and equality. The 'death of the subject' underlines this dilemma, for 'if there is no subject, then there is no subject to be liberated' (Charles, 1996, p. 9). Citing Briadotti's query, 'equal to whom?' (1994, p. 67), McRobbie reasons that the postmodern self is reborn 'as a series of bit parts in the concrete field of social relations' (ibid., p. 70). Many feminists remain sceptical nonetheless<sup>55</sup>, pointing out the irony of fragmenting social identity at precisely the moment when previously marginalised groups are 'coming to voice for the first time' (hooks, 1998, p. 421).

Contemporary research (Yeandle et al., 2004) demonstrates how the post-feminist 'truths' of gender equality have not been realised. And while universal concepts such as 'sisterhood in oppression' (Ramazanoglu, 1989) have been justly critiqued,

---

<sup>55</sup> Such as Hartsock (1987), hooks (1998) and Morris (1998).



epistemological and ontological debate maintains the urgency of multidisciplinary feminist research, generating plural ways of knowing and working. Rather than adhering to one feminist school, my research is grounded in the 'shared radical tenet' identified by Shulamit Reinharz: 'women's lives are important' (1992, p. 241). She argues that while 'feminism supplies the perspective', the disciplines within which feminists work 'supply the method' (ibid., p. 243). Below I assess the appropriateness of ethnography for studying the lived experience of female music listeners and makers.

### **Why ethnography?**

In its traditional anthropological mode, 'ethnography proper' seeks to describe and understand particular cultures through 'first-hand fieldwork' (Finnegan, 1989), namely participation in, and observation of the lives of culture members in everyday settings over time (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990). As 'a theory of the research process' (Skeggs, 1995, p. 192), ethnography is differentially constructed and practised according to the researcher's epistemological orientations 'which underpin how [they] approach reality, their participants, their analysis and writing' (ibid.). Whereas realist ethnography is based upon the ontological premise 'that there is a 'reality' out there which can be discovered' (ibid.) - a belief which typified the imperialist bias of traditional anthropological fieldwork - postmodern ethnographers highlight the constructivist, dialogic process of knowledge production (Skeggs, 1995; Tyler, 1997).

Cohen makes a convincing case for the relevance of anthropological ethnography when detailing the relational aspects of music making and listening in terms of kinship, community and locality, thus emphasising popular music as 'social practice and process' (1993, p. 123). A holistic approach requires that 'practices and discourses need to be examined across a range of intersecting contexts and networks (whether they involve music or not) in order to make sense of the meaning derived from music within one

particular setting' (ibid.). Beverley Skeggs confirms that 'one of the main values of ethnography is to be able to explore how contradictions are lived and the differences between discourse and practice. Time enables an analysis of which differences appear as significant and systematic' (1997, p. 32).

Frith (1992) concludes that in popular music studies, anthropological and sociological accounts are more empirically 'accurate' than those of subcultural theorists. Similarly, McRobbie (1994) argues that 'micrological' ethnographic study can compensate for the invisibility of women and girls perpetuated through the 'Resistance through Rituals' model. However, Lyn Lofland also identifies romanticised and celebratory constructs of "the boy's world" in classic sociological ethnographies (cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, p. 86), with their 'image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths' (Wilkinson, 1986, pp 10-11). As John Van Maanen notes, 'one result of feminist scholarship is the realisation that there are many tales of the field to be told' (cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 54).

Feminist ethnographers therefore aim to assess women's roles within, and perceptions of, the culture under analysis. While Reinharz identifies a rich if 'unknown' history of feminist anthropological ethnography within the 'travel literature' of writers such as Harriet Martineau, contemporary feminist ethnographies of popular culture are rare.<sup>56</sup> Neither Cohen nor Finnegan is explicitly feminist, although they analyse the gender issues raised in their respective studies with great insight. Bayton's work is informed and motivated by feminist principles and although clearly ethnographic, the very accessibility

---

<sup>56</sup> Including: Hobson (1982); Modleski (1982); Radway (1984/1987); Ang (1985); Gray (1987; 1992); Bacon-Smith (1992); Gillespie (1995) and Seiter (1999). This selective canon does not distinguish between anthropological ethnography practised by Radway for example, and those adopted as 'ethnographic' by focusing on 'real' rather than imagined audiences, a point I will return to below.

of *Frock Rock* (1998) dispenses with theoretical and methodological detail. Beverley Skegg's ethnography, *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), has provided general guidelines and reflections and *Star Gazing* (1994) by Jackie Stacey usefully assesses how women made sense of their cinema-going experiences and identities 'through the negotiation of 'public' discourses and 'private' narratives' (ibid., p. 63). Crucially, Stacey insists that women should occupy a central role in theories of female spectatorship, as complex, social human beings rather than theoretical constructs determined by the text.

Consequently, a diverse range of disciplines - sociology, cultural studies, popular music, film and women's studies - 'supply' variable ethnographic accounts which have informed my ethnographic practice. I have drawn on both anthropological and postmodern perspectives to develop a holistic methodological approach to explore the lived experience of music makers and listeners in their everyday settings, thus stressing agency and specificity in the production of situated knowledge. Reinharz identifies three feminist aims that have further honed this approach. Firstly, to document women's lives and activities; secondly, to do this from their own perspective; thirdly, to locate these accounts in their social and historical specificity, thus 'conceptualiz[ing] women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts' (1992, p. 51). My fourth aim, to mobilise knowledge and experience in the pursuit of social change, has recently taken a more pragmatic, concrete turn.

Embracing the 'change-oriented', 'constructivist' and collaborative elements of feminist ethnography (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ang, 1998), I have established a music industry training organisation for women (2005). Harmony Training is supported by a range of funders, including the Equal Last Mile Development Partnership, committed to enabling under-represented groups to work in the creative and cultural industries. Cohen (1993) also highlights the benefits of policy-driven research: indeed, Ang suggests that doing

ethnography is, in and of itself, a political enterprise, 'in that its activity helps to construct the culture it seeks to describe and understand, rather than merely reflect it' (1998, p. 525). Ang's 'ethnographic' work has provoked criticism however. Jenkins (1997) queries her focus on 'isolated' letter writers, arguing that studying fans in this way ignores the wider contexts of social consumption and their material lives. Jenkins' (1992; 1997) research is also representative of those audience studies accused of populism and empiricism, accusations that beg further consideration.

Ethnography is 'now widely held to be the only sure method of catching hold of the full meanings of people's activities, including their activities as audiences' (Barker and Beezer, 1992, p. 9). Barker and Beezer warn against investing the method with too much power, coupled with 'an over-easy mapping of resistance on to ideas of activity...produc[ing] an over-generalised, non-specific understanding of opposition' (ibid., p. 11). Three problem areas are identified: the reductionist focus on audiences at the expense of structural analysis; the privileged 'confessional status' of the data (ibid., p.16); and thirdly, that researchers acknowledge the 'problem' of researcher bias without offering solutions. Frith also suggests that 'the so-called 'turn to ethnography'', with its focus on 'select groups of valorised fans', is condescending, 'hypocritical' and empirically inadequate (1998, pp 572-573).

Ethnographers have traditionally been resistant to abstract theorising. 'The...position has been that in order for researchers to be as accurate and faithful as possible, they should put all theories, convictions and causes out of their mind and let hypotheses generate from their empirical work' (Thornton, 1997b, p. 215). This 'postponement of theory' has led to charges of empiricism, which Stacey identifies as a prevalent criticism for audience research within film studies:



Whilst many of these criticisms of empiricism are well-placed, ...all audience studies are often rejected as 'empirical' whether or not their method is that of empiricism. The source of study - the audience - is thus seen to define the research as empirical whether or not the researcher is working within such an epistemology (1994, p. 74).

The centrality of 'experience' underpins these debates. In tracing the development of the concept, Raymond Williams notes that up until the eighteenth century, 'experience' was directly related to 'experiment', hence its implicit connections to empiricism. While arguing these 'old associations' might appear archaic, he problematises the correlation of experience as evidence of unmediated 'truths':

At one extreme experience (present) is offered as the necessary...ground for all subsequent reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, experience (once the present participle not of 'feeling' but of 'trying' or 'testing' something) is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief...and thus not as a material for truths but of evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain (1976, p. 128).

Although I wasn't aware of these complex debates when I began the research a decade ago, they have since helped me to critically reflect upon and adapt the process and practice of doing feminist ethnography, in an attempt to mitigate these damning critiques.

### **Doing feminist ethnography**

I focused on live performance because audience/performer relations are most visibly constructed, negotiated and enacted within this 'special setting' (Frith, 1992). Following the ethnographic principle that people act differently in different situations, I also participated in a range of 'intersecting contexts and networks' (Cohen, 1993). These involved: socialising in pubs and cafes and attending other gigs with female performers; going to family celebrations; visiting record shops and recording sessions; and travelling with 'fans' to out of town gigs. It is important to include a range of perspectives in order to compare and contrast accounts and equally, to distinguish between 'public' discourse,

‘private’ narratives and local practice: between ‘what was said’ and ‘what was done’ (Labov, 1972) at varying stages of fieldwork.

Referred to as data triangulation or corroboration, this approach enables the researcher to cross-check inferences across a variety of sources and social and temporal contexts (Yin, 1989; Banister et al., 1994). This is especially valuable because different methods have ‘different kinds of error built into them’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, p. 198). Constantly reflecting on the appropriateness of methods and combining methods with different ‘validity threats’, ‘facilitates richer and potentially more valid interpretations’ (Banister et al., 1994, p. 145). The application of ‘scientific’ principles such as triangulation, validity and reliability in qualitative research has led to accusations of covert neo-positivism (Wilkinson, 1986). Validity can however be appropriated in non-positivist ways to evaluate the practical adequacy, responsibility and plausibility of the research account (Skeggs, 1997, p. 32). Geertz also suggests that multiple data sources and techniques ‘can ‘thicken’ it’ (cited in Finnegan, 1997a, p. 108).

Along with participant observation, face-to-face interviews and questionnaires, I consulted demographic surveys and systematically read Pulp’s fanzine and the pop pages of the *Sheffield Telegraph* over many years. This proved useful on two counts: firstly, for providing vital but inevitably partial information about who was playing where and when and secondly, for observing the processes of ‘scene’ representation and mediation over time. Thus rather than ‘valorise’ one particular setting or group of ‘fans’, the comparative, reflexive, relational and dialogic principles of ‘ethnography proper’ allow for a more holistic and historically-grounded conception of the research field, contextualised in space and time (Cohen, 1993; Skeggs, 1997).

Reflexivity at all stages of the research is central to the ‘spirit’ of ethnographic practice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990). Because ‘we are part of the social world we study’ (ibid., p. 14), researchers inevitably hold ‘common-sense knowledge’ that underpins our sense of how the world works. Ethnographic practice is informed by assumptions (whether acknowledged or not) that shape the research setting and questions, participant selection, relationships in the ‘field’, data generation, interpretation and analysis. Willis (1977) suggests that critical reflection of the research process should begin with a ‘theoretical confession’, acknowledging our ‘consciousness, culture and theoretical organisation’ (cited in Thornton, 1997b, p. 215). The following sections therefore interrogate some of the key decisions made and issues encountered, opening with an explanation of the commonsense assumptions I brought to the ‘field’.

### *Theoretical confessions*

Many researchers use their own experiences and passions as a means of engaging with wider epistemological debates, ranging from fandom (Hills, 2002) to record company organisational strategies in the production of failure (Jones, 1997). As Banister et al. observe:

We arrive at the closest we can get to an objective account of the phenomenon in question through an exploration of ways in which the subjectivity of the researcher has structured the way it is defined in the first place. Subjectivity is a resource, not a problem, for a theoretically and pragmatically sufficient explanation (1994, p. 13).

Initially I wanted to ‘rescue’ the female fan from obscurity. I drew upon the subjective knowledge that women were a ‘hidden’ presence in local music and set out to privilege their stories and status as ‘experts’, thus challenging multiple elitist divisions that position fans against ‘ordinary’ consumers, and expert males against hysterical girls. I was therefore - unknowingly at the time - drawing on feminist standpoint theory, which

suggests that oppressed groups have access to more accurate forms of knowledge about their oppression and the power relations that sustain it.<sup>57</sup>

When designing the research, I also privileged the status of my own lived experience, arguing that my prior familiarity with the 'scene' should provide a unique perspective on neglected processes of fandom. The following extract from my research journal illustrates how these early standpoints were well intentioned, but extremely problematic:

These last few gigs have highlighted my vulnerability as a female researcher. I had temporarily resolved the whole dilemma around going to gigs on my own after Pulp's Arena gig when the fact that I was alone enabled me to get backstage. I had also rationalised this aloneness in line with the methodological requirements of making familiar cultures 'anthropologically strange' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990), concluding that it should not be a social occasion for me. Leaning towards the 'complete observer' end of Gold's spectrum, I felt I would be able to observe fan practices that may well remain 'hidden' if I went as part of a friendship group. Having been surprised to find that low key gigs constitute a male subculture, I now have a greater insight into the structures that perpetuate this male domination. After being hit on and harassed, I conclude that a woman at gigs on her own is seen at best, as an oddity and at worst, as sexually available. The amazing revelation is that I have been immersed in this culture for over fifteen years and had never realised or experienced this before now (August 1996).

I had always before sided subconsciously with the liberal humanist perspective that we are the authors of our own stories and subjectivity, 'the source rather than the effect' of discourse/ideology (Weedon, 1987, p. 31). Chris Weedon argues that it is precisely this process of 'misrecognition' and identification with the subject that lends this perspective such seductive force (ibid.). Referring to Elspeth Probyn's (1993) re-conceptualisation of ontology as a 'context of being', Skeggs (1995; 1997) cautions against the collapse of ontology and epistemology, whereby being equates to knowing and experience is represented as the source of authentic knowledge.

---

<sup>57</sup> See for example Hartsock (1983); Smith (1988); Hill Collins (1990); Harding (1991); Bar On (1993) and Griffin (1996).



Skeggs also adopted feminist standpoint theory in her ethnography of working class women. Yet reservations about 'the certainty expressed in this position' (1995, p. 195) have subsequently led her to a poststructuralist approach to theorising experience as a 'way of understanding how women occupy the category 'women', a category which is classed and raced and produced through power relations and through struggle across different sites in space and time' (1997, p. 27). Within this framework, experience is reformulated as a process through which subjectivities are produced and reproduced through discursive and material struggles over identities and power. Probyn too reclaims experience as a vehicle for grounding social analysis and connecting with others. Whilst highlighting the flexible rather than fixed connections between relations of knowing and being, she warns against the reification of experience and 'an untheorized return to the 'I' (1993, p. 11).

These different poststructuralist perspectives have encouraged me to acknowledge 'competing subjective realities' (Weedon, 1987, p. 8) and the partiality of my lived experience; to reformulate notions of access and exclusion and, furthermore, to critically examine what precisely I mean by 'expertise'. Initial fieldwork observations for instance, were entirely coloured by the ideology of authenticity. In my early search for authentic, female fandom, I would often return home from local gigs - on the rare occasions that women were there - to record that 'no female fans attended.' I was therefore ironically reproducing aspects of what Frith (1992) has coined the 'subcultural pop music myth', by seeking 'cool others' to stand in for *me*. As I began to gradually redefine the concept of fandom, the epistemological parameters of study emerged, for new ways of thinking impact upon ways of doing (Skeggs, 1995, p. 13). I consequently broadened my focus in order to locate a diverse range of music listeners and makers, and examine the ways in which discourses of fandom, meanings of 'making it' and 'local structures of feeling' (Taylor et al., 1996) shape their activities and accounts. In short, the development of

theory is dialectical. Observations inform theory and theoretical positions inform how the research questions are framed and observations are analysed (Stacey, 1995).

### *Selecting participants*

As open, public settings, live performances provided more or less accessible sites to establish contact and develop 'field' relationships. Out of hundreds of potential functional or gigging acts identified in the first year of fieldwork, twenty-seven bands were selected to reflect a diversity of participants *and* experiences (Burgess, 1984). Of these, nine were mixed-gender groups, one all-female and seventeen all-male bands. Membership ranged from three to seven participants, totalling one hundred and twelve performers, twenty of whom were women. The vast majority were white; only five of the hundred and twelve performers were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME's). Social class was more difficult to ascertain, there being no clear correlation between the varying sub-genres of rock and pop being produced and the class formations of music makers and listeners. Only members of the pop-rock (and later cover) band Belief were unequivocally working class.

Included in this initial sample was my own soul covers group, with three female members including myself. Of the other nine mixed-gender bands, Pulp, the Human League and Speedy had recording contracts with the remaining six unsigned. I intended to study all these groups as a comparative sample. However, as Finnegan and Cohen note, band dynamics are rarely stable and three out of the ten bands, including my own, split up shortly after the research commenced. Meanwhile I began the first case study. Pulp were selected to examine the consequences of 'making it' for both the construction of audiences as fans, and performers as stars. Identifying and accessing potential participants was considerably more difficult than I envisaged however.

At Pulp's concert at the Sheffield Arena in February 1996, my 'cold call' approach was ultimately illuminating, but also daunting and frustrating. The opening gambit of 'are you a Pulp fan?' provoked a mixed response. Four separate groups of young women demurred, explaining that they were there because they liked the venue, 'the night out', and in one instance, because they had won the tickets in a competition. On the whole, I found that women were suspicious of being 'interviewed', although often willing to talk informally with the dictaphone switched off. Young women in particular were understandably cautious about giving out a home address/contact number. This experience encouraged a change of strategy.

The second Pulp gig I attended was at the V96 festival in Warrington and when I found that Sheffield University's 'Ents' team were chartering a train from Sheffield to Warrington, I designed an open-ended questionnaire, printed on SHU paper, to distribute to the travellers on the aptly named 'Pulp Express' (see appendix 1). The organisers had also devised a Pulp quiz and agreed to hand out my questionnaire at the same time. Its university heading further established my academic credentials (Gurney, 1991) and legitimated my interest.<sup>58</sup> Forty-four questionnaires were returned by twenty-five women and nineteen men. Eleven out of the twenty-five also included a phone number or address and seven of these were from Sheffield. Despite this promising feedback, only three respondents supplied both, and I found that the combination of an introductory letter plus a follow-up phone call was the only reliable method of securing consent for interview.

Pulp's official fanclub also promised to be a valuable resource, and I joined in September 1996. Although declining a face-to-face interview, the female editor Alex Deck agreed to

---

<sup>58</sup> Our unfortunate oversight was a lack of pens and responses to the quiz and questionnaire were adversely affected as a result.

answer any written questions and print the following request, published in the Spring 1997 edition of Pulp People, issue 19.

Josie Robson from Sheffield Hallam University is doing a research study looking at the relationship between Sheffield bands and female fans, and wants to hear from any Sheffield 'Pulpettes'<sup>59</sup> about your experiences as a pop/Pulp fan. If you'd like to take part in this study, please contact her at (see address above) or ring...

The response was extremely disappointing. Out of a possible 2,500<sup>60</sup> members at that time, I received only two letters and one phone-call. Both letters were from fans in the South of England who were, therefore, regrettably outside the geographical remit of study.

Frith has questioned the rationale behind interviewing 'self-declared' fans. He states that Cultural Studies' more recent focus on people 'with particularly strong feelings - and a reason for wanting to make them public' is problematic, because their organised 'terms of judgement are...*likely to be a bit peculiar* (even if we accept, with the Vermorels, that this peculiarity is just an extreme and obsessive version of what we all do and feel anyway)' (1996, p. 48, emphasis added). We have already established how discourses of fandom position female fans as 'other' and whilst pathology is downgraded to peculiarity, the 'Misfits and Freaks'<sup>61</sup> label that fans are frequently dismissed or disparaged by may, in part, explain the reticence I encountered in finding Pulp fans, 'self-declared' or otherwise, who were willing to participate.

### *Generating data*

Multiple research methods were utilised throughout the research process, underpinned by

---

<sup>59</sup> Although -ette signifies 'imitation or substitute, the female version' (Steward and Garratt, 1984, p. 20) and could therefore be read as a subordinate label, I decided to follow the fanclub convention.

<sup>60</sup> With 58 from Sheffield, 41 females and 17 males.

<sup>61</sup> Coined by an *NME* journalist on the Pulp Express. As this label specifically references Pulp lyrics/song titles, it could be argued that the journalist is merely demonstrating his textual competency.



the principle techniques of participation and observation, which, as Thornton notes, 'are not necessarily complementary' (1995, p. 105). My initial tendency towards observation proved useful for gaining a broad picture of the gender dynamics, musical roles and genre-related rituals and conventions at a range of live events. Conversely, my researcher identity was more fluid than Gold's (1958) spectrum allows, as the role of participant-as-observer became increasingly appropriate when approaching potential bands and audience members to initiate 'field' relationships. Unlike Griffin (1985; 1989), I found that male musicians, friends and family members were keen to be involved in informal discussions, although I too occasionally encountered hostility when outlining my gender focus. My visibility as a lone woman also presented dilemmas. Despite wanting to engender a sense of 'anthropological strangeness', the threatening atmosphere at some gigs, particularly those in unfamiliar locations, encouraged me to recruit a set of 'gig companions'. Aloneness as a methodological ideal was therefore frequently traded against practical considerations of safety.

I am deeply indebted to the five 'gig companions' who contributed to this research by talking through - and frequently challenging - developing ideas. I occasionally found their presence problematic because they brought their own assumptions and social needs to events. The contradictory benefits of aloneness and fluidity of researcher roles are highlighted in the following excerpt from my research journal (13/9/97):

Because I don't have a car, the logistics of getting to and from gigs is a constant issue...Other related issues that limit the study are money - venue - do I feel comfortable in that space? - and location. For example, The Grapes is situated in one of the so-called 'red light' areas of the city, which inevitably increases the potential for harassment for any lone woman in that area. Based on previous performances by Velodrome 2000, I assumed the gig itself would represent a safe space and this was indeed the case. Being alone enabled me to 'hang around' - and engage in more in-depth conversations with the band, who consequently asked me to their 'invite-only' 'Popstar launch party!'. This research moment perfectly encapsulates the tensions between participation and observation and how they can be temporarily resolved or suspended. Tonight, the contradictory subject positions of insider/outsider were simultaneously occupied and inhabited.

In the second stage of inquiry, 1997-1999 (and beyond), I developed two further comparative case studies of mixed gender bands and their audiences: Belief and Velodrome 2000. Ethnographic case studies have two main functions: to examine social phenomena through a specific case and scrutinise and develop theory (Yin, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Robson, 1993). In exposing exceptional cases and challenging theoretical generalisations, case studies have been described as ‘essential’ feminist tools ‘for putting women on the map of social life’ (Reinharz, 1992, p. 174). These case studies were ‘exceptional’ in that both bands had two female members and attracted sizeable female audiences. Indeed, Belief were the only unsigned band in Sheffield to have an established fan club. Their musical and social ‘pathways’ were also clearly distinct from the DIY route trodden by Velodrome 2000, and I set out to compare and contrast their motivations for making music and appeal for differing audiences.<sup>62</sup>

Whilst aware of the pitfalls of ‘wheeling in’ class (McRobbie, 1991, p. 64), I wanted to assess the significance of both gender and social class in forging routes of access and audience alliances within the context of a male dominated ‘scene’. The ongoing case study of Pulp provided a useful correlate, as it moved beyond the ‘scene’ to examine the impact of success on gendered access. In the light of emerging themes in the other case studies, I also began to address the relationship between working class-ness and locality as socially constructed markers of belonging. Thus, rather than reproducing a ‘monolithic’ (ibid., p. 65) position of class or gender relations, I focus instead upon the multiple and situated conditions of power and powerlessness (Griffin, 1996) that enable and constrain access for these various social groups.

---

<sup>62</sup> Treacle and EKM were equally exceptional cases but unfortunately, disbanded during this time, thus precluding in-depth comparative study, although I do incorporate relevant observations in the following chapter.

Observations and informal discussions were supplemented by eight semi-structured interviews that lasted between one and two hours. Six of these were with Pulp 'fans', including the band's drummer, Nick Banks. The remaining two were conducted with the female vocalist from Velodrome 2000 and one of her closest friends and 'supporter fans'. Although I developed a significant level of trust with members of Belief and several 'Believers' over time, these women were unwilling to be formally interviewed. This refusal raises the critical dimension of researcher access and the significance of ethnography's multi-method approach, also illustrating the power dialectic between the researcher and the researched that I will return to later in the chapter. Specific methodological and ethical issues will be addressed in each respective case study.

The conceptual themes for interview were organised to gain a sense of the processes involved in becoming a fan and/or musician, and the relevance of music to their everyday lives and sense of self. All interviews were recorded onto a dictaphone and then transcribed in loose accordance with Gail Jefferson's model of transcription design features (see appendix 2). As Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 47) observe, transcribed data does not represent what was actually said. 'Auditory hallucinations' are common and through changing the medium from aural to visual, perceptions of the data also change. Transcription therefore represents an important stage of interpretation and analysis.

Skeggs draws attention to the 'in-built theoretical insecurity' when doing ethnography. People change their minds and 'the field' is rarely stable, thus highlighting the 'temporality' of theories and theorising (1995, p. 196). Epistemological concerns also shift with each nuance of the research journey, as some theories have more resonance with and for ethnographic observations than others (Stacey, 1994; Skeggs, 1997). Nonetheless, several questions need to be addressed as they inform the very basis of this inquiry. Firstly, what do I mean by gender and secondly, how does a study focusing on

popular music serve to clarify these concerns? I will now outline what I found to be the most plausible theoretical approaches to these questions.

### **Generating a conceptual framework**

Feminists have approached the analysis of relations between women and men in two distinct ways: ‘either we can see women as essentially different from men or as socially constituted as different and subject to social relations and processes in different ways to men’ (Weedon, 1987, p. 8). French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray is a key advocate of ‘difference’ feminism, re-framing the question ‘equal to whom?’ with the response, ‘why not to themselves?’ (1993, p. 21). She argues that the only way to resolve the exploitation of women is to embrace the specificity of sexual difference, the essential cultural and biological differences between women and men.

Alternatively, theorists advocating a social constructionist epistemology argue that the categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ - and ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ - are ‘social structural’ products that differentiate and normalise socially constructed relations of inequality<sup>63</sup> (Lorber and Farrell, 1991; West and Zimmerman, 1991; Charles, 1996; Whiteley, 1997; Cohen, 2001). This notion of culturally constructed gender categories rather than biological, sex-based differences has become a recognised feminist ‘tool’ for ‘analysing how women and men are made rather than born’ (Oakley, 1998, pp 29-30). As I grappled with the data, I found several concepts to have particular explanatory value: the first of which is Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s ‘Doing Gender’ (1991).

---

<sup>63</sup> Unequal power relations are equally informed by other socially constructed categories including social class and racial ethnic stratification (Murphy and Livingstone, 1985; Dugger, 1991); sexuality (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996) and locality (Massey, 1994).



West and Zimmerman draw on the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1967; 1977) to examine the processes of gender construction. They developed the notion of “doing gender” to demonstrate the ongoing social construction and maintenance of unequal gendered power relations, produced through daily social interactions and structural institutions such as the family, educational and legal system. Borrowing Goffman’s phrase, ‘the arrangement of the sexes’, they illustrate how gender-appropriate displays are context and culture-specific. Individuals who challenge or transgress the gendered norms of social interaction are subject to censure and accountability.

Doing gender furnishes the interactional scaffolding of social structure, along with a built-in mechanism of social control. In appreciating the institutional forces that maintain distinctions between women and men, we must not lose sight of the interactional validation of those distinctions that confers upon them their sense of “naturalness” and “rightness” (1991, p. 33).

Gender is thus conceived as a ‘situated doing’ (ibid., p. 14), produced and validated through everyday social interactions with others. Goffman (1977) for example, notes how the ‘totally cultural matter’ of gendered segregation in public lavatories is ‘presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact, it is a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference’ (ibid., p. 24).

The production of difference begins in childhood as we learn to adopt appropriate feminine and masculine behaviours through a process of self-regulation. Girls and boys are recruited by specific ‘gender ideals’ that cast culturally specific and differentiated behaviours as natural and normal. Gendered identities are accordingly developed as social competencies and pervade all aspects of life choices. The ideological structures that inform and define the practice of ‘doing gender’ influence discourse, practice, perceptions and opportunities, from the education system and the workplace, to the ‘sexual’ division of labour in the home, thus normalizing inequalities between women

and men. 'If, in doing gender, men are also doing dominance and women are doing deference, the resultant social order, which supposedly reflects "natural difference", is a powerful reinforcer and legitimator of hierarchical arrangements' (ibid., p. 32).

Crucially however, because gender is always in the process of being accomplished rather than achieved, their thesis allows for the possibility of social change. Viewing identities in 'process' is critical to the 'denaturalisation of inequality' (Stacey, 1994, p. 226), a social constructionist perspective which has informed my organising concept of *doing fandom*. Finnegan, Cohen, Taylor et al. and Massey's work have also been influential, as they demonstrate how perceptions and material conditions of place and space are equally central to the construction and negotiation of social identities. I thus developed the concept of *landmarks* to plot each group's movement through social space. Stacey encouraged me to identify and contrast public *discourses of fandom* with the 'private' narratives of participants and I revisited metaphors of 'fan cultural capital' (Fiske, 1992) and 'fan social capital' (Hills, 2002) after reading Thornton, Skeggs and Hills. In addition, Willis's notion of 'consumers-as-producers' has proved critical for reframing *music makers as listeners*. I have consequently developed a localized, contingent conceptual framework to analyse the practices and processes of doing fandom, without abandoning the emancipatory potential of feminist praxis. 'Identity is essential to a politics of liberation but...there is nothing essentialist about this: on the contrary, identities are socially constructed' (Charles, 1996, p. 18).

According to Skeggs, 'methodology is the archaeological foundation from which theories are constructed' (1997, p. 38). In line with Cohen, I have found that 'ethnography proper' can illuminate both the social ('relational') and fluid ('conjunctural') elements of identity formation and locality (1993, p. 132). In short, the organising concepts and theoretical framework were generated and tested through the research process itself. When

addressing a range of ethical issues below, I consider further benefits and drawbacks of longitudinal ethnography, along with the contested role of subjectivity and the contradictory power relations between researcher and researched.

### **Ethical issues**

The researcher holds a position of power within social interaction and interpretation. I attempted to redress this imbalance by disclosing my prior involvement in pop culture in an attempt to ‘demystify’ the position of researcher (Hollway, 1989, p. 22). Although these disclosures proved to be a useful resource in terms of establishing credibility and developing rapport with co-researchers, the position of the academic-as-fan is much debated. Espousing an ethical stance to respecting and valuing the experiences of ‘others’ ‘as if they were us’ (1992, p. 26), Jensen argues that ‘thinking well about fans and fandom’ (ibid., p. 27) could serve to mitigate the elitism and reductionism that characterises much of the fan literature. According to Rosalind Brunt (1992), difficulties arise from where we are located and locate ourselves. She was my co-supervisor when the following conversation took place:

JR: I felt your paper was relevant to my own position because in our last meeting, you rightly pointed out to me that I keep on going on about being a performer and a fan, kind of justifying my incentive and involvement in the research...and you say you’re deeply suspicious of academics doing that [yes]. You say that researchers are located differently and therefore have certain responsibilities and shouldn’t claim to be the same as the researched.

RB: Well I agree with myself! (1996).

The non-reflexive academic-as-fan therefore generates well-founded suspicions but as Hills (2002) observes, the ‘scholar fan’ is also constrained by the regulatory power of ‘rational’ academic norms. When applying for funding for this project for example, a member of the funding committee expressed concern about my ‘lack of disinterestedness’. Jostein Grisprud (1998) reasons that as ‘double-access audiences’, cultural researchers could reap analytical rewards if, in owning their located differences,

their fan pleasures were contrasted with those who have restricted access to the cultural and social capital academics often take for granted.

On the other hand, Frith (1992; 1998) argues that ‘academics have bodies and fans have minds’, thus confounding the constructed divisions between what Hills terms the ‘imagined subjectivity of the rational academic’ (2002, p. 4) and the ‘irrational’ object of theory, fans themselves.<sup>64</sup> Whereas Frith identifies similarities between the intellectual processes of fans and academics, Hills claims that the ‘hybrid identity’ of the scholar fan underpins ‘a constructed pseudo-similarity aimed at legitimating academic practice by projecting this onto a *rationalisation* of the fan’ (ibid., p. 11). Above all, I endorse Brunt’s warnings against over-identification and as a *feminist* ‘scholar fan’; I embrace the political and ethical responsibility of taking the narratives of girls and women seriously.

My previous experiences of music making and listening certainly generated what Probyn (1993) describes as ‘ontological moments’ of recognition. I ‘recognised’ aspects of my contradictory pleasures in being the vocal and focal point of a band in Emma (Belief) and Penny’s (Velodrome 2000) varying ‘performances’. These cases also highlighted the partiality of my local knowledge, for I was simultaneously positioned as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, observing two quite distinct lived cultures circulating in one locale. I also had great fun when ‘sharing’ fan stories with other participants. I am aware however that these ‘linking processes’ - as fans, singers and women - should not be overplayed (Skeggs, 1995; 1997). Rather than engage in auto-ethnography as Hills suggests, I acknowledge the significance of my locatedness and experiences in informing the

---

<sup>64</sup> Whilst these approaches overlap, Hills takes issue with a review of Frith’s (1990) in which he stated that that the ‘fantasy land’ of popular culture is constructed by (male) academics. Given that Frith persuasively develops this position via the ‘subcultural pop music myth’ (1992), Hills’ criticism is misplaced.



research focus and questions - without reifying them (Probyn, 1993).

I am equally conscious that my collaborative, dialogic approach impinges the so-called neutral line of textbook, sociological inquiry. I have asked leading questions and ventured opinions for two reasons. Firstly, due to the poststructuralist position that experiences and meanings are constructed and negotiated through interaction (Weedon, 1987). Finnegan (1997a) draws upon Jerome Bruner's theory, 'life as narrative', to demonstrate how articulating experiences becomes a 'recipe for life', as a means of 'storying the self.' In Bruner's words, 'a life as led is inseparable from a life as told' (cited in Finnegan, 1997a, p. 111). Whereas many of the performers were extremely skilled in managing discursive exchanges, in direct contrast to Finnegan (1997a), I found that other co-researchers were less used to talking about their often-contradictory experiences.

The Vermorels' work sheds light on the ways in which fans are effectively silenced, for in a 'rational' society where 'excessive' emotionality is repressed, there are few sanctioned channels through which to articulate the complexities of what and how they feel.<sup>65</sup> The ideas I suggested, which were frequently negated, thus acted as conceptual pegs for various co-researchers to hang their feelings on, enabling them to explore, often for the first time, the ambivalent 'affective'<sup>66</sup> investments and processes of fandom. I don't mean to privilege the 'confessional' status of such stories or drown in a sea of relativist intersubjectivity<sup>67</sup>, but rather, highlight the complex processes through which experiential narratives are constructed within social interaction and equally shaped - and silenced - by pre-existing discursive codes.

---

<sup>65</sup> Although with the rapid advent of the Internet, this situation has now clearly changed. Institutionalised channels for fan-talk continue to be censored nevertheless (see chapter seven).

<sup>66</sup> Rather than drawing on Grossberg's complex conceptual framework, I refer to Hills' appropriation of the term as 'the attachments, emotions and passions of those who self-identify as 'fans'' (Hills, 2002, xi).

<sup>67</sup> Used in this context to refer to a 'shared world of meaning' (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 408) rather than the more specific 'psychic' focus proposed by object relations theory (Stacey, 1994).

Due to the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality, I consulted participants about the use of pseudonyms. All the interviewees (with the exception of the musicians) opted to remain anonymous and several chose their own monikers. I have however retained the actual names of band members and key personnel such as managers and journalists; a decision reached in accordance with all participants and supported by Bayton (1998). Interviewees were sent transcripts to double-check factual information and to reiterate the 'research bargain' (Burgess, 1984) via the following proviso: 'let me know if there are any elements of it that you'd feel uncomfortable about me using in the thesis.' Despite exhibiting resistance to particularly sensitive questions, all the interviewees gave their informed consent, stating how much they had enjoyed the process. I suspect, as McRobbie (1991) and Stacey (1995) observe, that they were 'flattered' to have been consulted and constructed as 'experts', particularly given the low status ascribed to the study of popular music and female fandom (Vroomen, 2001).

Although Stacey interprets the primary data with great ethical and intellectual rigour, the fundamental distinction between 'ethnographic' techniques and fieldwork is the development of face-to-face relationships, which present a range of challenges. By the end of 1998, I had generated masses of data that I felt swamped by. I also didn't know how to leave the 'field' and continued going to gigs as a form of displacement activity. In particular, members of Belief had learned to expect my presence and support. Establishing rapport and trust is crucial to the maintenance of ethnographic relationships and much is written about negotiating access, frequently with the aid of 'mentors' (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 255), in the early stages of fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990; Burgess, 1991). These relationships, which are so crucial at the beginning of ethnographic research, are less easy to abandon as the fieldwork period is ending however. The very intimacy and intensity (Shaffir, 1991) of social participation 'makes it difficult to draw boundaries of emotional, moral and political involvement' (Thornton,

1997b, p. 213), thus emphasising the potentially exploitative relationship between researcher and researched in prolonged ethnographic study (Skeggs, 1995).

At this critical three-year stage, the funding also ran out. I had been teaching throughout the research but it now became an economic necessity and I took over the design and delivery of a new popular music unit at Sheffield Hallam University. Writing up was therefore put on hold once again, although the unit structure and content clearly reflect the organising concepts informing this study. After a period of illness, I began a full-time post as music business tutor at Red Tape Studios (2000-2004) and the striking absence of other women in this environment, as both trainers and trainees, forced me to re-engage with the very issues that had first motivated this research. During the first year or so, I found myself continually challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the lack of female participation and began to develop interventionist strategies. For example, in a moderately successful bid to encourage mixed-gender bands to apply for the extremely popular Band Development Programme<sup>68</sup>, I re-designed the selection procedure - based previously on the sole decisions of sound engineers and management trainees - to allow tutor involvement on the grounds of 'promoting diversity'.

Consequently, when Sheffield Hallam University offered additional funding for me to resume the 'writing up' process one day a week, I returned to the thesis with renewed vigour and confidence, re-assured - somewhat ambivalently - of its continued relevance. Where appropriate, I have up-dated the case studies to incorporate some of the key issues that have occurred in the intervening years and re-contacted key participants. In returning

---

<sup>68</sup> Described as 'a mini-record deal' in the promotional literature, the programme ran annually for 30 weeks, offering weekly recording sessions with trainee sound engineers; a trainee manager to help organise gigs and develop promotional materials and weekly lectures on music industry topics, ranging from copyright to marketing. I ran the course for four years and with only twelve places, it was always massively oversubscribed.

to study, I have also addressed the implications of local cultural policies in an attempt to map the interlinking socio-structural contexts and complex interest groups constituting a 'scene', thus locating the case studies within a more holistic framework of economic regeneration and community access. These are key organising concepts for many policy-oriented research projects (Brown et al., 1998; Richards and Milestone, 2000; Gilmore, 2001; Tams, 2003), but a far cry from cultural studies of fandom. In attempting to explicate these connections, I acknowledge the ambitious reach of the final thesis and were I to conduct further research, I would now begin from this premise rather than ending here.

Feminists involved in critical, reflexive research frequently express a sense of anxiety about the knowledge claims they make on behalf of the researched, as well as their status in the academy. This final section therefore focuses upon several fundamental analytical considerations for the feminist ethnographer: how to represent, interpret and generalise from ethnographic data.

### **Analytical issues**

#### *Representing and interpreting accounts*

Although ethnography can be defined etymologically as 'people writing' (Bowers, 1996), how we re-present the culture under analysis and the differing stories is both politically sensitive and potentially fraught. Indeed, Stacey (1995) argues that many feminist film theorists favour textual analysis in order to avoid having to grapple with these dilemmas. It is suggested that interpretations should be read 'symptomatically' (Ang, 1998) and 'systematically' (Skeggs, 1997), by seeking the lived contradictions between discourse and practice and explicating these within a critical framework which is both appropriate to the material 'and can be contested' (Stacey, 1994, p. 72). Stacey outlines the project: 'I wanted to represent these accounts respectfully and in their full complexity, rather than



just as an abstracted means to an end, and yet also be able to make critical interpretations from my point of view as a feminist researcher with an interest in challenging the terms of patriarchal culture' (1995, p. 115).

Green, Jenkins and Jenkins make the opposite case for allowing the expert voices of 'slash' fans the same authorial status as the academic:

We urge a reconsideration of the concept of popular expertise, a recognition and respect for the sites of amateur cultural production that accords them the same privileges to speak as are accorded to other spheres of the art world... we have not operated on the assumption that fans know or can explain everything about their own activities... We have, however, taken as a given that the fan community has meaningful things to contribute to an understanding of slash and that cultural studies will be enriched by listening to them speak (1998, p. 14).

I aim to find a route between these opposing perspectives by foregrounding the experiential narratives of female music makers and listeners *as* 'narratives', as 'characteristically human way[s] for formulating and conveying experience' (Finnegan, 1997a, p. 72) that are shaped by specific contexts and conventions. This recognises the critical issue that representations are, in and of themselves, interpretations (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; McRobbie, 1991; 2003).

In line with Skeggs (1997, p. 30), I consulted and discussed my work and developing interpretations with many participants. Rather than change the analysis to fit that of the researched, which has been suggested by some feminists in terms of 'respondent validity'<sup>69</sup>, I have the 'epistemic responsibility' of authoring their stories, interpreting them and making them audible. These issues highlight the dialogic and dialectical process of knowledge production, processes which are further emphasised in prolonged, ethnographic study. Willis, for example, suggests that 'the ethnographic account, without

---

<sup>69</sup> See Reinharz (1992). In what seems a useful compromise, Cohen (1991) conferred with informants in her Liverpool study and included their differing interpretations as footnotes.

always knowing how, can allow a degree of the activity, creativity and human agency within the object of study to come through' (1977, p. 3). The researcher can be 'surprised' in those moments when participants 'hijack' the research and identify key issues 'not prefigured in one's starting paradigms.'

These moments occurred again and again throughout this research. Yet McRobbie warns against over-dramatising them, arguing that this 'unburdening' should 'force the researcher into a fresh humility, into an awareness of the limitations of one form of intellectual activity and its absolute dependence on these 'others'' (1991, p. 76). Consequently, whilst I refer to those participating in this study as co-researchers, readily acknowledging their situated expertise, I have the ultimate responsibility of re-presenting 'the culture under analysis' and the 'authority' 'to write the story' (Thornton, 1997b, p. 215). The final analytical issue I wish to consider is the 'necessary' tensions between identifying a generalised phenomenon, and ethnography's contextualised exploration of the 'particular' (Thornton, 1995; Hammersley, 1998).

### *Global versus local debates*

According to Kirschner, many 'territorially bound ethnographies...fail to link intimate accounts of local practices to the bigger picture, reducing complex flows of popular culture to a sort of local determinism' (1998, p. 258). He argues that this is due to conceptualising the field as a 'bounded territory', 'making it difficult for the ethnographer to connect his or her findings to wider global influences' (ibid., p. 259). Instead, his chosen ethnographic site (Champagne, Illinois) is constructed as a 'perspective' 'rather than a demarcated site of analysis' (ibid., p. 260). Finnegan also stresses the interdependence - 'extra-local associations' - between wider institutions and conventions and local practices in Milton Keynes (1989, p. 183), whilst claiming specificity:

The specific conditions within Milton Keynes (or any locality) are likely to be unique, but I have no doubt that other towns too have their pathways which represent neither tight-knit 'community' nor alien anonymity but one established and habitual way in which people find their meaning in urban living (ibid., pp 324-325).

Andy Bennett adopts a similar rationale in his analysis of pub rock in Newcastle:

Whilst the popular cultural industries may provide social actors with a common stock of cultural resources, the way such resources are subsequently re-worked as collective sensibilities, will in every instance, depend upon the conditions of locality,...upon the particular social discourses and practices which inform the daily lives of individuals in the places where they live (1997, p. 98).

Massey suggests that the tendency towards 'spatial fetishization' can be mitigated by the reintegration of the local and the global, providing an 'extroverted' sense of place. She writes that 'thinking of places in this way implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations' (1994, p. 121). These approaches provide a dynamic framework for locating empirical study within a particular spatial, temporal, social, cultural and economic context that is shaped by wider institutional, ideological and organisational structures. Chapter five will assess the gender dynamics of Sheffield's popular music scene/s from a similarly 'extra-local' perspective.

## CHAPTER FIVE: MAPPING SHEFFIELD'S SCENE/S

In April 2002, *The Guardian's* rock and pop critic embarked on a tour of Britain's 'most musically-influential cities' to seek out 'the scenes of the moment', visiting Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester and Sheffield. Although focusing on the latest crop of 'underground' electronica groups in the city, he 'sets the scene' by referencing the Human League, with 'their clumsy, over-rouged female vocalists'; Pulp, 'who remain one of the most consistently fascinating bands in British rock'; 'failing' superclub, Gatecrasher; and the National Centre for Popular Music (NCPM) - 'two (sic) metallic rotundas that resemble giant curling stones. Built with millions of lottery money, they housed a rock museum which closed within months because so few people went' (Alexis Petridis, *The Guardian*, 3/5/02). What Tony Mitchell coins a 'fetishization of locality' (1996, p. 87) is most clearly apparent in the identification of a distinct 'Sheffield sound', 'which matches futuristic electronica influenced by the city's industrial past' (op cit).

I aim to complicate and develop this typical snapshot of Sheffield's popular music history by examining the shifting socio-economic and cultural factors that have shaped conditions and perceptions - 'local structures of feeling' (Taylor et al., 1996) - of the city and its scene/s. Firstly, I want to consider the concept of scene itself, for although it has become 'common parlance' (Cohen, 1997) for the media, promoters<sup>70</sup>, musicians and audiences alike, competing notions of scene shed light on how meanings of place, genre, gender and value are variously constructed to promote homosocial cultural norms.

### Unpacking the scene

'People were generally interested in what everyone was doing creatively and that, in essence, distils what a scene is, doesn't it?' (Martyn Ware *Made in Sheffield*, slackjawfilm, 2002).

---

<sup>70</sup> As Peter Stringfellow's advertising line for the 1967 Mojo reunion show proclaimed: 'It's gonna be a scene baby' (cited in Firminger and Lilleker, 2001, p. 83).



‘Sheffield’s never had a scene really...It’s never had a big record company like other cities. Manchester had Factory, Newcastle had Kitchenware, Glasgow had Postcard, but we never had that really...And it was the only major city that never had a TV station based in it...we had to go to Leeds...I hated Leeds because of that’ (Ogy McGrath from mid-80s band Dig Vis Drill, cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 106).

‘We were like kings of the jungle then and we were very close to the Stones...It was like a men’s smoking club, just a very good scene’ (John Lennon cited in Frith, 1983, p. 79).

The above quotations illustrate three of the characteristic ways in which a scene is variously perceived. As we established in chapter three, academic writers have embraced the concept as a flexible analytical tool for mapping the dynamic relationships between spaces, sounds, structures and social groups. Musicians tend to collapse these dimensions in order to define *their* sites and networks of musical activity as ‘the scene.’ Martyn Ware’s comment is a case in point. He is referring to a specific historical period, the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a number of groups including Cabaret Voltaire, Clock DVA, Heaven 17, ABC and the Human League, were gaining commercial and/or critical success. This exposure helped to construct what *The Guardian* journalist calls a ‘blueprint’ for a ‘Sheffield sound’, melding a particular coalition of spatial, social and aesthetic factors through a distinctive sub-genre: post-punk electronica.

My focus on the broader but equally ‘elusive’ (Finnegan, 1989) pathways of rock and pop inevitably considers the impact of electronica, but to reduce the scene to a handful of acts symbolised by analogue synthesisers, obscures the diversity of music and music makers that co-exist in the locale. In order to demonstrate the flexible, overlapping and historically conditional trajectory of Sheffield’s multiple pathways, I refer to scene/s as a plural concept because, as the case studies of Belief and Velodrome 2000 will show, it is in more ‘hidden’ pathways that women music makers in Sheffield are most evident.

The second quotation illustrates the fundamental role of music infrastructure in supporting and stimulating musical productivity. What is of equal interest is the ‘regional

sense of grievance' (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 28) this particular musician draws upon to highlight unequal perceptions of opportunity,<sup>71</sup> expressed through the filter of 'local structures of feeling' that are inextricably linked to the material conditions and mythologized characteristics of a particular place (ibid.). I will examine these interconnected themes in the context of Sheffield's industrial past and so-called post-industrial present, for the legacy of Sheffield's 'dual economy' (Thrift, 1987) of steel and cutlery have furnished masculinist narratives of 'Sheffieldness' that shape the ways in which local music is produced, consumed and understood.

The subsequent collapse of traditional industry has had an equally profound effect on - for the purposes of this study - two critical areas. Firstly, the success of the above groups helped to facilitate an ideological shift from constructing music as play to music as work, thus placing 'culture' at the centre of policies of economic and urban regeneration (Frith, 1993). Secondly, the crisis of de-industrialisation, coupled with 'the dominant, enterprise model of creativity' (Tams, 2003), has been shown to accentuate relations of gender inequality (Taylor et al., 1996; Yeandle et al.; 2004); producing a paradoxical nexus of increased opportunities and constraints for women that is highlighted in the third quotation.

John Lennon's construct of a 'men's club' underscores the gendered dimensions of access and exclusion in 'translocal' scene narratives, for he is not referring to the entrenched male-ness of Liverpool music detailed by Sara Cohen, but rather to an exclusive clique of rock acts that the Beatles allied with in the early 1960s. Sheffield is host to similar cliques and I examine some of the local cultural industries to assess how contemporary 'men's clubs' are forged. I also consider the role of local media in constructing a sense of scene,

---

<sup>71</sup> Taylor et al. (1996, p. 10) also note 'angry local comment' that regional news is produced in the 'rival' city of Leeds.

focusing especially on the ‘free monthly music magazine’ *Sandman*, and the ways in which a group of women attempted to problematise hegemonic masculinity through the counterpart, *Sandlady*.

Underpinning these various scene dimensions are the enduring practices of promoters, music makers and listeners. I trace the journeys of the mixed-gender bands in the 1996-1997 sample and examine these interdependent relationships in order to identify key moments of disruption to the homosocial norms of local rock and pop. In sum, this chapter aims to map some of the significant features of Sheffield’s scene/s to illustrate how the interaction of place, policy, and musical practice produces contrasting perceptions and material conditions within which particular relations of gender inequality are both constructed and contested.

### **Steel City**

Situated in the sub-region of South Yorkshire, Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England with a population of 513,104 (2001 Census).<sup>72</sup> Built on seven hills and crosscut by five rivers, these geographical features have powered the city’s ‘dual economy’ for centuries. The metalworking skills of local artisans were so distinct that in 1565, a local monopoly and formal apprenticeship system was established. Thus, Taylor et al. argue that the Sheffield area had an established craft identity and system of governance ‘well before the coming of the Industrial Revolution proper’ (1996, p. 37). Two significant factors advanced steel production: the development of Huntsman’s crucible for ‘casting’ steel and Bessemer’s furnace. The factories<sup>73</sup> and population expanded accordingly, from 46,000 in 1801 to over 285,000 eighty years later. By 1901, Sheffield’s populace had reached 400,000.

---

<sup>72</sup> 262, 481 women and 250, 623 men (www.daisyinfo.org.uk).

<sup>73</sup> Located in Sheffield’s so-called East End: Attercliffe, Tinsley, Darnall and Brightside.

The 'heavy' steel industry became the chief source of employment in the city - 65, 724 in 1921, of which only 6% were women - rising to almost 100,000 by 1954 (ibid., pp 42-43). Women were much more prevalent in 'light' cutlery and associated trades, comprising 33% of the 40,536 workforce in 1921, with 3,449 as polishers or so-called 'Buffer Girls'. 'Cutlery' and 'steel' became increasingly interdependent but the skilled artisan, the 'Little Mester', was relatively autonomous in comparison to the steelworker. He typically 'owned his own tools, controlled his hours of work, observed Saint Monday [see below] and paid a weekly rent for space at his 'trough' and the use of power' (Thrift, 1987 cited in Taylor et al., 1996, p. 40). What is conspicuously absent in Taylor et al.'s otherwise detailed study is the similarly self-sufficient role of the 'Little Missus', who ran a complementary system of buffing shops. They 'would rent a small workshop...buy equipment...and contract to do outwork for the larger firms'<sup>74</sup> (Booth, 1998, p. 27).

Based on the oral history of buffer girls, Gillian Booth's study outlines the fierce sense of independence, camaraderie and status generated through this collective work identity, for although buffers were 'the underdogs in a male-dominated industry', with no access to apprenticeships, they were better paid than the other main occupation for Sheffield women in the 1920s and '30s - domestic service - with many claiming 'they earned more than their husband' (ibid., p. 60).<sup>75</sup> Booth also found that many women, particularly those with children, preferred the relative freedom of the 'Little Missus' system to the more regimented firms. As one buffer explained, 'you could please yourself. There was no clocking in and you could work school hours' (ibid., p. 27). These contrasting studies portray a male-dominated culture characterised by what Taylor et al. succinctly coin 'craft' and 'graft' (1996, p. 4), creating a hierarchical gendered division of labour that was also contested by the resistant, collective culture of the buffing shop. 'They were

---

<sup>74</sup> Such as Viners, Mappin and Webb and Richardsons.

<sup>75</sup> Typically earning £2 per week for piece work in the 1930s (Booth, 1998).



remarkable because they were everything women were not supposed to be: noisy, bawdy, dirty, self-assured and capable' (Booth, 1998, p. 58).<sup>76</sup>

Locally renowned, buffer girls were visible in characteristically male-dominated public spaces: the street, workshop and pub. Apart from the twinned annual highlights of the works trip and Christmas party, the public house was a central site of leisure for working class men and women. The tradition of 'Saint Monday'<sup>77</sup> - also 'observed' by the Little Missus - highlights this point whereby, after a typically drunken weekend, more autonomous workers would routinely stay at home. A habitual cycle of 'workshop-pub-chapel-house' (Thrift, 1987) created well-trodden social pathways that local promoter Peter Stringfellow would bemoan some thirty years later, stating: 'all Sheffield people want out of life is long, steady drinking...there is nowhere else more beer conscious' (cited in Firminger and Lilleker, 2001, p. 71). He was also adversely affected by the Methodist-influenced authorities' response to excessive alcohol consumption, for the 'draconian' regulation of alcohol and entertainments licenses have curbed the city's cultural growth.<sup>78</sup> Prior to the opening of the Republic nightclub in 1995, no nightclub license had been issued for fifteen years (Brown et al., 1998, p. 256).

Two other notable characteristics were produced through Sheffield's industrial identity. Firstly, following significant Chartist activity in the eighteenth century, the city is a resolutely 'labour town', illustrated by the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' tag of the 1980s, which was constructed against a backdrop of pit closures and catastrophic de-

---

<sup>76</sup> Booth is however careful to point out the iniquities for working women. There was no holiday or sick pay and many women worked over fifty hours a week until the 44 hour week was introduced in the 1950s. Accidents to hands and eyes, "she's got collared", were also common, with no compensation for industrial injuries until the Factories Act, 1948 (1998, p. 54).

<sup>77</sup> Taylor et al. interestingly note that Saint Monday is referenced in a local song, 'The Jovial Cutlers', which dates back to the Napoleonic wars (1996, p. 321).

<sup>78</sup> The Private Places of Entertainment (Licensing) Act of 1967 restricted audience capacities, compelling unregulated clubs to apply for a music and dancing license. Many, including Stringfellow's Mojo club, were refused (Firminger and Lilleker, 2001).

industrialisation. Secondly, the focus on specialist skills and stable demographic<sup>79</sup> has resulted in limited immigration from the former British colonies, markedly less than that of the so-called 'Cotton' towns. Labour gaps were evident in the affluent post-war period and people from the West Indies were recruited by several local hospitals. The initial 3-4,000 Pakistani immigrants responded to similar 'pull factors' (Gilmore, 2001) by the steel industry and both groups established communities in Sheffield's East End - along with Pitsmoor and Burngreave - that remain to this day. Thus, the 1991 Census estimated Sheffield's combined ethnic minority demographic at 25,200, 5% of the city's population. Even at a projected 6.8% by 1998, this figure remained 'relatively low for a city the size and position of Sheffield' (Sheffield Trends, 1998),<sup>80</sup> earning it the moniker of a 'white city' (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 198).<sup>81</sup>

A key sector supporting Sheffield's night time economy is the substantial student population<sup>82</sup>, although even this typically dynamic group is less mobile than other student demographics, with approximately one third of those studying at Sheffield University electing to live in the city after graduation (*The Virgin Guide*, 2001). Sheffield's landlocked topography also contributes to what Thrift (1987) has coined an 'enclave mentality.' The authors of *Not Like a Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield 1955-1977* argue that these various factors served to shape the music 'made in Sheffield.'

Unlike [Liverpool and Manchester]... Sheffield was geographically isolated. Both Lancashire cities were ports, Manchester being linked by the ship canal, and had historic and cultural links with the east coast of North America. They also had huge influxes of Irish immigrants which were to have a strong influence on musical input. It always took Sheffield that bit longer to catch up – but it also led

---

<sup>79</sup> When compared to other cities in crisis (1981-1991), only 14,800 (0.11%) of the population emigrated in contrast to Greater Manchester (131, 400 - 5.02%) and Merseyside (4.7%) (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 12).

<sup>80</sup> A pilot project established by local agencies including both universities and Sheffield City Council to provide a holistic set of indicators about Sheffield life: housing, education, employment and so forth.

<sup>81</sup> In the 2001 Census, Sheffield's BME population had increased to approximately 45,000 (Yeandle et al., 2004).

<sup>82</sup> Sheffield College is Europe's largest college of Further Education, with over 40,000 students. The two universities also attract approximately 54,000 students between them, with an expansion of 12,000 between 1991 and 1997 (Sheffield Trends, 1999).

to the city creating its own unique take on musical trends, as well as developing its own (Firminger and Lilleker, 2001, p. 7).

Building on Taylor et al.'s concept, 'local structures of feeling', I now examine the ways in which narratives of place or 'Sheffieldness' have influenced this 'unique take on musical trends' in order to address a key question posed by Frith: 'what is the Sheffieldness of Sheffield bands?' (1993, p. 22).

### **Narratives of Sheffieldness**

Taylor et al. apply John Urry's (1981) theory of a 'local class structure' to demonstrate how relations of production, particular occupations and trade union activity, are shaped by distinctive industrial conditions. These conditions are inextricably linked to the local cultural structure - marked by particular institutions such as working mens clubs and pubs - which produce, developing Raymond Williams' oft-used phrase, '*local* structures of feeling' (1996, p. 32, emphasis added). By this, they mean the processes through which knowledge and folklore associated with a particular place and the people who live there is translated into 'commonsense talk', simultaneously circulated *by* the people who live there. As Bruner confirms, 'place is crucial and it shapes and constrains the stories that are told, or indeed, that could be told' (cited in Finnegan, 1997a, p. 108).

Frequently referred to as 'the largest village in England' (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 28), the cliquy facets of the city's musical scenes are habitual complaints: 'Sheffield is the only city that thinks it's a town with a village in-look' as one artist manager put it. On the other hand, it is suggested that the city's topography and parochialism provides a fertile training ground for 'outsiders' - 'it's a place where you can actually experiment.'<sup>83</sup> Penny

---

<sup>83</sup> Martyn Ware on Calendar Goes Pop, YTV, 1998: an argument similarly propounded for the so-called 'godfathers' of electronica, Kraftwerk. 'Germany... was, and remains, heavy-rock territory, an ultra-conservative backdrop that gave groups such as Kraftwerk... room to experiment' (Times Online, 23/4/04).



from Velodrome 2000 extends this rationale, describing Sheffield as a ‘DIY city, full of independent spirit’ (Sandlady in *Sandman*, August 2004). Competing interpretations of an ‘enclave mentality’ continue to provoke controversy. For example, in response to charges of ‘incestuousness’ and ‘nepotism’, a recent *Sandman* letter claims that:

our fair and green city...is the largest village on the world...I believe this factor actually contributes to our current success and should be championed... There’s no Mafia, just a lot of people who know each other... we’ve got it good. Let’s just enjoy it. And stop moaning you resentful fuck (March 2006).

In her documentary ‘Made In Sheffield’ (slackjaw films, 2002), Eve Wood draws on another emotive strand of Sheffieldness, that of quality. Imprinted on a range of metalwork exports, the brand ‘Made In Sheffield’ signifies a place-specific marker of value that she appropriates to emphasise the ‘unique’ cluster of acts involved in ‘the birth of electronic pop’ ([www.sheffieldvision.com](http://www.sheffieldvision.com)). Belonging and familiarity are related recurring themes: ‘I...love this city, which is why I stay here. I were born here, all my family’s here, my roots are here’ (Richard Hawley, *The Guardian*, 13/2/03). Equally common however, is the perception that there are better scenes, with better facilities or opportunities, happening elsewhere. ‘You only have to stand on a stage with a guitar and a drum in Manchester and you’re signed, you have to work for it in Sheffield. You do play a lot of gigs for a lot of time before [music industry] people notice’ (Penny from Velodrome 2000, personal communication, 1997).

Drawing upon the familiar motifs of ‘graft’ forged through regional inequality, this account also serves an underlying compensatory function for the vast majority who don’t ‘make it’. Thus, local bands are typically defined as ‘insular’, ‘independent’ and ‘self-supporting’ (Sturdy, 2003, p. 18). Stereotypes of down-to-earth masculinity, characterised by ‘a blunt, no-shit type of personality’ (*Sandman*, May 2003), locate these narratives within a masculinist framework. Even the success of the celebrated few are storied within the context of tenacious Northern grit, with ‘Sheffield’s famous five’, Pulp, setting the



1990s' benchmark for 'resilience, perseverance and belief.'<sup>84</sup> In sum, each of these perceived traits - insularity, individuality, sociability, quality, familiarity, inequity, tenacity and masculinity - serve to shape the city's 'sound, look and story' (Jones, 1997) and the 'Sheffieldness of Sheffield bands'.

### **Music City**

'The factories close down, the lost colour returns to Sheffield's cheeks' (Paul Morley, *The Face*, August 1981).

'The overseas earnings of British rock music exceed those generated by the steel industry' (Tony Blair, 1997, cited in Brown et al., 1998, p. 246).

JR: 'It was a wonderful gig; you have really made a difference to Sheffield's self-image.

RS: 'What, do you mean we're producing steel again?' (personal communication with Russell Senior from Pulp, Sheffield Arena, 1996).

The collapse of Sheffield's traditional industries and consequent devastating job losses - almost 75% of those working in steel and metals production between 1981 and 1991 (Sheffield Trends, 1997) - advanced a process of 're-imaging' in a bid to construct a post-industrial identity founded on culture, leisure and tourism (Brown et al., 1998). Encouraged by the achievements of the Human League et al., popular music was identified as a key motor for economic and urban regeneration. As legend has it, the impetus for the rise of electronica stems back to a gig at Sheffield University's Lower Refectory (26/6/78), when Cabaret Voltaire supported Kraftwerk on their Trans Europe Express tour. According to one of those present, 'there were only 17 or 18 people there and [we] all formed bands. That was the key, it unlocked the Sheffield thing.'<sup>85</sup>

Cabaret Voltaire were certainly an influential force on those acts who would become the pioneers of 'synth-pop' in the early 1980s, not least because they owned only one of two

---

<sup>84</sup> 'How Pulp gained overnight stardom in just 12 years' (*The Star*, 29/12/94). This has also become a familiar motif for the journalist David Dunn, who refers to Pulp two years later as 'Sheffield's longest overnight success story' (see chapter seven).

<sup>85</sup> Jamie Fry, World of Twist, cited in 'Forged in the City of Steel' ([www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk) 23/4/04).

recording studios in Sheffield at that time.<sup>86</sup> Places to play and the infrastructure needed to disseminate music were similarly scarce, although in line with the DIY ethic, several bands released independent records before acquiring major deals.<sup>87</sup> Due to the lack of competitive facilities, the 'drift to London' (Brown et al., 1998) was inevitable for signed bands. The Human League's Phil Oakey, amongst others, aimed to reverse this trend by suggesting ways in which successful acts could invest in a 'local' music industry, thus challenging the cultural authority of London's capital (Milestone and Richards, 2000). The resulting initiative was founded on two interlinking aims: to provide increased community access to the resources needed to develop local talent, whilst simultaneously promoting economic growth and employment (Brown et al., 1998). Sheffield's post-industrial vision was therefore globally determined - shifting demand and markets for steel; multinational advances; US record sales - and locally framed.

The first phase incorporated all four municipal areas of investment identified by John Street and Michael Stanley: recording studios, venues, concert promotion and training provision (Frith, 1993, p. 15). Initially opened as an arts centre (circa 1978), the Leadmill became the first council-owned performance space in the UK. Training, recording and rehearsal facilities were established on two further sites - Darnall's<sup>88</sup> 'Music Factory' and the city centre flagship, Red Tape Studios. Launched in 1986, Red Tape was the founding venture underpinning a wider strategy of creative enterprise - the Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ) - that has since developed managed workspaces for a range of cultural producers. Thus, in opposition to Adorno's negative construction of the 'Culture

---

<sup>86</sup> Confirmed in an unpublished interview conducted by NCPM founder, Tim Strickland, with the former Stunt Kites' manager and member of They Must be Russians, Martin Lacey (Juma Print Office, 8/6/93). I am indebted to Tim for his generosity in sharing knowledge and archive materials.

<sup>87</sup> Including Stephen Singleton of Vice Versa, soon to become ABC - and Def Leppard, on their Bludgeon Riffola label. They signed to Vertigo in 1980.

<sup>88</sup> 1990s regeneration initiatives also attempted to transform the 'industrial wasteland' (Taylor et al., 1996) of Sheffield's East End into a site of leisure consumption, now housing one of the largest shopping malls in Europe, Meadowhall; the 'Centertainment' complex; and sport and music arenas.

Industry', the small-scale production of symbolic goods, from records to computer games, is now heralded as an affirmative 'model for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Working' ([www.ciq.org.uk](http://www.ciq.org.uk); Milestone and Richards, 2000). My concern here is not primarily with specific policy but rather, with the tensions municipal intervention and investment gives rise to. In short, how do 'local structures of feeling' interact with narratives of entrepreneurship and community to facilitate - or indeed constrain - access?

*'This isn't the spirit of rock 'n' roll, this is Sheffield City Council'*<sup>89</sup>

Economic subsidies enabled the Human League and members of the Comsat Angels to build commercial recording studios within the Audio Visual Enterprise Centre (AVEC) where Red Tape was already established. Financed by the proceeds of local band Chakk's recording contract with MCA - allegedly generating £650,000 in advances alone - FON recording studios added to AVEC's burgeoning roster, producing an eponymous record label (FON) managed by Dave Taylor and ex-NME journalist, Amrik Rai. Tensions emerged early however, as these perceived enclaves of power became branded the 'Sheffield Music Mafia' (Sturdy, 2003, p. 193). The major complaint was that the powerful few had the ear of London A&R, restricting access - even thwarting opportunities - for those outside the 'men's club.' Indeed, several employees at Red Tape subsequently (and in one case, simultaneously) worked as A&R 'scouts'. Thus, narratives of 'regional grievance' became locally focused.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, council policy meshed fortuitously with Sheffield's growing prominence as a centre of dance music production, encouraging entrepreneurs like those

---

<sup>89</sup> From '23.59' by Nicola Baldwin, the Crucible theatre's millennium play about a fictional Sheffield 'scene'.

<sup>90</sup> Although Sturdy is referring specifically to FON and the Leadmill, I would also include Red Tape due to personal communication with many aggrieved music makers. There is also a parallel tradition of rivalry based on perceived and material inequalities between the two training providers.



behind the independent record label Wau! Mr Modo, to relocate.

We moved to Sheffield because financially it was a lot cheaper than London. And geographically, Sheffield's the centre of the country and the Council were offering us grants to move up here and...they were building this audio visual centre [so]...it seemed like quite an exciting idea to me at the time. And Warp records were up here as well who I knew (from an unpublished interview conducted by Tim Strickland with Adam Morris, 4/6/93).

Beginning as a record shop, the Warp label became (and remains) a recognised pioneer of 'weird electronic dance music' ([www.warprecords.com](http://www.warprecords.com)), thus drawing on and developing the city's 'unique' associations with left-field electronica. Collectively, these labels generated a 3.2% share of British singles sales in 1990, leading to claims that 'the City is on target to register as a major music production centre, increasingly recognised as such by the Media and Record Industry' (cited in Frith, 1993, p. 17). Despite Wau! Mr Modo's subsequent bankruptcy<sup>91</sup> and Warp's move away from the CIQ, the internationally renowned Gatecrasher phenomenon at the Republic nightclub served to underline the city's post-industrial success during the mid to late 1990s.

Whilst 'difficult to define', the 'Cultural Industries' were an expanding sector, with a 10% growth in employment between 1997 and 1999.<sup>92</sup> Not surprisingly, the council literature capitalised on these real and perceived achievements: 'what was once a sceptic's field day is fast becoming the envy of the nation' (*Dirty Stopouts Guide*, 1998/99). Other commentators were more measured.

About...150 companies are currently employed in the Cultural Industries Quarter... within the next ten years, it is hoped the number will grow... thanks to the further development of micro-businesses working in culture, media, science and technology to complement more traditional industries. However, a recent city council report states that 'The CIQ remains a part of '*hidden Sheffield*' ... It is clear that many Sheffielders do not know where it is, or what it is-indeed, they may not have heard of it at all... 21 years after The Leadmill opened... there are only a few

---

<sup>91</sup> In part, due to the lack of sector-specific 'back-up.' 'There are no club promoters, no clubs, no cutting places, no pluggers. There are no marketing companies...so it's quite difficult. You have to be willing to spend a lot of time travelling to London' (Adam Morris, 4/6/93).

<sup>92</sup> Almost 5,500 - not that significant when contrasted with the 35,000 employed in the retail and wholesale sector, or steel and related manufacturing, around 17,000 (The World of Work in Sheffield, 1999, [www.shefftap.org](http://www.shefftap.org)).



new venues to attract visitors either during the day or night. They include the Showroom Cinema and Bar, The Site Gallery, the Republic nightclub, and most recently, the National Centre for Popular Music. And if ever there was a salutary lesson in not getting too carried away with optimistic predictions, the latest council report refers to the initial estimate of half-a-million visitors a year for the NCPM. If only. The NCPM represents the focal point of the quarter and, to a large extent, its success or failure will affect the public's perception of the whole of the area (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 15/10/99, emphasis added).

This notion of a 'hidden Sheffield' was confirmed in Brown, O'Connor and Cohen's (1998) comparative study of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield's cultural industries. They found that production facilities had been prioritised at the expense of complementary amenities such as bars, cafes and shops that would attract people into the area. The lack of 'soft infrastructure', vital to encouraging new social pathways, also resulted in cultural producers and community arts projects outside the CIQ feeling excluded (Brown et al., 1998; Tams, 2003). Brown et al. therefore challenge the policy focus, stating: 'Quarters are complex clusters of activities - they are networks embedded in a particular place... it is these 'scenes', 'milieus', 'happening places', which are the real context for a local music industry rather than facilities' (1998, p. 256).

I would argue that the musical strand of Sheffield's cultural policy was founded on the assumption that music production generates consistent economic growth.<sup>93</sup> Thus, 'community access' became subordinate to the 'buoyant expectations' (Breen, 1993) of free market enterprise, arguably impacting on the eventual downfall - unrealistic projected visitor numbers compounded by poor planning. Where were they going to park or eat? What were they going to see? - of the NCPM. Opening on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1999, only 65,500 paying visitors were recorded in the first six months. Despite many redundancies, the NCPM continued to trade at a massive loss, accruing over £13 million debts.<sup>94</sup> It

---

<sup>93</sup> A view that the global industry also propounded in the early 1990s (Breen, 1993).

<sup>94</sup> All information taken from the Creditors Notice sent to me (15/10/99).

finally closed to visitors in June 2000.<sup>95</sup> As predicted above, this spectacular, highly newsworthy collapse contributed to negative perceptions of the city and its scene/s.

The city is more than a little in need of a few acts to make it big at the minute, its scene seems to have gone the same way as The National Centre for Popular Music (Neil Anderson, *Sheffield Telegraph*, 28/3/03).

If cities were like cartoon characters, right, Sheffield would absolutely be Homer Simpson. No matter whatever great idea the city seems to have, we always seem to be going ‘Doh!’ at the end of it (Richard Hawley, *The Guardian*, 13/2/03).

Failure to address the ‘spatial politics’ (Brown et al., 1998) also had a profound impact on the gendered use of the area, as illustrated by the recent developments of two sites at the heart of the CIQ. Firstly, the demise of the Women’s Cultural Club - one of the many community oriented casualties of what Elly Tams (2003), in her doctoral research investigating the gender imbalance of the CIQ, has coined ‘the dominant, enterprise model of creativity.’ Secondly, the transformation of the nightclub, Brown Street, into a so-called ‘gentlemen’s club’ (December 2002) - part of the Spearmint Rhino chain - initially provoking fierce opposition<sup>96</sup>, followed by ‘avoidance’ (Taylor et al., 1996).

During my four years at Red Tape, I worked the 2-10pm late shift an average of three times per week, finding the male-domination of the interior increasingly mirrored in the surrounding streets. Despite a heavy bouncer presence, the explicitly sexualized pathways to the ‘gentleman’s club’ generated a heightened sense of threat after dark. Personal safety has been a primary consideration for almost every woman I have talked to over the last decade - there were only a handful that felt confident going to venues or pubs alone.

---

<sup>95</sup> Sheffield Hallam University purchased the building in 2003 amidst great local controversy, stimulating a lobby group, ‘Pride in Sheffield.’ The building has since become the base for SHU’s student union.

<sup>96</sup> By businesses within the CIQ, trade unions, both universities, and women’s groups. They organised numerous mass protests ‘against the global pimp – help us chase the scumbag... sexist fat cat company out of town!’ (flyer distributed 14/12/02); including a demonstration outside Sheffield Magistrates court in an attempt to stop the application for a change of license (14/1/03). Opinions were vociferously divided, with supporters (many of whom were women) citing four main arguments: ‘market forces’; ‘job opportunities’ – 50 dancers and 70 staff were employed; ‘a bit of harmless entertainment’; and a welcome challenge to the ‘elitism’ of the CIQ (‘Have Your Say’, 16/1/03, [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)).

Women's mobility is therefore restricted by the perceived and actual dangers of urban city spaces (Massey, 1994), particularly those 'zones' that are manifestly 'sex typed' (Taylor et al., 1996).<sup>97</sup> In short, the CIQ has become another 'overwhelmingly male place' which limits women's access to the cultural facilities in the area such as Red Tape. The continued male-domination of this training provider also deserves further consideration, in order to shed light on the exclusionary practices that contribute to gender inequalities on the wider 'scene'.

### **From the Little Mester to the music maker**

Between 2000-2004, forty-six acts - thirty-two bands, one vocal harmony group and thirteen solo artists - trained on Red Tape's Band Development Programme (BDP), totalling one hundred and forty music makers. Only seventeen (12%) of these were women. With the exception of four 'black' men, all the musicians were white. There are potential problems when generalising from this sample however. Many established, functional bands in and around the Sheffield area are too *developed* to consider a training programme of this kind, and the exclusive and exclusionary reputation of Red Tape,<sup>98</sup> coupled with subsidised but potentially substantial course fees, undoubtedly deters other aspirant music makers - as does the council tag (Brown et al., 1998). With these provisos in mind, the above statistics, building on my initial 1996-1997 sample (see below), uphold Cohen's findings that band culture overwhelmingly produces 'whiteness' and masculinity.

---

<sup>97</sup> Although crime statistics are notoriously difficult to disseminate, there was a marked increase in reported crime, 36% between 1986-1991 (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 26). A decade later, Sheffield was being heralded as the 'the safest big city in England and Wales' (Sheffield Telegraph, 21/7/00), based on Home Office crime statistics released in July 2000. Perceptions of safety, marked by particular 'no-go areas', complicate quantitative-based claims however (op. cit).

<sup>98</sup> Developed into the 1990s through association with bands such as the Longpigs and Gomez. Despite vociferous internal value clashes with the current council department managing Red Tape, leading to my resignation in August 2004 (followed by approximately eighteen further colleagues, including the manager), new staff are actively working to promote a more inclusive regime, through a mix of government/council initiatives (New Deal for Musicians; 14-16 programme; Lifelong Learning) and more formal, qualification-led training (such as B-tecs). Red Tape's elitist reputation continues to persist in the wider music-making 'community' nonetheless.



The vast majority of 'rock' bands on the BDP developed their skills collectively, within the fraternity of an all-male group founded upon an ideological allegiance to the process and practice of making music that simultaneously defined them as musicians (Bennett, 1990). This social practice reinforces the masculinity of its participants, a fragile construct that, as Bayton argues, 'is only preserved by the exclusion of girls' (1997, p. 41). Even those in mixed-gender bands were subject to a range of deterrents, from direct sexual harassment to more subtle means of exclusion, as one female bass player, who was 'sacked' after moving to Manchester, vividly highlights below - taking over the band's website to voice her disenfranchisement and rage.

this is walk and chew gum fanzine...in place of the t\*\*\*\* p\*\*\*\* website, shame they never bothered to work out how to do it, huh!...  
All good things must come to an end and usually you get a choice but boys will be boys as they say and I've been replaced on bass. I didn't want to go. I feel like i've been fucked over by people who i thought were my friends...oh...i have...so another garage/surf band on the scene.  
B.O.R.I.N.G...boys and guitars and groupie girls...no wonder i didn't stand a chance...at least i won't have to put up with being ignored during and after gigs, having hurtful remarks thrown at me about who i go out with and what i do...i won't have to put up with a singer who sounds like his voice is breaking, immature jokes that only they find funny ... bitter? me? after the way I've been treated...you betcha (2/4/03).

In short, many bands within Sheffield's scene/s operate as micro 'men's clubs'. Despite the best efforts of many staff, Red Tape has failed (thus far) to tackle the imbalance of access effectively, particularly in the light of original policy aims to 'develop new skills and extend and increase opportunities for finding work for both adults and young people, both black and white, male and female, and make use of the new and interesting job opportunities available locally and nationally in an industry with growth potential' (cited in Frith, 1993, p. 16).

According to Yeandle et al., 'girls and boys [in South Yorkshire] are underachieving in all age groups compared to pupils in England as a whole' (2004, p. 7). Furthermore, that there is a marked tendency for girls - and boys from BME groups - to 'opt out' of the



design and technology curriculum (ibid.). It is therefore hardly surprising that the white male hegemony of Red Tape is most acutely pronounced in the technology courses (Bayton, 1998; Marshall, 2003). Many prominent ‘cultural intermediaries’ working in local venues, recording studios or training providers, initially trained as sound engineers at Red Tape. Thus, the training cycle perpetuates the masculinism of Sheffield’s scene/s. Council policy also failed to stem the migration of many successful acts and entrepreneurs. Warp records moved to London in 2000, followed by the producers from Axis/Manna and Steelworks (previously FON) studios.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, when considering the relative success of Manchester’s cultural industries where the local authority adopted a ‘hands-off’ approach, Brown et al. ask whether the music industry is an appropriate target for council intervention (1998, p. 260).

Whilst the stainless steel drums of the ‘National Centre of Regional Embarrassment’ became a blot on Sheffield’s contemporary ‘scenescape’ (Cohen, 1997), a more organic meld of the city’s dual identities can be traced through the gradual re-appropriation - from the 1960s onwards - of cutlery and finishing works into affordable rehearsal spaces and associated cultural industries. Many of these works have been demolished over the last two decades, with the most notable remaining ones concentrated in a few streets opposite Sheffield United’s<sup>100</sup> football ground, just outside the city centre. A symbiotic relationship has consequently developed between music and metal workers in the area, with one collective, Electroworks (formerly Stag Works), housing silver smiths, precious metalworkers and pewterers.

Electroworks is also host to the largest concentration of micro music businesses in the

---

<sup>99</sup> The production team of John Quarmby and Kevin Bacon (formerly of the Comsat Angels) and Elliot Kennedy respectively, best known for his work with the Spice Girls.

<sup>100</sup> Colloquially known as ‘The Blades’ since 1889.

region, representing various strands of Sheffield's overlapping scene/s. These include: *Sandman*; the Juju club, specialising in 'global dance'; Headcharge - 'legendary Sheffield club with international DJs and very, very late nights'; rehearsal facilities for numerous bands; one record label and four recording studios. In an attempt to attract funding to refurbish and develop the facilities, the two entrepreneurs fronting the initiative draw on 'local structures of feeling' to explicitly link the music maker to the 'Little Mester.' *Sandman* disseminates their theory as follows: 'There is a strong and interesting argument that the independent nature of Sheffield's musicians is a direct result of these small businesses which, unlike the huge corporations that dominated the workforce of other Northern cities...lead to competition within the city itself' ([www.sandman.co.uk](http://www.sandman.co.uk), 26/11/04).

With the exception of a handful of women, two of whom have subsequently left<sup>101</sup>, this nostalgic vision of enterprise culture represents a 'celebration of masculinity' (Lees, 1986; Cohen, 2001). According to Tams (2003), the 'creative entrepreneur' is constructed as a 'masculinised ideal', blurring the boundaries between work and play in a living embodiment of the creative consumer turned producer. The Electroworks' account reinforces and simultaneously develops this ideal in a bid for self-sufficiency apart from the CIQ - thus 're-imaging' entrepreneurship through the enduring filters of 'craft', 'graft' and competitiveness. In sum, narratives of Sheffieldness shape those of entrepreneurship in ways that naturalise the masculinity of 'professional' fandom: the 'Little Missus' is once again absent from the 'men's club'. I will now review the initial fieldwork, examining a further range of tensions shaping gendered cultural practices within the context of Sheffield's 'live' music scene/s.

---

<sup>101</sup> One because of the setting, 'cold, dirty, dangerous' and cliquy, all-male environment, 'boys and their toys!' (personal communication, August 2004); the other because she has moved city. This second woman was also central to the 'Sandlady' initiative, see below.

## Sheffield pathways: dance versus live

The concept and practice of the live 'rock' performance has powerful emotional and cultural force, articulating a sense of community (Willis, 1990) and authenticity (Grossberg, 1992). It is also a practice perceived to be under threat and, until recently, in decline (Thornton, 1995).<sup>102</sup> In 1988, Frith wrote 'that rock's story is ending'. This premonition was influenced by the decline of the seven-inch vinyl single, coupled with the rise of rave culture and DJ as producer. Discourses, practices and markets for popular music were in a process of transformation and Frith reasoned that rock's probable demise 'makes it possible for the first time to make sense of it' (1988, p. 4). Others were more hostile however. Dance music challenged the Romantic value cluster embodied in the rock aesthetic, becoming cherished ideals that needed protection. The Musicians' Union's (MU) campaign 'Keep Music Live' is an unequivocal defense of 'live ideology' (Thornton, 1995, p. 42), highlighting the slippage between rock and live ideology as that of real-ness<sup>103</sup> against artifice, the human being against the machine.

Many local electronica groups contributed to this struggle, illustrated by the central image promoting Eve Wood's documentary, that of an electric guitar being launched from the balcony of a tower block of flats. In the words of one Sheffield music maker, 'we thought we were killing off rock and roll' (Ian Craig Marsh, *Made In Sheffield*, slackjawfilm, 2002).<sup>104</sup> By the turn of the following decade, academics and journalists alike had confirmed its death. As one MU rep conceded, 'live music has ceased to be "hip". Clubs with name DJs and the latest remixes are what appeal to people today' (cited in Thornton, 1995, p. 49). Some musicians were similarly convinced. Morrissey from The Smiths

---

<sup>102</sup> During the last several years, the reinstatement of 'The band' has been dramatic, as the following roll-call testifies: The Strokes; The White Stripes; The Datsuns; The Vines; The Darkness; Bloc Party; Kaiser Chiefs; Franz Ferdinand and Arctic Monkeys, to name but a few. With the exception of the White Stripes, the masculinity of band culture is equally reinstated in this new wave of 'rock' groups.

<sup>103</sup> Reinforced by the MU's more recent tag, 'Musicians and Audiences say Keep it...REAL.'

<sup>104</sup> A discursive trope playfully revived in Kings Have Long Arms' 2003 single, 'Rock 'n' Roll is Dead', featuring Phil Oakey on vocals.

pronounced that pop was 'dead'<sup>105</sup> and in a *Melody Maker* interview (1990), Phil Oakey dismissed the traditional model of band culture altogether, stating: 'you don't have groups any more. There's no such thing as a group' (cited in Goodwin, 1992, p. 93).

Thornton notes the ways in which the primacy of live performance and recordings are reversed within 'disc culture': 'records are the original, whereas live music has become an exercise in reproduction' (1995, p. 4). Goodwin points out how the Human League contributed to this reversal, 'through their emphasis on machine-made music, their abandonment of live performance...and via the transparent deployment of backing vocalists Joanne Catherall and Suzanne (sic) Sulley as little more than visual signifiers designed to promote the music' (op cit). Female backing vocalists are frequently trivialised and sexualized as a marketing device, although these dismissive observations were certainly founded in the early months of Joanne and Susan's involvement with the group, appearing on the cover of the single *Boys and Girls* 'even though we hadn't sung on the record' (Susan Sulley, personal communication, 1994).

Joanne and Susan have since become recognised as mainstays of the Human League and its sound,<sup>106</sup> but initially, their presence was perceived to dilute the authenticity of the creative, masculine collective, generating hostility from record company executives, fans and journalists alike:

We constantly had massive opposition because people never saw that Joanne and I had any worth whatsoever...we were fighting a battle between all those people who wanted five men in a rock group playing bass guitar and drums and then all those sort of good teenybopper bands like Duran Duran that were just gonna aim at the little girls. There was nothing in-between where male and female joined together (ibid.).

---

<sup>105</sup> Cited by Blur's Damon Albarn as the motivation for forming a band (The South Bank Show, 21/11/99).

<sup>106</sup> The three-strong band received *Q*'s 'Innovation in Sound Award', December 2004.



The normative masculinity of band culture therefore appears to transcend genre. The group's subsequent shift from avant-garde electronica to 'synth-pop' created further consternation for purist fans - 'pop was a dirty word' (ibid.). Whilst defending their pop sensibilities,<sup>107</sup> Susan draws upon the authenticating logic of live ideology to contrast their performance approach with the 'manufactured, cutesie packages' of 1990s' pop acts. 'I can't see the point in going on stage and dancing to backing tracks. I thought music was supposed to be live, that's what we've always done (ibid.).

Notions of dance music threatening the traditions and practice of 'live' performance are recurring. John Firminger and Martin Lilleker detail the emerging 'crisis' in late 1960s South Yorkshire, as the typical venues of the time - pubs, swimming baths<sup>108</sup>, church halls and beat clubs including the Sheffield Scene, Esquire and Mojo<sup>109</sup>, which attracted almost 5,000 teenage members - were either closed or transformed into discos, 'sound[ing] the death knell for many local bands' (2001, p. 108). Many contributory factors were identified, including 'saturation.' According to one promoter of the time, 'the Sheffield kids are having too much of a good thing... with a glut of shows' (ibid., p. 70). The most prolific local entrepreneur responsible for this saturation was Peter Stringfellow, who identified a shift in cultural tastes - 'people are beginning to dance again... they no longer want to listen to groups' (ibid., p. 71) - compounded by escalating costs demanded by outside promoters and star names, along with the parochial characteristics of 'Sheffieldness.' After years of clashes with the licensing authorities, he

---

<sup>107</sup> Aspirations that the earlier Ware/Marsh/Oakey line-up similarly shared, aiming for the success of Georgio Moroder ([www.humanleague.co.uk](http://www.humanleague.co.uk)).

<sup>108</sup> Recently revived through the transformation of Hillsborough baths into a live music venue, the Deep End, known for its 'Can U Jam' sessions.

<sup>109</sup> The NCPM's live music venue and bar, Mojoes (which opened 26/2/99), explicitly drew on this legacy. Similarly, when The Barfly chain briefly took over this space in 2001, Stringfellow's nephew was enlisted to launch the re-branded site.

left the city in the late 1960s. In sum, 'live' music has proved to be an erratic but enduring force, shaped by local practice, wider trends and internal restrictions.<sup>110</sup>

The oppositional discourse of dance versus live continues to resonate as venues like the Boardwalk - 'Sheffield's very own Cavern' - thank its patrons for 'supporting live music' ([www.theboardwalklive.co.uk](http://www.theboardwalklive.co.uk)). Many people I talked to upheld this cultural divide. One participant in her late teens clearly demarcates her involvement and investment in live ideology against those she disparagingly describes as 'dance groupies' (see chapter seven). On the other hand 'Charlie', in her mid-twenties, usefully complicates this binary construct:

Although I...enjoy watching live bands and going to clubs, I go to different nights for different reasons. I enjoy '80s nights for nostalgia, Mod nights for the pleasure of dressing up, and dance nights for the social factor...Even though I am no longer part of any particular scene, or an avid follower of any particular band, I am still a big music fan. Music is the focal point for socialising. I tend to go to pubs and clubs which play good music and so tend to mix with people with similar musical tastes to myself (personal communication, 1998).

Pubs and clubs are vital sites for 'scene building' (Peterson and Bennett, 2004) and interaction. Although individual venues draw different audiences due to reputation, location, size and cost, the character and atmosphere of venues shifts according to the social groupings that inhabit and simultaneously construct that space. As Massey confirms, 'localities are not just about physical buildings... they are about the intersection of social activities and social relations... which are necessarily, by definition, dynamic, changing' (1994, p. 136). Thus the Boardwalk features hardcore punk events, local unsigned nights and tribute bands, along with older touring acts. It is also host to the Juju

---

<sup>110</sup>Licensing magistrates also draw on dance/live distinctions. When the club/bar Tin Pan Alley's license came up for review in 1998, 'live' music was a key specification for renewal (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 19/2/98).

club's 'global live music nights', each attracting different 'coalitions' (Straw, 1991/1997) allied through 'musical taste'<sup>111</sup>, sociality and/or ritual.

Particular physical locations have also become marked sites of entertainment on Sheffield's 'scenescape.' The Leadmill was built on the old Esquire site and the Casbah, re-launched in 1998, was previously the 1970s' Wap 'n' Take, dedicated to all things rock. 1960s' beat club, the Cavendish, transformed into the Corporation, specialising in hardcore rock and punk, whilst the Black Swan - one of the few pubs that continued hosting live music in the late 1960s - re-opened as the Boardwalk in 1997. Certain venues have therefore become integrated into the social and musical pathways of generations of music makers and listeners.<sup>112</sup>

Promoters are an additional element in the 'live' music equation. Those working the smaller venues have to negotiate an uneasy power dynamic between touring/'outside' and local acts, marked by the 'logic of access' (Kirschner, 1998) and masked through the assumed mutual 'love of live.' The promoter working at one of the most prolific clubs, the Casbah, announced on the Listen to Sheffield Bands (L2SB) website (26/4/04) that they were 'dropping' unsigned band nights due to 'band/audience apathy', along with a culture of competitiveness fostered by local bands. He later expanded upon this, outlining a night when four groups arrived to sound-check without a drum kit between them, identifying 'arrogance' as a peculiar characteristic of Sheffield music makers (personal communication, May 2004).

---

<sup>111</sup> Two club nights, All Things Electric (founded in April 2002) and Razor Stiletto cater for Sheffield's distinctive tradition of electronica, also blurring the boundaries between disc and band culture by showcasing a combination of 'live' acts and host DJs.

<sup>112</sup> The Frank White band's 20+ year residency at the out-of-town Pheasant pub for example.

The L2SB website has become a regular communication channel for various players to exchange information, and confirm or contest 'local structures of feeling' about their sense of scene. One post created a furor that threatened to close another mainstay of unsigned live music in recent years - the Boardwalk. The promoters behind BOB (Best Of Boardwalk) nights hosted at the Leadmill were accused of 'ripping bands off', provoking this poignant reply: 'How can you expect to make money at that level when you're hiring a place like the mighty Leadmill to put on local bands, the majority of which struggle to bring 30 or 40 to a gig?...I felt we were all working together for the good of the Sheffield scene.'<sup>113</sup>

Thirty-five responses were posted in a twenty-four hour period (May 20-May 21, 2004) to express anger against 'a vociferous but ill-informed minority' by restating their gratitude - 'I'm sorry that I took the work you do for granted' - for the promoters' 'genuine desire to help young bands'; thus developing a romanticized narrative around the 'love of live.' They are consequently described as 'the spirit of Sheffield music', 'promoters with a heart,' embodying a 'love', 'passion' and 'belief' in 'the live music scene.' Several posts challenge the 'art versus commerce myth' (Weinstein, 1999) that both supporters and retractors are drawing on - 'promoters make money. Wooooooh! That's sooooo nasty of them. Grow up', along with: 'please - where is this inverse correlation between money and passion?' - but the overriding discourse is one of a beleaguered community and 'scene' under siege.

They are the only promoters around that are in this 100% for the music and to try and help generate a scene! It would be a sad loss to us all, but once again Sheffield is obviously taking its toll on yet another promoter and venue.

The Casbah's gone leaving a hole. If the Boardwalk goes too for unsigned bands it'll be a big gaping chasm...I hope everyone lets it be known that the rantings of a few aren't the consensus opinion in the city.

---

<sup>113</sup> Originally appearing on the Boardwalk's website and subsequently cited in an L2SB post (20/5/04).



To...there's a huge wealth of people in Sheffield who truly appreciate the work you do. And we love you for it.

The concept of scene is able to capture and articulate this essence of ritual and drama, the 'dramatic sense of scene as public performance' (Cohen, 1997, p. 17), offering the potential of a transcendental, intensely pleasurable experience, as one regular audience member explains:

JR: What's the biggest buzz you get out of music?

Helen: It's still the live thing, going to see bands live, being overtaken and overwhelmed by whoever it is that's on stage, that's the best feeling ever. *Doesn't happen that often* now but it can be just the most amazing experience ever without the use of drugs [laughter] (1998).

Thus, what journalist and hip-hop fan Danyel Smith (1995, p. 209) describes as 'that ecstatic, erotic, nonsensical place where profound connection is made between performer and audience member', is rarely achieved. Cumulatively, these accounts highlight a further critical element in live music, that of local support, for whilst performance remains the visible marker of local band activity, with a 'glut' of weekly 'unsigned' nights across the city, the majority of these are poorly attended.<sup>114</sup>

This is compounded by a striking absence of women. At smaller gigs, I have consistently found the audience composition reflects that of the group on-stage, who are, borrowing Finnegan's (1989) phrase, 'almost always male.' As I detailed in the previous chapter, many women, and to my great surprise as a cultural researcher, I numbered amongst them, are rendered 'out of place' (Massey, 1994, p. 148). The homosocial norm

---

<sup>114</sup> Most unsigned bands do indeed 'struggle' to attract thirty people to a gig. Even with the backing of Red Tape and trainee managers/promoters, a typical 'Taped Up' gig (hosted on a monthly basis between 2000-2004 at the Grapes, Barfly and then Casbah) would consist of three or four bands and sixty or so audience members. End-of-year showcases aside, the only Taped Up night that generated a sizeable audience was at SHU's (now defunct) venue, the Nelson Mandela Building (6/4/03), when 289 people attended. This was largely due to one teenage band - Milburn's - unusually large following of 'Milburnites', consisting of school and football friends, coupled with dedicated 'community' support. 350 'supporter fans' travelled to see them at the Cavern in Liverpool, later that same year. Milburn have since acquired a distribution deal with Mercury records and currently have a single at number 22 in the charts (8/4/06).

of live rock and pop is potentially disrupted when mixed-gender or all-women bands are performing however - both Belief and Velodrome 2000 attracted significantly more women to their regular, resident shows. Sheffield's unsigned bands are 'almost always' white, as indeed are local audiences. As the only black British musicians in the fieldwork sample, EKM inspired the most diverse multi-ethnic and gendered following. In short, at 'low level' gigs, the people on stage tend to shape the audience dynamic.

### **Gendered strategies of inclusion: competence, collectivism and commitment**

Out of the twenty-seven acts selected, there were nine mixed-gender groups and one all-women band, Treacle. Six women were in their teens; four under the age of twenty-five with the other ten ranging between late twenties and mid thirties. Thirteen were either lead or backing vocalists, confirming the typicality of these 'gender-influenced roles' (Finnegan, 1989). They also challenged the hierarchical typology proposed by Green (1997) and Bayton (1993; 1998), engaging in multiple activities as songwriters and/or instrumentalists, along with promotion and business negotiation. I have yet to meet *just* a singer.

The range of instruments was equally diverse, including: one clarinet player; two electric guitarists; a trumpeter in the three-piece brass section of my soul covers group, Reaction; one keyboard player and two drummers. Treacle played the full range of rock instruments - bass, electric guitar and drums. Developing competences and the cultural capital appropriate to their divergent pathways is a key legitimating strategy for all players, but a particularly crucial one for female musicians who frequently state, as do women in other masculine spheres, that they have to be 'exceptional' in order to gain a grudging acceptance: 'you're alright for a girl' (cited in Green, 1997, p. 74). Velodrome 2000's DIY values problematised notions of excellence however, by embracing the 'purposeful'

style of ‘musical incompetence’ (Cohen, 1991; Strachan, 2004), swapping instruments and sharing lead vocals (see chapter six).

Finding like-minded/tasted others to play with is a further critical ‘hurdle’ (Bayton, 1998). Three of the mixed-gender groups had only one female player.<sup>115</sup> The Human League, Reaction and Velodrome 2000 contained two or more women members who were firm friends. The most striking feature for the remaining four was the level of family involvement. EKM, Belief and Derrick each contained two women members who were sisters. There were two sets of sisters in Treacle, and one father had taken on the role of manager. Belief were also managed by the sisters’ father - Derrick’s by their mother.<sup>116</sup> Belief and EKM’s memberships consisted almost entirely of extended family members, including brothers, partners and husbands. This strategy of collectivism is a common, pragmatic practice also adopted by all-male groups, who draw on accessible social networks to collaborate and develop corresponding social pathways. Playing with family and friends takes on additional significance for women, due to considerations of safety and confidence (Bayton, 1997), paradoxically creating the potential for additional constraints, as the case studies of Velodrome 2000 and Belief will illustrate.

The third ideal strategy is that of commitment<sup>117</sup> (Bennett, 1990). All the women featured in this study displayed an intensely ‘intrinsic’ commitment to *their* music (Sloboda, Davidson and Howe, 1994). For those working in bands, personal commitment to the

---

<sup>115</sup> Speedy (drums), Yonni (vocals and clarinet) and Pulp (keyboards), although Candida Doyle originally joined Pulp with her partner and brother (see chapter seven).

<sup>116</sup> Who also established a community based music project – Get Sorted - in Rotherham in 1996, with the aim of ‘keeping kids off the street and channeling youthful energy into something more productive.’ By 1997, they had ‘about 50 bands on the books’ (personal communication, 1997). Get Sorted continue to provide training and promotional opportunities for ‘disaffected kids.’

<sup>117</sup> I refer to these as strategic ‘ideals’ due to the gender-specific problems associated with how competences are judged (Green, 1997; Milestone and Richards, 2000), along with the more generally noted band/scene characteristics of conflict and competition addressed later in the chapter. Perceptions of unequal commitment - of certain members ‘not pulling their weight’ – are an equally common source of inter-group friction.

music needed to be translated into an extrinsic set of group practices that were both specific to the group and commonly understood.<sup>118</sup> Notions of commitment were shaped by varying narratives of ‘making it.’ Pulp, the Human League and Speedy were already signed, with four others (Belief, Treacle, Derrick and Yonni) - drawing on the discursive framework established in chapter three - harboring ‘romantic’ aspirations of ‘getting a deal’. Velodrome 2000’s complex motivations for making music will be assessed in chapter six. As two of the oldest ‘amateur’ bands, members of Reaction and EKM had previously worked within the mainstream music industry, forming new bands for the collective and creative pleasures of the group experience. Each ‘making it’ narrative is ideologically informed by specific values pertaining to their specific pathways. EKM’s story illustrates this point.

The four black members of the six-strong band were from the same family, who had grown up under the paternal influence of the Darnall Congregationalist gospel church. Described as ‘the most important...setting that Black people control’ (Cheryl Townsend Gilkes cited in Reinhartz, 1992, p. 12), the church represented a social, spiritual and musical training ground (Finnegan, 1989). Initially known as Eliakim, they formed in the early 1980s, playing a mixture of gospel standards and original material on the ‘circuit’: ‘Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, London...the network of churches is country-wide’ (personal communication, 1997). Much to the consternation of their minister, Eliakim began performing at local pubs and clubs in the mid-1980s, generating tensions that were still apparent at one of the sister’s weddings over a decade later.

---

<sup>118</sup> Punctuality for example, became synonymous with professionalism for Red Tape’s trainee sound engineers and managers.



Gospel remained the touchstone for their symbolic creativity, releasing an independent single, *I'm a Christian Warrior*, in 1988:<sup>119</sup> an explicitly ideological remit that continued to inform their love and logic of live. 'For those of you who have never been inside a black gospel church, then we're going to bring it to you' (*The Slug and Fiddle*, 21/4/97). Although EKM were a highly visible presence in predominantly white, male 'scene' settings, their professionalism and passionate zeal, expressed through the emotive vocal skills of the singers, moved audiences, however momentarily, to imagine a different kind of Sheffieldness. As local journalist Martin Lilleker enthused: 'EKM, the impressive new line-up which has emerged from one of Sheffield's finest bands of the mid-eighties... still featur[es] those superb vocalists, sisters Sharon and Jacqui' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 18/4/97). To summarise, gendered strategies of inclusion - competence, collectivism and commitment - are variously re-worked according to the aesthetic and ideological values informing particular pathways which are, in turn, shaped by 'extra-local' scene narratives of exclusion and access. I will now examine the role of the media in this process.

### **Mediated scenes**

National media play a vital role in the construction, circulation and 'fetishization' of a 'scene' outside its locale (Thornton, 1995; Mitchell, 1996). To invert Smith's (1994) phrase, geography has become 'integral to the musical imagination' (cited in Leyshon et al., 1998). This is particularly evident for places associated with particular sounds such as Seattle, Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield: 'music seems to 'express' a locality in some way' (Brown et al., 1998, p. 259). Consequently, the Human League were the only act to win a Q Award in 2004 to be identified in terms of both place and genre, as 'Sheffield's premier synth-pop trio' (*Q*, December, 2004). Local media functions in similar ways, for whilst 'local structures of feeling' about the 'scene' are contradictory, the pronoun 'our' is frequently used to distinguish acts that hail from the region, fostering

---

<sup>119</sup> Funded by self-declared fan, Phil Oakey.

a sense of inclusion and place identity. 'We're proud you're from Sheffield and we're proud you've stayed' proclaimed BBC Look North in an interview with the Human League (1/12/04).

Sheffield media consists of two newspapers, the daily *Star*<sup>120</sup> and weekly *Sheffield Telegraph*,<sup>121</sup> along with two FM radio stations, BBC Radio Sheffield and Hallam FM. Launched in 1974, Hallam FM provided a platform for local music throughout the 1970s and '80s, producing and broadcasting live sessions on the weekly 'New Age Muzak', along with live roadshows. Subsequent takeovers by the Metro Radio Group and more recently, EMAP (1995), have resulted in a generic streamlining of playlists and content. On the other hand, BBC Radio Sheffield has a policy of supporting local music, from the 1980s' 'amateur' 'ROTT' (Right Over The Top) to Jane Kitson's 'alternative rock' show. Although the latter was axed in the late 1990s, BBC South Yorkshire's 'Raw Talent' (2001) has subsequently fulfilled the 'youth' and 'local' provision. The weekly Thursday night programme (in conjunction with BBC Radio Hull) provides a combination of live sessions, unsigned demos and music industry features, supplemented by a website featuring a directory of bands throughout Yorkshire and the Humberside.

There are also two digital radio stations currently supporting 'local' music: SheffieldLive! and Radio 2XS. The Internet represents a significant channel for 'lively scenelike exchange' (Peterson and Bennett, 2004, p. 6), with a proliferation of chatrooms and websites such as [www.sheffieldscene.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldscene.co.uk) Many bands have also developed websites, providing virtual 'links' between their local and translocal networks. For instance, one act

---

<sup>120</sup> With an estimated 194, 992 readers, daily sales are 80, 097 (JICREG – July-December 2002, [www.sheffieldtoday.net](http://www.sheffieldtoday.net)).

<sup>121</sup> The *Sheffield Telegraph* was initially a daily newspaper, closed in 1986 by the United Newspapers Group and then reinstated as a weekly newspaper in 1989, with a readership of 58, 646 (ibid.).

‘ensuring Sheffield’s legacy of groundbreaking industrial electropop is safe’<sup>122</sup> is Hiem – whose recommended websites include Kraftwerk, Stereolab and *Sandman*. Launched in October 2002 with a circulation of 10,000 (August 2004), *Sandman* is one of the most recent additions to a consistent culture of fanzines,<sup>123</sup> rapidly becoming a key symbol of Sheffield’s contemporary scene/s.

*Sheffield Telegraph*’s ‘listings’ presents the most detailed map of the city’s multiple pathways<sup>124</sup>, organised around the following subheadings: Clubbing; Rock/Pop; Jazz; Folk/Roots; Country; Opera and Concerts/Recitals, which includes information about an array of musical projects, from community brass bands to cathedral choirs. Diverse musical activities are consequently grouped into discrete categories relating to genre. It is striking how closely these categories correlate with the musical worlds of Milton Keynes (Finnegan, 1989). They also overlap in similar ways, with ‘folk/roots’ events often duplicated in the ‘rock/pop’ section. As the most prolific local pathways, the first two categories typically generate the most coverage, structuring the week in terms of which bands/artists/DJs are appearing at which venues on a particular night. Similarly, *The Star* and *Sandman* contain ‘What’s On’ guides. All three also preview and review selected gigs and events, thus acting as key tastemakers in the process of discrimination.

Knowing who is playing where and what is happening to whom, provides an important source of cultural capital for both music makers and listeners. One member of the band Saxon describes *The Star* as ‘a musicians bible,’ recalling that: ‘All musicians bought it... because there were three or four advertising columns in the back - I used to know the

---

<sup>122</sup> From *The Sunday Times*, cited on [www.hiem.co.uk/press.asp](http://www.hiem.co.uk/press.asp) (accessed 22/11/04). Hiem’s founding members are Boz, formerly of the ‘All Seeing I’ and Nick Eastwood, formerly of Venini.

<sup>123</sup> Including ‘NMX’ (Martin Lacey) in the 1970s, Russell Senior’s ‘Bath Bankers’, and ‘Sheffield City Press’ in the 1980s. Three additional fanzines were launched in 2004 ([www.L2SB.co.uk](http://www.L2SB.co.uk), December 2004).

<sup>124</sup> Including events in surrounding towns and villages in the South Yorkshire sub-region and bordering counties, such as Doncaster, Rotherham, Penistone, Worksop and Chesterfield.

numbers off by heart - Instruments For Sale, Musicians Wanted and Bands. We'd all look at those columns. I still buy it today and still look at them just out of habit' (cited in Firminger and Lilleker, 2001, p. 105). *Sandman* is the current 'bible', mediating relations between those who are seeking personnel and services - musicians, demos, 'enthusiastic flyerers' - and those supplying commodities and skills: 'string arranger available'; 'affordable website design'; 'free rehearsal room, come and do us a gig in return'; 'bass for sale' (August 2004, p. 18).

Although *Sandman* draws on a wide pool of freelance, unpaid writers, some of whom are women, the majority of those working in 'professional' media-related fields are male. This male domination perpetuates a homosocial network (McDonnell and Powers, 1995) that, when coupled with the proliferation of aspirant bands, inevitably leads to the 'discursive exclusion' (Frith, 1992) of many music makers. The absence of women, emphasized by the typical inequalities of these interdependent scene roles, accentuates the gendered power dynamics at play.

#### *Local women: the absent presence*

Women working in male dominated environments are said to adopt 'blind eyes and deaf ears' (Gilligan, 1997, p. 24) to preserve the status quo, whilst those attempting to draw attention to gendered inequities are frequently censured. Consequently, the claim that it is 'harder for women than men to get respect in the music business,' elicited the following response: 'perhaps calling your record label Slappa isn't the best of starts' (Martin Lilleker, *Sheffield Telegraph*, 26/2/98). This paradox - what I have called the *absent presence* of women<sup>125</sup> - was challenged by an 'anonymous' female collective 'taking over the centre pages of *Sandman*'. As the opening paragraphs explain:

---

<sup>125</sup> Drawing on Finnegan's (1989) notion of 'hidden' musicians and Cohen's (1997) observation that 'women were very much present, despite their absence.'



Now I can almost hear what you're thinking saying or shouting, why do women NEED a magazine devoted to them... surely that's patronizing, unnecessary, sexist etc?! Well we take your point and, believe me, it's been the subject of hot debate since we decided to go ahead with it. Sandman, and we love it, does a damn fine job of writing about and promoting Sheffield's musicians and bands (and Leed's and Hull's). But how many women have they had on the front cover and how many women are featured inside? Not as many as the men. Are we whinging? Nah, we just thought that Sandman needed more women in it. And come to mention it, so does the Sheffield music scene in general... We don't profess to want to be popstars... but if we did, I think we'd be more inspired to go for it if we saw local women playing out... So that's what this magazine's for – a bit of indulgence, a magazine where we don't have to scour through the pages desperately seeking women. It'll be a bit of fun and also highlight a serious issue (Sandlady in *Sandman*, August 2004).

The main feature, 'Queens of Club', presented a selection of significant role models, including the Leadmill's general manager and live music manager at Sheffield University.<sup>126</sup> In addition, there was a review of the Sandlady launch gig, features on two artists, and an interview with a woman bouncer by regular Headcharge DJ, Ann D - 'Sheffield's turntable diva.' Sandlady's aim was therefore laudable, but the underlying dialectic - 'a bit of fun' versus 'a serious issue' - is tellingly highlighted through the 'stop press' announcement: 'the winking fanny...coming soon...Sheffield gossip...things you NEED to know', and competition. 'No one knows who the Sandladies are. Are they young? Are they old? Are they sweet and lovely or a malevolent manifestation of the Sandmen's worst nightmares? Send us an artist's impression of how you see them.'<sup>127</sup>

Through foregrounding stereotypical attributes of femininity - how do we look? how do we feel? - within the malestream magazine, these 'adaptive strategies' undermined their intent to raise local women's profiles in a credible, equitable context. In short, by 'doing femininity', 'masculinity' is simultaneously restated (West and Zimmerman, 1991) given

---

<sup>126</sup> Penny Blackham, who was also in *Velodrome 2000* (see chapter six).

<sup>127</sup> They planned to extend the women's magazine format with 'makeovers', 'horoscopes' and a 'problem page' in the following edition (Sandlady e-mail, 25/5/04). It proved to be a one-off however due to two factors: firstly, they struggled to raise the £300 advertising revenue needed to fund the extra pages and secondly, the principal organiser moved to Leeds.

that, as Cohen argues (2001), gender is a relational category. In the final two sections, I consider the practices and rituals of two interdependent interest groups that are similarly constructed: music makers and listeners.

### **Music Makers**

The dynamics of band culture are shaped by local conditions such as performance opportunities and existing pathways that are simultaneously influenced by wider industry trends and tastes. 1964 consequently heralded an ‘explosion’ (over 300) of aspirant Sheffield bands, due to a combination of Dave Berry’s chart success, the proliferation of beat clubs, and Anglo-American construction of teenage consumers and markets (Firminger and Lilleker, 2001). It is difficult to quantify the exact number of functional bands during the ethnographic time frame of this research however, for groups of popular music makers are rarely stable, taking on new members and shedding others, often disbanding completely. Thus, out of the twenty-seven bands noted in 1996, many had broken-up or metamorphosed beyond recognition four years later. As Finnegan notes, ‘trying to make an exact count of an ill-defined and variegated field is not altogether productive’ (1989, p. 298).

A telling illustration of a field and its players in constant flux is my own band experience. I had originally aimed to conduct a pilot study with selected regular audience members attending our gigs. Due to a host of factors, including family commitments and dissatisfaction with the ‘covers’ label, Reaction disbanded shortly after the research began. Derrick also split up after several performances because of ‘A’ level pressures, one of the many significant ‘turning points’ identified by Finnegan, along with marriage and parenthood (*ibid.*, p. 257). Treacle survived slightly longer, featuring in a Channel Four documentary about ‘women in rock’ (1996), supporting another all-women band, Girlschool. The coverage and experience was disappointing however:

They were a right snotty bunch of cows and it's really sad 'cause you think 'you're an all-girl band and we are'. Alright, they were signed, but they were still playing the same crappy club in Doncaster that were empty...it were only the drummer that even said hello, none of the others acknowledged we were even there and they were right stuck up you know like, 'We've got a record deal, you haven't', rather than like helping each other out (personal communication, 1996).

Male musicians were equally hostile, 'we were a threat you know,' and they despaired of constant media comparisons with other female bands such as Hell 7, the Bangles and Girlschool: 'they can't compare you with a male band' (ibid.). They were also mistakenly categorised under the banner of Riot Grrrl in an *NME* review (Bayton, 1998, p. 79). Ultimately, the documentary exposure backfired, reinforcing the group's marginal status and generating derision from local media:

This [is] pure gossip but when Treacle were recently knocked out of the first round of the Battle of the Bands in Rotherham, did they really refuse to accept that they had been beaten by reformed-for-the-night rock outfit Nu-Killer and demand a recount of the vote? Surely not? Anyway, the all-female band who starred in the TV documentary which led to demands for their autographs from people in the streets of Sheffield but not from the all-important record companies, will not have to worry about losing out on this occasion...(Sheffield Telegraph, 16/8/96).

The lack of wider or indeed local success, combined with inexperienced family management - one local journalist told me he was 'a complete pain' - eventually lead to their demise a year later.

Of the remaining twenty-four, one band moved to America and a further three changed their names. Fine became Redder, Fruit became Seafruit and Belief developed dual (and conflicting) identities, playing working men's clubs as Rumours, Sisters T and then Live From Earth. Seafruit secured a recording deal with Electric Canyon, whilst the Longpigs and Speedy were 'dropped' and later disbanded. Speedy's guitarist subsequently joined Seafruit, who also recruited EKM's keyboard player for their 1999 tour. EKM split up in 1998 due to membership problems when their drummer, after touring with another band, decided to stay in Spain. The two sisters continued to work in the local music industry.



Jacqui ran the Temple Rhythms gospel choir whilst Sharon became marketing manager for the ill-fated NCPM, resigning in October 1999. Pulp's line-up also changed as Russell Senior left in 1997, forming another local group, Venini, who announced their break-up in 2001. Pulp, too, have finally 'retired' (see chapter seven).

### *Characteristics of band culture*

All of these changes illustrate a culture in constant flux yet, simultaneously, displaying some stable and widely recognised characteristics. Firstly, collaboration and social networking are core features of local musical activity (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991; 1997) - for 'amateur' and professional groups alike. ChickenLegs Weaver 'borrowed' Freekspert's drummer for live work until the Comsat Angels' ex-drummer joined in 2003. Pulp also enlisted guitarist Richard Hawley (formerly of the Longpigs) when touring, whilst the Human League employed Hiem's 'session' guitarist for their 2004 winter tour. Secondly, competitiveness and rivalry are equally evident. Bands compete for limited resources, whether they are audiences, gigs, drummers or record deals, and the rapid turnover of members precipitates further inter and intra-group conflict. Thus, endorsing Cohen's (1991; 1997; 2001) empirical findings, Sheffield's dynamic musical networks are sustained through the relational filters of co-operation and competition.

The strong sense of individuality promoted through the meta-narrative of Sheffieldness also serves to underpin the creative and collective group identity, as the following excerpt from a 1999 Venini interview illustrates:

Q: Do you see yourselves as a Sheffield band?

Nick: Kind of. We live there, we're influenced by what's going off there, but we're on our own, do you know what I mean? We don't follow anybody's leads in Sheffield because everybody there's so singular.

Russell: But that's the way it's always been in Sheffield... There's the All Seeing I and Moloko who I've got a lot of respect for, and there's the hint of possible collaboration with them...they'd written a song for us on Pickled Eggs and Sherbert which we ended up not doing because we didn't want to get too associated with anyone else at the time.



Debbie: Seafruit? (*wry groans from everyone*)

Nick: Yeah, we hate Seafruit.

Debbie: We don't hate them Nick. We just think they're, erm, average.<sup>128</sup>

One member of the now defunct Seafruit has since established 2-Fly Studios in Electroworks, reinforcing the third characteristic identified by Cohen and Finnegan: for many Sheffield musicians, making music and related cultural activities have become 'a way of life.' The longevity and sustained cultural productivity of the Human League for example, entirely refutes Oakey's earlier claim that 'the concept of the group [is] obsolete' (cited in Goodwin, 1992, p. 95). Along with production, artist management provides a complementary role for ex-musicians. Seafruit's previous lead singer currently co-manages the Arctic Monkeys, whilst the Comsat Angels' Stephen Fellows 'discovered' Gomez when working at the independent record shop, Record Collector, which has been run by the same entrepreneur for over twenty-five years. Sound engineering, promotion and music journalism are equally well-trodden routes: Martin Lilleker began working on rival paper, *The Star*, in 1976.

Wau! Mr Modo's story further illustrates how musical pathways can become 'a framework for living' (Finnegan, 1989, p. 324). At the age of fifty, Adam Morris established his third independent record label, Northern Phonographics Ltd., financed through lecturing at the training centres, Darnall Music Factory and Red Tape. His ex-wife and label partner also continues to work in the related area of funding and business support. Very few women in Sheffield sustain these levels of involvement however, underlining the fourth widely recognised feature of 'local' rock and pop: the vast majority of music makers and associated cultural intermediaries are male, reflecting the white,

---

<sup>128</sup> Venini interview (27/11/99), from their (now defunct) website on [www.sheffieldscene.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldscene.co.uk)

However, in contrast to Liverpool's 'indie scene', Sheffield's multiple pathways allowed for more flexibility and by 1998, I had observed an increase in mixed-gender bands. There are two potential reasons for this increase: firstly, chart success. Successful acts marketed in terms of their place identity serve to raise the profile of that locality<sup>130</sup>, stimulating local productivity and wider interest from national media and record companies. Chart success therefore fuels romanticized myths of 'making it', encouraging aspirant music makers to join and form bands. This cycle - what Abigail Gilmore (2001) refers to as a 'feedback loop' - is crucial to the mobility of scene/s (Olson, 1998), and following the exposure of 'Sheffield' acts such as Pulp, Babybird, Gomez<sup>131</sup> and the Longpigs in the mid 1990s, there was a notable rise in the number of groups and musicians performing in the city - some of whom were women.

This observation also raises interesting methodological issues. As people became aware of my gender focus, they would highlight acts I hadn't seen or indeed heard about, occasionally helpfully but, even more frequently, to dispute my argument that local music was male dominated. Bayton found a similar tendency to 'exaggerate' women's participation due to the increasing visibility of women in the charts or on our TV screens. Thus, when conducting her Sheffield interviews, one of Treacle's guitarists claimed there were 'hundreds...loads' of teenage girls playing guitar (1998, p. 22). Conversely,

---

<sup>129</sup> Although at the music industry conference, In The City 2003, BMG provided statistics generated from within the company to demonstrate how employment opportunities for under-represented groups are improving. Women constituted 48% of the BMG workforce (although typically, in more 'low status' positions); ethnic minorities, 17.5% (cited by BMG's Rosie Belfield on the panel, 'We don't need no education', ITC, 15/9/03).

<sup>130</sup> The All Seeing I is another illustration of a collaborative, commercial 'Sheffield' project. Their first two singles involved Jarvis Cocker as lyricist, featuring Tony Christie and Phil Oakey respectively on vocals.

<sup>131</sup> Gomez formed during their time at Sheffield Hallam University and were referred to in *The Guardian* (20/2/01) as 'a Sheffield product.'

*Sandman's* 2003 database listed over 300 local bands, but only thirteen female players (Marshall, 2003).

The second factor concerns genre. Successful groups - counting those noted above, along with a cluster of electronica acts over three decades, ranging from Hula's 'white funky sound' ([www.soureden.com](http://www.soureden.com)) to The Lovers' 'avant electropop' ([www.voilathelovers.com](http://www.voilathelovers.com)) - also include the bluesy rock of Joe Cocker; stadium rock of Def Leppard; 'indie' rock of the Arctic Monkeys and Pink Grease's 'arty punk pop.' As their singer usefully puts it, 'the great thing about pop is that it never sticks to one genre' (*The Telegraph*, 12/6/04). Even at the height of first wave electronica, a four track EP released on Stephen Singleton's Neutron label - *1980: The First 15 Minutes* - demonstrates the breadth of music being produced. It features the quirky synth-pop of Vice Versa; 'Sheffield's leading punk band' the Stunt Kites; the industrial funk of Clock DVA and post-punk, female-led, I'm So Hollow. According to the Stunk Kites' former manager, 'that was actually you know quite an important record at the time because it... defined the different strands of Sheffield' (Martin Lacey, 8/6/93).

Russell Senior confirms this point, stating: 'there has never been a Sheffield sound, there's always been that experimental edge to it' (Venini interview, 27/11/99, op. cit). According to Frith, this highlights a fundamental 'contradiction' between local practice and council policy, predicated on the notion of a geographically specific music making 'community' 'with a distinctive language and history' (1993, p. 22). Although narratives of Sheffieldness serve to promote individualism and difference, the emphasis on experimentalism rather than genre allows highly differentiated 'communities' to co-exist, enabling women to enter marginalised pathways such as folk and punk-pop, or occasionally 're-territorialize' (Coates, 1998) the more chart friendly, homosocial

pathways of indie rock and electronica. These two factors contribute to a more flexible and contested cultural terrain than that detailed by Cohen.<sup>132</sup>

Finnegan's study challenged many commonsense assumptions about 'rock' including its intimate associations with youth: 'playing and listening to rock music...was *not* the preserve only of the young' (1989, p. 123). Whilst the above examples reinforce this position, the following highlight the gender issues at stake. When the Stunt Kites reformed in 1998 for instance, their singer proffered this reason for playing again: 'Well we were always friends and we thought, why not? It's what we always did and I suppose as well, it's about us carrying on our youth' (personal communication, The Lescar pub, 1/5/98). In contrast, thirty-something live music enthusiast, Caroline, queries her continued involvement in local music.

I like just going out and meeting people and being a part of that scene and I fear for the point - when will that end?...when do you bow out? Cos I know a lot of people who have, but when do you not go to the Leadmill or to the Grapes or whatever?...and it was interesting when Tom came down to the Leadmill with us and it's like, now when do you stop - when you start bumping into your son? [laughter]... And I was talking about this at a meal with some women friends and my friend said...she has a sense that we, we like to 'muscle in'...on their culture cos we don't want to grow old but I said no, Nirvana actually belongs just as much to us...in fact like we bought the album, it was us that introduced err that to Tom...Nirvana comes from our history...You know, I like Pulp and the Lightening Seeds and I like Oasis and it's actually quite interesting that she doesn't

JR: Yes, so she sees your involvement quite negatively then?

Caroline: Yes, that it's their culture and we should let them get on with it, we should bow out (1996).

Many of the women interviewed in Milestone and Richards' (2000) study echo Caroline's fears, setting an age-limit for their participation in Manchester's cultural industries. Although many men also 'bow out' due to domestic and/or work commitments, older women are further disadvantaged by a Western ideological framework that fetishizes

---

<sup>132</sup> The Long Blondes, who have recently won the *NME*'s 'one to watch' award (2006), are at the forefront of a number of contemporary local mixed gender bands treading similar indie/pop/electro pathways. They cite Jarvis Cocker as a key influence, as do The Lovers.



youthfulness. On the other hand, 'ideals of masculinity become increasingly realisable and cumulative with age' (Stacey, 1994, p. 226). In sum, supporting Milestone and Richards (2000), Fonarow (1997) and Thornton's (1995, p. 3) findings, the 'ageing-out' process is more prevalent for women involved in scene activities, including those who participate as music listeners, as part of the live audience.

### **Music listeners**

Fans, audiences, music listeners and consumers: each of these terms suggests different social locations and levels of affective, temporal and economic investment. 'Musical value judgements' are central to 'who listens to what and with whom' (Lewis, G., 1992, p. 139), but of equal importance are the complex 'affective alliances' (Hills, 2002) generated through the production and consumption of local music. Through many years of participant observation, I have identified two broad audience categories in live rock and pop. Firstly, the category of *supporter fan* conceptualises those dynamic relational groups that are personally connected to the music makers in some way, as friends, colleagues and family members.<sup>133</sup> Supporter fans are a precious commodity for fledgling music makers, providing a vital emotional and economic resource, particularly given the pervasive 'pay-to-play' strategy venues adopt to offset the unequal band/fan dynamic at the lower end of the success continuum (Kirschner, 1998).

Second are the *sceneists*, those participants who are actively engaged in the ongoing construction and maintenance of their musical and social pathways. This disparate group includes musicians - who are frequently located within both audience categories, as friends and/or rivals of other acts - and a range of cultural producers, from sound engineers and promoters to cultural researchers (Fonarow, 1997). Sceneists are the most

---

<sup>133</sup> Finnegan also identifies this trait in local audiences across musical worlds: 'there were few if any where the audience was a truly 'mass' or 'impersonal' one' (1989, p. 152).

likely to be duplicated across gigs and time, as their own activities serve to sustain their involvement and investments. These audience categories are not stable entities however, but interconnected and mobile. For instance, in my own experience as a researcher, I have also become a supporter fan as interpersonal relationships with various bands have developed. On the other hand, supporter fans can and do withdraw their support, due to a range of factors including 'saturation' and disaffection. The gig is merely one of many settings in which kinship and social relations are articulated (see chapter six).

Dave Berry refers to himself as a 'product of the local scene' almost forty years ago and when contrasting his experiences with current musical practice, notes one striking similarity: 'There's [still] a band playing in an upstairs room to about 20 of their friends while the pub downstairs is packed with drinkers' (cited in Firminger and Lilleker, 2001, p. 4). Attracting 'engaged strangers' (Cohen, 1991, p. 45) beyond the circle of supporter fans is a habitual problem for unsigned music makers, with a lack of support frequently cited as a reason for bad gigs and even band break ups.<sup>134</sup> Local audiences are therefore constructed as a powerful and elusive or - conversely and contentiously - 'apathetic' force.

### *Audience rituals*

According to Willis, 'when a rock show works, it is because, in speaking to the crowd, the musicians come to speak for them: the music both creates and articulates the very idea of a symbolically creative community' (1990, p. 81). Finnegan (1997b) also highlights the critical role live audiences play, suggesting that there has to be mutuality between expectations and 'socially accepted conventions' for a performance to 'work.' Whilst no

---

<sup>134</sup> Despite the exposure the Stunt Kites received through the Neutron single, they disbanded shortly after its release due to their inability to attract a local 'following': 'that was one of our big frustrations...they just couldn't establish a big following locally and you know 'cause of that, they couldn't get known outside Sheffield, their name just didn't spread' (Martin Lacey, 8/6/93).

two performances or audience coalitions were alike, recognisable rituals began to cohere. These 'modes of participation' (Fonarow, 1997) are influenced by genre, location, cultural norms and audience conventions - as diverse and as context-specific as the genre values that inform them. Gobbing was appropriate for 1970s punk audiences and all forms of dancing have been ritualized: crowd surfing at indie gigs for example. On the other hand, bingo is a core participatory activity in working men's clubs, with bingo and performance slots clearly demarcated and adhered to.

Heckling is also a commonly recognised mode of participation in most popular music genres, but it is actually rare for audiences to collectively disrupt a performance 'by refusing to follow the conventions' (Finnegan, 1997b, p. 137). In direct contrast to theories of deindividuation and crowd contagion, I have found gigs to be regulated and orderly on the whole. Indeed, I have only ever observed one live event when the proto-relationship between music makers and listeners completely broke down. The following account usefully connects the majority of themes we have considered thus far, highlighting one further critical dimension - that of success.

Babybird, Hoopla Baby and Chickenlegs Weaver at the Leadmill, Sheffield: 19/11/96

It was an appalling November night which meant that the venue was surprisingly empty, with around three hundred people present.<sup>135</sup> My gig companion and I arrived at 8pm to see the support bands and whilst they were playing, the promoter reduced the ticket prices on the door. As soon as Babybird came on stage, a small section of the audience began to heckle the group. The lead singer, Stephen Jones, was immediately antagonistic in return and when somebody shouted out 'wanker', he retorted that we were actually the 'wankers' for 'shelling out seven quid'. The heckling increased in volume and hostility

---

<sup>135</sup> The main performance area at the Leadmill has an audience capacity of 900.



and Jones responded by singling out individuals, calling one a 'fucking cunt' and another 'a piece of shit'.

JR: I am not impressed. And neither are a lot of the women, who seem to be very offended. They are now surging the front and I'm going to join them []

SJ: [after stopping their hit *You're Gorgeous* mid-song] And you, you and you are cunts

Outraged, largely female response: Fuck you!

Jones then slammed his microphone down and left the stage, provoking howls of derision from audience members. As I was shouting into the dictaphone, one woman asked to go 'on record', calling him 'a tosser' and expressing her fury at his 'sexism' and 'disrespect'. Her response - and the wider, largely female disruption - represented a pertinent challenge to notions of passive, feminised audiences. Many women were outraged, whereas my male gig companion did not grasp the significance of 'cunt' as a derogatory, gendered insult. Indeed, sceneist Caroline 'voted with her feet' and left. The following local media reviews highlight further competing interpretations.

It should have been a triumphant homecoming after finding nation-wide stardom but Babybird's return to Sheffield's Leadmill turned into a firestorm of antagonism and rage... Wild from repeated encounters with hecklers and noisy talkers during quieter songs, he... stormed off saying: 'I knew this was a mistake.' Babybird are in a tricky position: they've had success with a song 'You're Gorgeous' which isn't typical of their overall style... Jones is a sensitive genius who... rebukes crowds too harshly if faced with indifference. He is also like a kid who keeps getting his ears flicked; the more he reacts, the more his tormentors keep on, knowing it riles him. Until he snaps. Jones can be partly blamed for digging his own grave, his arrogant, overriding professional intolerance of a minor faction. Last time the band played this venue amid similar vitriol, they vowed never to again. Sadly this time they may mean it (David Dunn, *The Star*, 20/11/96).

Whereas David Dunn makes allowances for the 'sensitive genius', Martin Lilleker is less tolerant of the artistic temperament:

What should have been a triumphant homecoming after conquering all before them elsewhere turned into a debacle. Many people, braving terrible weather, were there just to see what all the fuss is about, having heard the enticing pop song with the strange lyrics, *You're Gorgeous*. And it all started so well... but things started to turn sour when singer Stephen Jones started reacting to a handful of hecklers, something that has marred previous Babybird gigs in Sheffield. It descended into vicious banter, ending with Jones bashing his microphone against the stage and storming off mid-song... and although the band finished the number



without him, there wasn't much demand for him to return. Those who came out of curiosity won't be back either (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 22/11/96).

This event underscores two recurring themes concerning audience/performer relations. Firstly, that the connections forged between these two interest groups are fragile (Frith, 1998), confirming Finnegan and Willis's observations that a performance will only 'work' when mutually 'appropriate' practices are observed. Second, it highlights the tensions between the contradictory scene tenets of 'movement' and 'belonging' (Olson, 1998) that chart success precipitates. Whilst success encourages a more widely dispersed audience, particularly noticeable in the more equitable gender mix at this gig, it doesn't secure intersubjectivity. Indeed, in an *NME* interview (22/8/98), Jones claimed he'd been 'driven out' of Sheffield, recounting a similar response at London's Astoria:

When the Unbelievable Truth came on, people down the front were already shouting, 'Boring! Boring!' before the band had even started and then...these people were doing the same thing to us...a friend of mine got talking to one of them and he was saying, 'That Stephen Jones - he's just not ironic any more, he never swears!'...[when] we came back on to do an encore they still didn't shut up so I just launched into this massive attack...not knowing that they actually *wanted* me to swear! When I started on them, people started cheering. In fact it got the loudest cheer of the night...I think we should just give up the music and just go 'c-!' this and 'c-!' that because that's obviously what people want.

Frith argues that this sense of alienation is, in part, sociologically founded: 'what is work for the musician is play for the audience; the very rhythm of their lives is different, in terms of day and night, let alone status and attention' (1996, p. 53). In the light of these multiple 'musician/listener value gap[s]' (ibid., p. 63), what is surprising is how little enmity I have observed. Heckling subsequently became a well-established convention at Babybird concerts across the country, leading to mutual 'contempt' - so why did Jones continue? 'Put it down to Sheffield steel' writes journalist Simon Williams: 'just as his temples possess a stern gray sheen, so Babybird seem to be shot through with a determination which fiercely belies their pop sensibilities' (*NME*, 22/8/98). Hence, the

many discursive strands of 'Sheffieldness' are melded to present a justificatory narrative of the beleaguered but enduring craftsman.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how variable scene narratives are produced through a combination of discursive, spatial, political, aesthetic and social factors; namely the 'affective alliances' and local and translocal 'networks' (Massey, 1994) generated by shifting coalitions of music makers, sceneists and supporter fans, all of whom 'work' to generate divergent senses of 'community' within, and beyond, 'the conditions of metropolitan music scenes' (Straw, 1997, pp 494-5). Communities have been usefully described as 'fictional realities' which 'appear to have objective existence, but are actually products of the imagination' (Moore, 1997, p. 241). Sheffield's overlapping rock and pop scene/s can similarly be defined in this way, embodying both material and imaginative qualities.

It is important to recognise both the 'contested' notion of scenes (Cohen, 1997) and the dynamic social groupings that actively strive to keep multiple pathways open (Finnegan, 1989), whilst simultaneously patrolling their boundaries. Consequently, although 'left ideologists' frequently advocate ideals of 'community' in an attempt to combat the 'New Right privatization of our economic and social life' (Savage, 1988, pp 133-4), the communal sense of belonging generated through a range of aesthetic, social and spatial alliances - each displaying varying degrees of what Peterson and Bennett call 'sceneness' (2004, p. 12) - are equally marked by boundary and conflict.

According to Massey, 'the need for the security of boundaries...is culturally masculine' (1994, p. 7), representing the need to fix meanings, identities and power relations. I have identified many factors that construct Sheffield's scene/s as male, from the circulation

and celebration of 'local structures of feeling', to the ways in which band culture and small-scale gigs restrict women's participation. I have also noted several ideal strategies and material conditions through which the homosocial cultural norms and boundaries of local rock and pop are challenged. Thus, whilst Sheffield's scene/s can equally be interpreted as a 'performance of gender' (Cohen, 1997), a range of masculinities *and* femininities are constantly being negotiated, performed and potentially transformed through musical practice. I will examine and develop this multi-faceted perspective in the following three case studies.

## CHAPTER SIX: BELIEF AND VELODROME 2000

In previous chapters, I have discussed the ways in which women's musical roles are constructed through discursive and material practices and constrained through a range of exclusionary mechanisms, mechanisms that are simultaneously reproduced and contested within Sheffield's scene/s. Drawing on empirical data generated between 1996-2003, the following chapter presents a comparative analysis of two mixed-gender bands, to examine how gender relations and meanings of 'making it' were constructed through their pathways, ethos and networks. These case studies will also explore the bands' relationship to Sheffield and its scene/s, assessing the female players' perceptions of - and strategic responses to - a range of barriers, including the problematic notion of 'display' (Green, 1997). Focusing on the lived experience of singers Emma (Belief), Penny (Velodrome 2000) and their supporter fans, I consider how these contrasting groups of music makers and listeners negotiate the 'circumscribed space' (Bayton, 1993) of vocalist and fan to participate in local musical practice.

These particular research themes are contextualised through particular moments of cultural significance I call *bandmarks*. This concept illustrates the purposeful, cumulative events that shape the cultural journeys of musical groups along the 'continuum of success' (Kirschner, 1998). Low-level bandmarks include: the joining and forming of bands; finding places to play and people to play to; and the cultural commodification of material through the recording process. Variable narratives of 'making it' inform landmark choices, as do the particular pathways music makers and listeners embark upon. Thus, Velodrome 2000's two notable bandmarks - an independent single release followed by a Radio One John Peel session - were shaped by the 'DIY aesthetic' (Strachan, 2004) of punk-pop; bandmarks that would have been inappropriate - indeed unthinkable - for the aspirant pop/rock act Belief.



Belief's trajectory was driven by the desire to achieve a 'major'<sup>136</sup> recording contract through their two key landmarks: a record company showcase and band competition. Whilst these distinct landmarks are informed by seemingly competing value systems, the comparative case study method serves to highlight points of commonality as well as difference between the groups' motivations, aspirations, relationships and constraints.

### **Becoming a band: fandom, friendship and family**

Belief formed in 1992 as a song-writing team consisting of Pete Travis (lyrics), his eldest daughter Emma (vocals) and her school-friend Scott (keyboards). Describing himself as a 'Sheffielder born and bred', Pete had an established penchant for 'showbusiness.' A professional dancer in the 1960s, he had been involved in numerous small-scale enterprises, including a costume design and hire business, Sheffield's first kissogram service and, latterly, DJ-ing at karaoke nights. He met Joan at Stringfellow's club, the Azena, in the mid 1960s, and they were married in 1969. They had two daughters. Emma was born in 1972, Charlotte two years later. Pete and Joan subsequently divorced in 1985.

As Finnegan (1989) notes, family support is essential for early musical development and from a young age, the sisters were encouraged to perform at home and at parties. Emma's 'naturally' melodic voice became a particular source of family pride. Fandom was an equally crucial feature shaping their musical pathway. Emma and Charlotte grew up emulating their favourite chart hits and singers, along with those in Pete's extensive record collection. Their early exposure to girl groups such as Martha Reeves and the Vandellas and performers such as Tina Turner, shaped the distinctive vocal styles that would become a central characteristic of the group's sound of 'white soul', combining

---

136 As in substantial and (as they perceived it) 'secure', rather than the typical ideological or industrial distinctions of 'indie' and 'major'. In the later stages of Belief's journey however, any 'deal' would have been considered.

girl group genre features of intricate harmonies and call and response (Greig, 1989), with the emotional intensity of big ballad rock. Although conceding that she ‘loved’ Tina Turner and Fleetwood Mac,<sup>137</sup> Emma underplayed these ‘fan’ influences in an attempt to preserve her romantic status as a ‘born natural star in the making’ (‘number one fan’ Jill, 31/1/97).

Over a two-year period, Belief composed over fifty songs, ten of which were recorded at Darnall Music Factory (DMF)<sup>138</sup>. Due to the positive response from all who heard the demo, in 1994 they began to draw on the musical skills of family and friends ‘to take the songs out live’. Emma’s husband Dave (36), who had previously played in several unsigned bands, became the bass guitarist. Charlotte, now twenty, sang ‘backup’ and Scott’s fourteen-year-old brother, Ryan, was recruited on drums. The role of lead electric guitarist proved more difficult to fulfil and they initially ‘borrowed’ the guitarist from one of the few local bands they were familiar with, Carnival of Thieves. This arrangement soon generated intra-group struggles over access however, and after numerous ‘open’ auditions, Phill became the sixth member. Pete subsequently assumed a managerial role, designing and distributing promotional materials, organising gigs and contacting various music industry companies.

Endorsing the ideal strategy of collectivism, Scott and Ryan’s mother described the levels of group intimacy thus: ‘They’re not like friends, they’re like brothers and sisters. They’ve all gone to the same schools, lived on the same streets, they’ve grown up together, they’ve done everything together’ (Coach returning from the London showcase,

---

<sup>137</sup> Fleetwood Mac’s influence is clearly illustrated by their alternative name when playing working men’s clubs, ‘Rumours.’ Indeed, both sisters’ ‘fan cultural capital’ informed these club sets, which included innovative cover versions of many 1960s girl group tracks, along with songs by Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner, Janis Joplin, Abba, Alannis Morissette and Madonna.

<sup>138</sup> Pete also attended lyric-writing classes at DMF run by Mike Jones, who consequently recommended Belief as a potential case study and helped negotiate initial access, thus adopting a *dual* ‘mentoring’ role (Bacon-Smith, 1992).

6/11/97). Kinship distinctions were similarly blurred. Whereas Emma and Scott's relationship is likened to that of siblings, Pete defined himself as 'a mate'. These interdependent social relations were further heightened by the group's socio-structural location and I will now consider the cross-cutting relations of place and social class in forging the group's social and musical pathways.

### **Belief and Sheffield: 'the local life'**

All band members lived within the Sheffield ward of Manor Park, colloquially referred to as 'The Manor'. In numerous surveys, Manor Park consistently features some of the highest unemployment statistics of all twenty-nine Sheffield wards<sup>139</sup>, generating equally damning information about mortality, crime, and other indicators of social deprivation.<sup>140</sup> Urban myths were also inflated through the local press, demonising The Manor as 'the worst council estate in England' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 12/9/97). Both sets of brothers and sisters attended Waltheof Comprehensive School, labelled as a 'challenging' and previously 'failing' school in the 2001 Ofsted report.<sup>141</sup> Whilst Emma didn't achieve any formal qualifications, what quantitative statistics cannot elucidate are the long-term influences of enabling teachers. At the age of fourteen, she performed in the school production of *Bugsy Malone* - a significant 'turning point' (Finnegan, 1989) in her musical and biographical journey:

I wasn't doing so well at school you know and this was a hard time for me, Mum and Dad splitting up like that. I got a lot of stick for that and I was like always in shit you know, getting into fights and stuff. But when I sang on stage and all them people heard my voice, it changed things. People started to respect me more, mates, teachers, everybody, after they heard me sing (personal communication, 1999).

---

<sup>139</sup> With 39-41% of households in receipt of income support (Sheffield Trends, 1999).

<sup>140</sup> In Yeandle et al.'s report (2004), wards are scored according to the following criteria identified in the National Index of Multiple Deprivation: 'resident's income, health, housing, employment, education and geographical access to services' (ibid., p. 3). Manor Park remains one of Sheffield's 'most deprived' wards (also including Castle, Burngreave and Firth Park).

<sup>141</sup> Only 9% of pupils gained five or more GCSE/GNVQ results in 1999. By 2003, despite a 13% rise, Waltheof school remained in the bottom 10%, 3329 of 3571, of all UK educational institutions.



Waltheof school's music teacher also recounts the benefits of his encouragement:

Scott used to come up to the music room to tinkle around on the keyboards so I set him going really. And when we found out Emma had such a great talent, I got a peripatetic teacher to come along to give her singing lessons. I taught Charlotte and Ryan as well so when they all started together, I just kept in touch... Scott's come and helped me on productions when he's played one keyboard and I've played another so it's really good (Coach returning from the London showcase, 6/11/97).

The 'extrinsic' factors identified by Sloboda, Davidson and Howe (1994) were certainly a motivational force for Emma. She began to pursue other performance opportunities and became a regular participant at karaoke nights around The Manor's pubs and clubs, frequently winning cash prizes which generated further peer and kinship approval. Working men's clubs are enduring social institutions within Sheffield's local class and cultural structure (Taylor et al., 1996): there are four clubs within a one mile radius of The Manor alone. The musical pathway Emma entered on was therefore shaped by distinctive local conditions and family traditions.

One of the most cited events that simultaneously confirms and contests 'local structures of feeling' about The Manor was an arson attack on Waltheof school in 1995, creating over three million pounds worth of damage. A community action group of residents and teachers was established and through this 'strong local popular community... effort' (ibid., p. 354), teaching resumed in temporary accommodation within two weeks. Belief were central to the fund-raising activities that followed. 'They're very much for the school, particularly when our school burnt down, they did a big concert for us and all the staff went to see them when they did another benefit concert in a local pub... I've got a lot of time for them' (Waltheof music teacher, 6/11/97). Thus, even at this early stage in the band's career, their musical practice conferred significant local status.



Summarising Finnegan's findings, Frith states that when 'relating music and society,' typical sociological methods need to be reversed: 'rather than looking for people's material conditions in their aesthetic and hedonistic activity, we should look at how their particular love and use of music inform their social situations' (1996, p. 90). On the other hand, Skeggs stresses the 'ubiquity' of social class. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, she concludes that the working class women in her ethnographic study were:

born into structures of inequality which provided differential amounts of capital which circumscribed their movements through social space... They did not have access to the sort of capital that could be capitalized upon... which can be converted and traded up through education and employment into symbolic capital and economic reward... Lack of alternatives was one of the central features of being working class... the most fundamental marker of class was that of exclusion (1997, pp 161-162).

I will draw on both perspectives when unpacking Belief's story, beginning with their commonsense perceptions of 'making it.'

### **Making it narratives: 'belief is everything'**

Belief's contested sense of place and belonging, coupled with traditional values of Sheffieldness - 'craft' and 'graft', formed the basis for an extrinsic set of group practices underpinned by the strategic ideals of competence and commitment. They spent several nights a week rehearsing at an East-End Sheffield pub (The Plumpers) and prided themselves on their high standards of musicianship. Both vocalists were included in this definition and pursuit of excellence. Singing lessons had developed Emma's diaphragm strength and vocal dexterity, resulting in a three-octave range. Emma downplayed the significance of this training however, as did Pete, describing her voice as 'a gift from God'.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> They were also highly critical about the abilities of many contemporary female singers, referring to Catatonia's Cerys Matthews for example, as 'an old slapper off the clubs'.

Scott and Emma remained the principal musical contributors. They drew on the generic conventions of adult-oriented rock - featured electric guitar solos, four-four drum patterns - and melodic pop - traditional song structures (ABABCAB) foregrounding vocal melody and harmony - to create a sound they labelled 'white soul'. Along with an emphasis on original composition, the band also performed several cover versions, from Tina Turner classics to more contemporary material, such as the 4 Non Blondes' track, *What's Up?* They consequently straddled a rock and cabaret aesthetic, combining the rationale to entertain with 'a romantic belief in genius and originality' (Frith, 1998), which informed their 'romantic' and 'economic' aspirations of 'making it'. As a 'potent symbol of unity and identity' (Finnegan, 1989, p. 263), the name Belief was a literal embodiment of their commitment to the pursuit and realisation of this dream: 'talent will out' as Pete would often tell me.

The other component in romanticized narratives of making it is that of 'luck' (Frith, 1983), but whilst they all adhered to the 'discovery' myth, Belief's 'game plan' (Cohen, 1991)<sup>143</sup> was strategically organised around more concrete goals. The first was to produce a quality recording of the live line-up (they had used a drum machine on the earlier DMF demo) and they recorded at Sheffield's Cage studios for several weeks in 1995, producing eight tracks. The second was to develop a dedicated following and fanclub. They established a fortnightly residency at The Pheasant pub, drawing on the venue's well-trodden pathways of live performance, which served to build audience loyalties to the night as well as the band:<sup>144</sup> a strategy that was repeated at the Speakeasy (see below). Belief always played alone at these residencies and rarely came into contact with other aspirant Sheffield groups. Indeed, they actively distanced themselves from the city's

---

<sup>143</sup> Although this concept was rejected by many Liverpool bands.

<sup>144</sup> Indeed, some supporter fans referred to earlier Pheasant performances as the pinnacle of the group's live achievements.

overlapping scene/s - unsigned bands were ‘crap’ and electronica acts ‘weird’. Even those who had achieved mainstream success were subject to scathing criticism.<sup>145</sup>

This isolation was compounded by a lack of media coverage, for although Pete claimed they were ‘well thought of’ by local music critics, Belief rarely received a mention in the pop pages of either *The Star* or *Sheffield Telegraph*. They had achieved some exposure in the founding years, with airplay on BBC Radio Sheffield and a live appearance on Yorkshire Television (‘Maynard’s Bill’, 1995). Belief performed at the Pheasant and when looking back at the video footage, over 60% of the two hundred-strong audience are female. Since leaving school, Emma and Charlotte had worked as machinists at the Sheffield branch of the South Yorkshire clothing manufacturers, SR. Gents, where their mother had been promoted to supervisor. Known colloquially as ‘underwear girls’, the virtually all-female workforce produced underwear for SR Gents’ main suppliers, Marks and Spencers. Mike Jones informed me that their residencies were packed with scores of co-workers from the factory: ‘half the shop floor normally attend’ (personal communication, 1996). These women proved to be an elusive audience group however.

Belief’s core audience was comprised of friends, family and work colleagues, ranging from ‘eight to eighty’. Kinship and social networks also extended to those with tenuous links to the performers, which Pete described as a ‘snowball’ approach to building a fanbase. When the fanclub was launched in September 1996, thirty-eight people signed up for free membership within the first two days. Their monthly residency at the Speakeasy provided a fertile recruitment ground and at one gig I attended (7/3/97), thirty-three people - almost half the audience - joined, nine writing ‘Belief’ as their principal

---

<sup>145</sup> Joanne, Susan and Jarvis Cocker came in for particular criticism because they ‘couldn’t sing’, although Joe Cocker was admired.

‘interest’ on the membership form. As ‘a potent’ marker of Belief’s quantitative appeal<sup>146</sup>, fanclub members were constructed to endorse the group ethos - ‘talent will out’ - as ‘Believers’.

Pete capitalised on the burgeoning fanbase by designing merchandise such as t-shirts, hats, calendars and badges, each displaying the band’s logo and marketing tag: *Belief is everything*. These various promotional activities were intended to raise the band’s profile and stimulate record company interest: ‘You’ve got to think of anything to get your foot in the door’ (All Bar One, 20/8/96). The music industry was therefore constructed as an elusive *other place* policed by ‘gatekeepers’ (Hirsch, 1990), a common perception on which their ‘logic of access’ (Kirschner, 1998) and subsequent landmarks were founded. When critiquing this ‘linear’ hypothesis, Negus argues that ‘the boundary between the recording industry and potential artists is not so much a gate where aspiring stars must wait to be selected and admitted, but a web of relationships stretched across a shifting soundtrack of musical, verbal and visual information’ (1992, p. 46). As I discuss below, these typical romantic misconceptions of industry access informed both band and supporter fans’ expectations and investments, shaping the framework within which their ‘particular love and use of music’ was organised and understood.

Other factors that shape a band’s trajectory are less tactical but equally transformative, involving events and life ‘choices’ that Finnegan usefully terms ‘turning points.’ Parenthood for example, represents a vulnerable stage in a musician’s career (Finnegan, 1989, p. 257), particularly for women. Emma was already pregnant when I first saw Belief play (26/7/96), and in the autumn of 1996, the band suspended their live work until January 1997. After baby Charlotte’s birth, Pete and his mother, ‘Nan’, assumed daily

---

<sup>146</sup> When my partner joined in January 1998, he became the 433<sup>rd</sup> member.



child-care responsibilities, enabling Emma to continue working and maintain the temporal commitment to rehearsal, composition and gigging that group norms required.

Their cabaret/rock aesthetic also informed the visual imagery of the band, although the sisters were frequently uncomfortable with the glamorous leather and sequined outfits Pete produced. In contrast, the male players were anonymous in t-shirts and jeans. Pete told me that he mainly designed 'stage wear' for Charlotte 'because Emma's not the right shape' (All Bar One, 20/8/96). At this early point in our 'field' relationship, I took this to be a reference to her pregnancy. Over the months and years that followed however, it became increasingly apparent that Emma's physical appearance was under constant critical scrutiny. Emma felt that she was 'not that gifted in the looks department' and would often bemoan the fact that female performers are evaluated on physical attributes rather than ability: 'It's not how much talent you've got but how thin and good looking you are, which I think stinks!' (personal communication, 1999).

There were consequently many sources of potential conflict, intensified by the dynamic power struggles fought out within the song-writing sub-group. Increasingly, Pete was perceived to be 'manipulative' and Scott 'arrogant';<sup>147</sup> compounded by his aversion to regular rehearsals which created friction throughout Belief's career. Moreover, whilst many supporter fans had a significant emotional stake in the band's success, these dense webs of inter and intra-group loyalties were similarly complex, often underscored by a sense of duty:

I had a good time, I always do though I got threatened into it really. Pete made me come! [laughter] No I always enjoy it anyway, I'm family so I've got to really, I'd get hammered if I didn't! [laughter] I always enjoy it, I like cheering 'em on, they're me family (Richard, The London showcase, 6/11/97).

---

<sup>147</sup> Characteristics identified by Emma at her solo recording session (see below) and reinforced by Dave: 'Men have bigger egos, Scott really does think everybody is watching him' (3/9/98).

In the following section, I consider these shifting power dynamics in greater detail, examining the ‘socially accepted conventions’ (Finnegan, 1997b) negotiated through Belief’s live performances, with particular focus on the ‘affective relations of fan-performer identification’ (Negus, 1992, p. 77) produced when the ‘performers on the pedestal’ are female.

### **Supporter fans**

During a two-year period, 1996-1998, the Speakeasy regularly hosted unsigned band nights. Situated in an out-of-town suburb with a large student population, the performance space was in a basement with a dingy, drinking-club ambience. It had a small stage at one end with a dance floor directly below, a seating area to the right and small bar to the left. With an audience capacity of 120, a nominal admission between one and two pounds was usually charged on the door. Below are my initial impressions of a Belief gig.

#### Belief at The Speakeasy: 26/7/96

The band were everything Mike had promised they’d be but due to Sheffield’s ‘work week’, only about forty people were there with ten or so women aged between twenty and forty on the dance floor, dancing and singing along. At the end of the gig, Emma informed the audience that two of the band members were single: ‘If they can’t pull their own fucking birds, I’ll pull ‘em for them,’ to choruses of ‘Get stuck in, get stuck in.’ The overall tone of the night was familiar, participatory, risqué and highly entertaining.

At this preliminary stage in the fieldwork, I had little idea how prescient the adjective ‘familiar’ was. The women on the dance floor included their mother, godmother (Jill) and cousin (Jane) - each with several friends - and even ‘Nan’ got up to dance for one song. As I observed at a range of shows over time, these women were the most visible of supporter fans and by positioning themselves as ‘hot’ participants, this spatial alignment did indeed represent a ‘public statement’ of allegiance (Fonarow, 1997). Crucially, Belief’s performances reversed the masculinised, youthful typography of the indie rock gig, for although the Speakeasy nights weren’t particularly ‘well attended’, their working

men's club shows, playing to audiences of five hundred or more, also attracted significantly more women of all ages to 'zone one.'

When assessing the identification between female spectators and Hollywood stars, Stacey notes multiple 'gendered dimensions of escapist pleasures' (1994, p. 91): emotional, material, sensual, ritual and collective. Given the seedy milieu of the Speakeasy<sup>148</sup>, the emotional, ritual and collective dimensions promise most relevance, as she writes of the ritualised pleasures of feminised consumption through which a 'sense of belonging' and 'community' generate a 'sense of self with a collective meaning' (ibid., p. 101). However, Skeggs cautions against the tendency to 'romanticize' the female collectivism of working class networks, typically constructed as a 'mass' against which discourses of individualism are legitimated (1997, p. 164). The concept of supporter fan serves to problematise homogenous, pejorative audience representations, by emphasising the dynamic relations of 'low level' music making and listening as an ongoing practice of social negotiation.

The rest of the forty-strong audience (mainly couples) seated to the right of the stage were equally participatory, applauding enthusiastically at the end of each song and singing along. Indeed, the majority knew the words to Belief's original compositions. Performer/audience relations were thus negotiated through habitual participatory modes I observed across a range of 'rock' performances: the notable difference was the normative sexualised banter 'appropriate' to the small-scale Belief gig - 'he might not have any hair but he's got big bollocks and he can go all night' (Emma referring to Dave's sexual prowess, The Speakeasy, 2/5/97). When considering the gig as a socially constructed

---

<sup>148</sup> Cinema provided a glamorous counterpart to the drabness and privations of women's everyday lives during 1940s Britain and the environment reflected these twin pleasures, providing emotional escapism through Hollywood texts and a warm and luxurious context of sensual abundance within its interior design (Stacey, 1994).

‘textual’ event, the notion of ‘interpretive community’ can be usefully appropriated to unpack the multiple strategies of negotiation at work.

Initially devised (Fish, 1980) to examine the conventions and competencies audiences develop in order to ‘recognise, create, experience, and talk about texts’ (Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998, p. 221), the concept has been adapted to consider such critical issues as genre (Jenkins, 1988) and gender (Radway, 1984), thus shifting the focus from ‘consensual unity’ to the ways in which ‘interpretive strategies may exhibit more heterogeneity, conflict and change’ (op cit. p. 223). Notions of *the audience* have been similarly complicated to take account of the social contexts within which audience fractions are constituted, and constitute themselves. As Radway explains:

I...conceived of reading in a limited fashion...focusing on the differential interpretation of texts [whereas] the Smithton women repeatedly answered my questions about the meaning of romances by talking about the meaning of romance *reading* as a social event in a familial context (1987, p. 7).

Considering the family as an interpretive community (Lindlof, 1988) serves to shed light on the meanings of music making and listening developed within the group. A further context that has a bearing on the wider ‘community’s’ tacit and yet recognizable interpretive strategies is the workplace.

Predominantly female working environments have an established history in the ‘Sheffield trade’. Unlike the relative freedoms of the ‘Little Missus’ system detailed in chapter five, the culture at SR Gents was highly regulated<sup>149</sup>. Both Charlotte and Emma described their jobs as ‘boring’, explaining that they and their colleagues combated the tedium by ‘having a laugh’, routinely adjourning to the nearby Olive Grove pub after work to challenge the regulars to drinking competitions. The ‘bawdy’ culture of so-called

---

<sup>149</sup> As are other ‘modernist’ clothing manufacturers (Cockburn, 1985).



‘underwear girls’ was therefore negotiated in several settings: the factory floor, home, pub and gig, where it was publicly re-enacted as a spectacle of proletarian matriarchy for their interpretive community. I will now focus on two performance strategies underpinning the gendered emotional, ritual and collective pleasures at stake: that of humour and ‘hardness’.

### **Doing display: humour and hardness**

Although conspicuously constrained by ‘feminine ideals’ of attractiveness (Stacey, 1994), Emma refused to comply with stereotypical regulations of respectability through which ‘others’ are classified and positioned in structures of inequality (Skeggs, 1997). ‘Respectability contains judgements of class, race, gender and sexuality and different groups have different access to the mechanisms for generating, resisting and displaying respectability’ (Skeggs, 1997, p. 2). Emma’s access to ‘the stage’ enabled her to develop and ‘display’ resistant strategies that were equally shaped by the ways in which gender and sexuality were variously constructed in specific spaces and places.

The Plumpers pub for instance, was also host to Sunday lunchtime female strippers and when Belief began playing regular Sunday night gigs, Emma and Charlotte frequently experienced sexual harassment. After one such encounter at the bar, Emma’s tactics mirrored those identified by Bayton: ‘actively drawing the audience’s attention to the perpetrator and confronting him usually works’ (1997, p. 47). When back in control of the mic, she singled him out, asking: ‘what do they call you then?’ ‘Twat’ he replied. ‘Oh I thought it was cunt, so I wasn’t far off was I’ came the cutting response, evoking roars of laughter from his friendship group and neatly effecting closure. In direct contrast to the ‘value gaps’ perpetuated through Babybird gigs, Emma’s interpretive skills enabled her to effectively manage a potentially hostile situation by employing humour. Indeed, ‘the perpetrator’ offered to buy her a drink after the gig (The Plumpers, 6/7/97).

From the glimpses I perceived and the information she chose to divulge, Emma's everyday life was a battleground. She consequently cultivated a 'display' of 'hardness' that could extend to physical aggression: 'you have to give as good as you get' (ibid.). Although every gig and social setting I observed was amicable, the potential for violence was often implied:

When I first met Emma she said 'I've heard you want to see me'. Now where I come from that means 'I've heard you want a fight' so I was like [squaring up] but it turns out she was Theresa's mate, she's a right laugh! (personal communication, Manor Social Club, 8/8/98).

These values of humour and hardness symbolised key markers of recognition and identification for the interpretive community, as did the pleasurable rituals connecting the band's original gigs to later club performances, thus apparently confirming Adorno's notion of popular music as 'a social cement.' Instead of reconciling supporter fans to the privations of the everyday however, these cumulative 'social conventions' were informed and heightened by Belief's desire to transcend them.

Self-proclaimed 'number one fan' Jill, articulates the affective pleasures generated through Emma's 'natural' talent, along with the hopes (and fears) many supporter fans invested in her projected success. 'Our Emma's a born natural...like Janis Joplin only better! [laughter] I'm always dead proud when I see her on stage and her voice is brilliant. If she doesn't get somewhere, it'll be a crime' (The Speakeasy, 31/1/97). Jill's multiple investments were further heightened through her developing role of fan club secretary, which promised to elevate her status to that of 'professional' fan. In short, this group of music makers and listeners were precariously allied through the shared ideals of communal belonging, romantic aspiration and escape. I will now consider Belief's key landmarks in the light of these themes.

## Bandmark one: the record company showcase

Hi

This is the band **Belief** looking for a recording contract.

We are as good as any signed band and a lot better than most.

We may not be what you are looking for at this moment in time, but we are the band for the future.

Original: **we do not sound like any other band**, we really do have talent with a good fanbase to prove it (over 600 Fan Club memberships).

The bigger the audience the better the performance, sisters **Emma** and **Charlotte** who front the band are brilliant live giggers.

I have put 10 songs onto a CD...to give some idea as to the genre of **Beliefs'** music. Would you be interested in hearing more?

**Give us a try. Sign us you won't be disappointed.**

### **belief is everything**

Pete continuously wrote letters in a similar vein<sup>150</sup> to a range of music industry companies. He occasionally received a reply - Sony Music in 1998 and Zepter Music in 1999 - but this 'cold call' approach was largely ignored. Due to the group's entertainment rationale, national showbusiness newspaper *The Stage* became Pete's 'bible'. His response to an advert, 'seeking new talent for record company showcase', placed by a newly established management/production company, KPA Music, set the context for their first significant bandmark, promising to confirm their 'logic of access' and ethos. Dave and Pete subsequently attended a meeting with KPA in London - the symbolic location of that *other place*. Although excited, Pete remained apprehensive about the credibility of a fledgling organisation funded by 'a rich kid who wants to get into the music business.' Dave was equally cautious.

At his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday party at The Plumpers (29/9/97), he expressed particular concern for Emma's psychological well being as she would be the one under scrutiny and had 'taken a lot of shit'. Both men asked for my help that night and although I didn't feel ethically or

---

<sup>150</sup> This particular version was written on May 26 2000, over two years since they had performed as Belief.

professionally able to comply with Pete's constant requests for representation<sup>151</sup>, I agreed to type the following letter that was sent to all fanclub members.

Dear Believer

Thanks for joining the fan club and supporting us at all our Sheffield concerts. We're writing to tell you some **great news!**

We're playing at a London 'showcase' in front of major recording companies... in London on Thursday, November 6, from 8 'til late. We'll be putting on coaches to take all our Believers there and back. Unfortunately, we can't put these on for free because we haven't been signed up *yet*, but with your support, it won't be long...

The combined cost for coach travel and entrance fee is 15 pounds

If you would like to come, you need to contact Jill to book a place without delay, as **tickets are in short supply!** But even if you can't make it, you can still be involved in choosing the songs we play on the night. Out of these eight songs, which is your favourite?

\*Mary in the Corner  
\*Shadows  
\*Higher and Higher  
\*Baby I Know

\*Pastimes  
\*Sweet Charms  
\*Only Dreams  
\*Lonely Moon

Please contact us and let us know, and thanks again for *your* belief in Belief.

According to Pete, the response was overwhelming: 'half of SR Gents and Waltheof school are coming.' On the day however, there were only forty-five people on the coach.<sup>152</sup>

#### Belief at the Zenith Disco, London: 6/11/97

Emma: 'When I got out there, I just thought, this is it... I just thought I'll get out there and give it me best and I always give 100% every time. People have come from Sheffield to London to see us so you just have to do your best don't you.'

---

<sup>151</sup> Because of my assumed role as music industry 'expert' due to the Chrysalis 'deal' and Mike Jones' introduction, Pete would call two or three times a week. This role was reinforced when I began to work at Red Tape, coming to a head in December 2000 when he left 18 messages over a three-day period I was away. Pete assumed I had access to the knowledge and contacts they lacked whilst, initially at least, he legitimated my presence and interest: a mutual exchange of cultural and social capital of which I was the greater beneficiary. Other methodological issues will be addressed later in the chapter.

<sup>152</sup> 24 men and 21 women, ranging from a thirteen-year-old girl to 'Nan' in her 70s. About one third of these people were unfamiliar to me, including a group of six 'lads' in their early teens that had never seen them live but were friends of Ryan and 'fans of the demo'. According to Charlotte, the SR Gents 'supporter fans' didn't want to use the precious commodity of a day's holiday (the coach left at 3pm) and so had elected not to come.



Situated in a 'leisure' complex in West Acton<sup>153</sup>, the Zenith Disco was built in the mid 1990s with an audience capacity of 1200 - there were however only 200 people at the height of the evening to support twenty acts. 'We' therefore constituted almost one quarter of the audience. With the exception of a few parents, we were also the oldest participants, as all the performers (apart from Dave) were under thirty. In addition, over half the performers and audience members were young 'black' women, mostly solo vocalists performing cover versions, supplemented by several duos, three 'original' bands and one all-female dance troupe, 'Shades of Blackness.' Defined as a 'white area' in a 'white city' (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 217), the mobilisation of this particular cross-section of The Manor 'community' could have presented the potential for conflict,<sup>154</sup> heightened by the manufactured competitiveness of the unsolicited, public showcase,<sup>155</sup> whereby numerous 'pop acts' are pitched in a competitive relationship for the elusive 'deal.' What linked the acts, albeit momentarily, were the shared musical values - 'great voices, great rhythms' as Emma put it - connecting the broadly generic R 'n' B styles to Belief's particular brand of 'white soul'.

Belief opened the first set.<sup>156</sup> Due to the size of venue and even smaller audience for this typically denigrated slot, the sound echoed around the space, with technical problems marring the reception and performance of both songs. Whilst twenty or so supporter fans clustered around the edges of the dance floor, the initial response was that of disappointment - accentuated by the lack of atmosphere and draft beer, with escalating

---

<sup>153</sup> With familiar restaurant chains, a bowling alley and cinema.

<sup>154</sup> Racist remarks were apparent on the coach when we were driving through London and after stopping to ask for directions, one comment, 'don't ask him, he won't speak English', was humorously received.

<sup>155</sup> Acts are much more likely to be signed through solicited, private showcases as a cumulative result of considerable negotiation and exchange between numerous interest groups, e.g. management, A&R and their company hierarchy. One widely recognised exception is the annual music industry conference, In The City, in Manchester, where hundreds of pre-selected, unsigned acts play in designated venues across the city (49 in 2003). The Darkness, Coldplay, Elbow and Muse are just a few of the well-publicised signings, although it would be reasonable to surmise that a similarly cumulative process occurred prior to the event.

<sup>156</sup> The show was organised around two sets, with each act performing two or three songs per set.

bottled lager prices throughout the night.<sup>157</sup> After the first set, scores of people therefore went in search of a pub, although the majority returned for Belief's second performance at 10pm, by which time the venue had filled out. They were consequently much more enthusiastically received and Emma joined a cheering crowd on the dance floor during the final song.

Immediately afterwards, Emma and Scott were elated, as were several supporter fans.

Nan: I thought most of the turns were good but I thought that jazz singer was excellent and I thought Belief were excellent as well. I'm not biased you know but I thought tonight, they outclassed themselves tonight.

Jane: We could be biased but there's been nowt to touch them tonight.

Jill: Emma's brilliant but you know they're all clever, really clever. I think kids are coming round to appreciate their kind of music but I'm biased. They're going to be rich and famous they are, definitely.

This narrative exchange revolves around critical issues of judgement, heightened by the competitive function of the showcase event (Frith, 1996). What is especially interesting are the ways in which notions of 'bias' are variously constructed. Whilst Nan attempts to legitimate claims of 'excellence' through the guise of objectivity, Jane cedes the likelihood of partiality whereas Jill willingly embraces it. Musical value judgements were rarely as explicitly articulated at Belief's solo gigs, because, I suspect, their 'intrinsic' relationship to the music was taken *as read*. Even the music teacher confounds Fiske's (1989) division between 'social relevance' and 'aesthetic quality' by accentuating their interdependence.<sup>158</sup>

They've come a long way, they've got a following but they deserve it because they've got a good style of music. You could tell the audience were up with them even if they were supporters of other bands, they were up there to see them...I mean, when you see the sort of stuff that is in the charts, they are manifestly better musicians, they've got more to offer...and it's really good so I hope they go far.

---

<sup>157</sup> At 9.30, 10 and 10.30 pm. Many people were resentful about these increases, feeling they'd been 'robbed'. Significant amounts of alcohol were consumed nevertheless, with Richard and Charlotte's partner each claiming to have spent 'about £60' on lager.

<sup>158</sup> I will return to this issue in much greater detail in the following case studies, as the form versus function narrative is employed to justify several fans' claims to 'distinction'.

Scott's already promised me that when he makes his money he's going to pay off my mortgage [laughter]

Whilst he privileges the group's exceptional competence, the following rationalisation as to why Belief 'deserve' to 'make it' is considerably more pragmatic, stressing instead the collective values of 'craft' and 'graft.'

Dad: They deserve to do well, all the work they've put in. That's all the band, not just Scott and Ryan, all the band

Mum: But it depends what people want. You can be really talented at something but if it's not going to sell, if it's not going to make the other side money, they're just not going to promote you are they.

Their interpretive strategy draws on the 'art versus commerce myth' proposed by Weinstein (1999). As she points out, this 'useful romantic illusion' has a compensatory function for failing artists, whilst simultaneously motivating new pop acts to negotiate with a global industry where the odds are stacked against success. The myth is therefore employed as a face-saving mechanism, to provide justification and 'solace' for the group's potential failure (Weinstein, 1999, p. 64).

Elements of 'disunity' (Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998) were equally evident in the variable interpretations of Belief's heterogeneous audience, contextualised and heightened through the raised expectations of this landmark. 'Him that were singing that reggae music thing... he were excellent [leaning into the dictaphone] I'd even say he were one of the best acts on, if not the best... What I'd like to know is, everyone said the record companies were in that corner but I never saw no-one sat there' (Richard, 6/11/97). The greatest surprise of the night was the palpable dissent. People were generally very critical about the 'crap sound' and venue, particularly when set against the economic, emotional and temporal cost, with virtually everybody on the homeward journey speculating about how many record companies were there, if any. During the following weeks, it became increasingly apparent that these reservations were founded, as KPA Music disappeared



without a trace. Whilst Emma raged against this thwarted opportunity, Pete remained convinced that their 'break' was 'just around the corner.'

### **Bandmark two: the band competition**

Belief's previous Cage recordings were now outdated and the oft-cited need for 'a decent demo' underpinned this second tactical bandmark, as the 'ultimate prize' was three days recording time in a professional studio. The competition was held in the Nottinghamshire town of Mansfield over a three-week period, with three bands per week. Belief had been selected from 'literally hundreds'<sup>159</sup> of entries to play the third heat. Pete again hired a coach but it was, on this occasion, less than half full, with only 21 travelling to the event.

#### Battle of the Bands, Fat Sams, Mansfield: 24/1/98

The first band, Haste, consisted of three teenage brothers performing well-executed punk songs. Stadia were equally competent, playing - as the name would suggest - 'cock rock'. Both groups attracted scores of supporter fans that were both participatory and partisan. Belief had the third most auspicious slot, as the venue was packed by 10 pm with almost 200 people present, many of whom warmed to the exuberant performance of both band and supporter fans. Several did not however, with Haste's father couching his inevitable partiality in discriminatory gendered terms: 'I'm a bit biased against girl singers for some reason.' Waiting for the result to be announced was particularly tense, but when Belief were declared the winners, supporter fans were elated for their loyalties and expectations had been momentarily confirmed.

When writing about one particular Milton Keynes' band, Finnegan notes that 'a gang of young people meeting to travel to London for a concert might seem to be undertaking a lengthy journey.' If however, the participants were 'bound together' by mutual



admiration for the group and travelled and returned together ‘triumphant’ that same night, ‘it was only a small extension of their already known paths’ (1989, p. 318). This description encapsulates the mood of the returning coach-load of Believers. Unlike the alienation of the London experience, dissenting voices were silenced as ‘we’ were ‘bound together’ in mutual victory, for ‘our’ ‘audience support’ had equally been judged and legitimated<sup>160</sup>. As a result, coach numbers doubled for the following week’s final, with expectations running high. The dramatic sense of ‘battle’ was further heightened, as Belief’s old rivals, Carnival of Thieves, were also in the final. In a paradoxically conciliatory tone, Fat Sam’s promoters stated that,

The standard of music from every band who has taken part in all the past heats has been exceptional. Even if they didn’t win their heat it was an achievement in itself just to reach the heats... Whatever the outcome – They are all winners (The Grand Final of the Battle of the Bands programme, 30/1/98).

When the judges<sup>161</sup> announced that Carnival of Thieves had won however, there was an outcry from competing bands and supporter fans alike. Grievances ranged from their semi-professional status, with an independent CD release and US tour planned, to their comparative lack of ‘audience support.’ The homeward journey was consequently underscored by a sense of injustice, failure and, for some, disaffection. Above all, Believers were constructed as ‘ideal’ fans: the fanclub an imagined marketing tool rather than an active site of investment and exchange. For many therefore, the identity of supporter fan was a flexible mantle to be inhabited, adapted *and* discarded. Thus, while Jill likened her fan journey to ‘a roller coaster ride... I’m on it now, do you know what I mean?’ - others were contemplating whether it was time to get off.

---

<sup>159</sup> The Grand Final of the Battle of the Bands programme (30/1/98).

<sup>160</sup> Indeed, ‘audience response’ was one of the five criterion employed by the judges, including songwriting talent, live performance, star quality, and image, fairly closely mirroring the six factors that, according to Negus (1992, p. 53), A&R ‘men’ use to assess the potential of an act.

<sup>161</sup> The judges consisted of an all-male panel of five. The owner/sound engineer of BandWaggon studio was the principal judge and key sponsor of the event, providing the prize. The other four judges included local music industry workers - from Mansfield-based-music chain, Carlsboro, HMV and Mansfield Radio.

### **Bandmark three: the working men's club**

These cumulative disappointments had a profound impact on Belief's romantic ethos and 'logic of access', leading to the contentious decision in the early months of 1998 to play covers on the working men's clubs under the newly-formed identity of 'Rumours.'<sup>162</sup> Confirming Kirschner's observation that 'upward mobility is directly tied to notions of originality' (1998, p. 265), Emma saw this as 'a backward step' negating their previous achievements (personal communication, 20/2/98). Belief's remoteness from Sheffield's more established scene/s and relational 'web' of local 'cultural intermediaries' was certainly a decisive factor narrowing their choices (Negus, 1992). The crucial consideration was however economic. Along with their increasingly desperate need for new recordings, the family were acutely aware of the emergent financial problems at S.R. Gents, largely due to Marks and Spencers' diminishing market share.<sup>163</sup> Playing the clubs was therefore pragmatically conceived and materially driven, as a viable source of alternative employment and 'means to an end' (personal communication, Pete, 12/5/98).

For the next year, they played an average of three nights per week throughout the Northern working men's club circuit, earning up to £1,200 less agent's fees and expenses. Belief reverted to the original songwriting sub-group whose re-focused aim was to write tracks for other pop acts. Pete therefore began targeting publishing companies with some marginal 'success'; Sony Music's 'send us more' encouraging Scott and Pete to imagine themselves as the next Elliot Kennedy or Carey Baylis.<sup>164</sup> Feeling increasingly marginalised, Emma began to audition for other bands and write independently,

---

<sup>162</sup> Then Sisters T and finally, Live From Earth. Emma is currently working the clubs as a solo act, Emma B.

<sup>163</sup> The closure of the Sheffield and other South Yorkshire factories, resulting in the loss of 'up to 1,000 jobs', was announced in August 1998 (*The Star*, 5/8/98), by which time both sisters had moved into commission-based sales work.

<sup>164</sup> Both of which were independently based in Sheffield and had had significant hits with the Spice Girls and Take That respectively.

combating the ‘technical’ barrier as a solo artist by purchasing a basic electronic keyboard as a writing tool.

Emma’s first independent project occurred when the resident sound engineer at Dial House Social Club, Sheffield, offered her a free four-hour recording session at Red Tape, where he was on a sound engineering course.<sup>165</sup> She subsequently composed her first song without additional musical and lyrical input, beginning, quite radically, with a melody.<sup>166</sup> ‘I don’t know where it comes from, I’ll just start humming something in my head until it sounds right’ (personal communication, 20/8/98). Only then did she turn to the recently acquired keyboard to work out a complementary skeletal chord scheme, an approach that liberated her writing style in two significant ways. Firstly, it enabled her ‘to write anywhere’, thus incorporating composition into her everyday routines which, in turn, loosened her dependence on ‘the band’.<sup>167</sup> Emma’s previous recording experiences had been ‘frustrating’ and she wanted to achieve a more ‘natural’ vocal performance, ‘something that sounds like me.’ I was invited along to help facilitate this aim.

#### Red Tape Studios, Sheffield: 3/9/98

As we established in chapter three, gendered musical practices are systematically differentiated through technology use and reinforced in the closed, masculinised setting of the recording studio. Along with a lack of control over the reproduction of her voice, Emma’s previous frustrations stemmed from a sense of isolation in the vocal booth, watching those on the other side of the glass dissecting her performance. I therefore suggested two alternative approaches - singing *in* the control room and ‘comping’ - both of which met with resistance from the sound engineer. In response to the first, whilst

---

<sup>165</sup> Trainee engineers would regularly select acts to work with prior to the Band Development Programme, established shortly after Emma’s session.

<sup>166</sup> Which had typically been the final element to be considered in prior collaborations.

<sup>167</sup> She did however utilise bass (Dave) and acoustic rhythm guitar (Phill) in order to ‘drive’ the track.

agreeing in principle that it might be ‘off-putting’, he preferred to work in the more customary way, thus retaining control of the spatial politics.

Effective communication is vital in the studio environment, but frequently hindered due to varying levels of expertise, power and imprecise ‘jargon’ (Bayton, 1998) - clearly highlighted by the confusion my second suggestion generated. Comping refers to the process of recording complete vocal or instrumental tracks which are subsequently compiled - ‘comped’ - to create an overall performance. This technique aids spontaneity, whilst circumventing the pressures of ‘dropping in’ phrases that can become problematised through repetition. However, the engineer thought I was referring to the audio process of compression<sup>168</sup> and the resulting debates took up valuable recording time.

Crucially, Emma wanted to capture the ‘energy’ of her live sound and with minor suggestions, she was able to utilize the environment and technology by experimenting with timing and tone. She was consequently pleased with the result: ‘he didn’t tell me what to do and you made me sound like myself.’ My most useful role though was that of childminder. Because of the sensitive family politics, her daughter was also present in the control room, creating further diversions for both performer and engineer. I therefore took Charlotte out for the remainder of the session. Later that month, Pete played me the finished track over the phone but was highly critical about the lyrics - feeling that he was being ‘written out.’

My involvement in this session also raises several ethical issues. Although my status as a middle class ‘outsider’ was clearly apparent in the early stages of fieldwork, after

---

<sup>168</sup> Used in the music and broadcast industries, compression is variably applied to recordings to control the overall dynamic range.



eighteen months of ‘hanging around’ (Bowers, 1996), Emma began to see me as a ‘mate’, as ‘somebody who understood’ her increasing frustrations. I therefore adopted an uneasy compromise between the roles of friend and researcher, creating ethical dilemmas that were never resolved. Our interpersonal relationship developed incrementally with her desperation to escape the patriarchal confines of the writing group and working men’s club. I consequently introduced her to other local pathways and players, aiming (unsuccessfully) to provide an entrée to key ‘cultural intermediaries’ such as the producers at Axis/Manna studios.<sup>169</sup>

The ‘cabaret’ pathway proved a more familiar and apparently fruitful route. Adopting *The Stage* as her own ‘bible’, Emma successfully auditioned for many production-based projects during 1999, although continuously finding herself ‘ripped off’<sup>170</sup> and ‘knocked back’, largely, she argued, ‘because my face don’t fit.’ Acutely aware of ‘time running out’, she elected to give Belief ‘one last go,’ finding however that the power dynamic had intensified in her absence:

My dad’s doing my head in. He’s started giving me all his songs to work with so that we only use his lyrics and Scott only wants to use his own music so we are back to square one as if the band had never split, with egos fighting against each other and daft Emma in the middle (personal communication, The Pheasant, 8/10/99).

Emma internalised this catalogue of failures and disappointments and after one particularly poignant communication<sup>171</sup>, I suggested that she pour her frustrations into a song. Here’s the result:

Trapped! by Emma Brown v1: wake up in the morning feeling down and low  
another has begun and i’ve nowhere to go v2: turn on the tv to watch somebody

---

<sup>169</sup> After performing at an open mic night at Under The Boardwalk (October, 1998), several musicians (including Frank White) expressed an interest in working with her, although she didn’t follow up, stating: ‘I’ve had my own band at the Pheasant, why would I want to sing in somebody else’s?’

<sup>170</sup> Although she was rarely paid and contributed to the creative process, many of these projects were accompanied by exploitative contracts insisting that any ‘rights’ be ‘waived’.

<sup>171</sup> Precipitated by yet another ‘knock back’ after auditioning for one of the forerunners of ‘discovery’ TV shows, ‘Star For A Night’, and getting down to the last twenty out of over 2,000 aspirants.

else's life it should be me who's on there doesn't any one care does any one care?  
chorus: cause i'm trapped now held down and hurting i want to break my chains  
and into the arms of the world i feel like i've already lived a thousand times but  
each time i get my break it's always there for someone else to take so i go back in  
to my box turn the keys on all the locks and then i go to sleep wait for another  
day. v3: caught a glimpse of a face i hardly know where did i go all those years  
ago and what am i trying to prove? (Copyright © Emma Brown 2000 Copyright  
Control).

The last few club gigs I attended were tainted by this growing sense of disillusionment and the group disbanded in 2001. In order to analyse Emma's particular sense of failure, we need to consider the 'multiple dimensions of inequality' (Yeandle et al., 2004) that her 'love and use of music' simultaneously magnified and yet promised to magically resolve. Firstly, Emma's performance of gender was informed and constrained by unattainable ideals of feminine beauty perpetuated both within the family and 'mainstream' music industry. Her anxieties about not looking good enough or 'getting it right' (Skeggs, 1997) were compounded by fears of being 'aged out', an exclusionary process that many women experience. 'Few women ever overcome the sense of mismatch between their self-image and feminine ideals in terms of physical appearance, and those that do live uneasily with the inevitability of its disappearing with ageing. The attainment of feminine ideals is thus typically ephemeral' (Stacey, 1994, p. 66).

Emma's subjective identity was equally shaped by her social-structural location, although I don't mean to suggest a reductive homologous correlation between social class and musical practice, for as Finnegan concludes: 'all in all, whether or not individuals entered or stayed on musical pathways was not related in any simple way to the class to which they could be allocated by government statistics or sociological labels' (1989, p. 313). The fundamental difference between Milton Keynes and Sheffield is its very new-ness, in contrast to the ingrained working class traditions and gender inequalities produced by the culture of Steel City, and Finnegan does acknowledge that generalising beyond Milton Keynes 'might be rash' (ibid., p. 314).

Rather than focusing solely on typical sociological indices such as occupation, housing and income, Skeggs suggests that social class may be most usefully assessed through the concepts of exclusion and access: 'that is, what people do not have rather than what they have' (1997, p. 13). Along with pervasive material constraints, Emma was conscious of her lack of 'institutionalised' cultural capital, stating: 'you can always win an argument when you're educated without throwing a punch' (Park and Arbourthorne Working Men's Club, 13/11/98). It could equally be argued that Belief's particular wealth of cultural capital - understanding the conventions of working men's club culture and exploiting these competencies to reproduce an accomplished set of cover versions - enabled the group to convert their specialist knowledge into economic value. What is at stake in the conversion process however are issues of 'trading up' and legitimation, for as Skeggs similarly found: 'They were able to generate their own local trading arenas with their own distinctions, but these barely influenced the supra-local arenas for capital exchange and conferral of legitimacy' (1997, p. 161).

Belief's transformation into a working men's club band was informed by powerlessness, a cultural shift that, as Emma intuitively understood, circumvented their quest for 'upward mobility.' Thus, despite claims that 'music is a great leveller' (Finnegan, 1989, p. 314), often articulated by the group themselves, Emma's sense of self was constructed and validated by what she had - the capitals she was able to capitalize upon, although these were perceived to be 'ephemeral' (Stacey, 1994) - and simultaneously 'circumscribed' by what she did not. Above all, she felt 'trapped.' I will now outline Velodrome 2000's journey to compare and contrast their sense of place, pathways, ethos, networks and landmarks with those of Belief.



## Velodrome 2000

It is one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. The Sheffield based indie act Velodrome 2000 has just begun their third attempt at performing one of their songs. The band manages a few bars of the introduction before the drummer loses time and the song breaks down yet again. Their apparent inability to 'get it right' is greeted with unembarrassed laughter from the band members themselves and with general encouragement from the audience that has gathered in front of the stage to watch them. Having finally reached the end of the song, the band's singer comments to a cheering crowd, 'we're crap but you love us.' Despite the flippancy and self-depreciation of the comment, it contains a certain grain of truth. The band's lack of 'tightness' (one of the most highly valued attributes conventionally upheld by rock bands) is accepted and even celebrated as part of their stage show. There is a tacit understanding between performer and audience that within this particular context, such a raggedness in performance style is charming, or is a marker of the band's liberating Do It Yourself (DIY) approach to popular music making. Velodrome 2000's lack of conventional competence is then, a kind of purposeful imprecision which is understood by all present (Strachan, 2004).

This vivid description of a Velodrome 2000 performance prefaces Rob Strachan's thesis exploring the industrial, ideological and aesthetic dimensions of what he terms the UK DIY Independent Scene. The context is that of an all-day music festival in Sheffield, organised by members of the band. Nine other groups performed at this festival, 'elevated' beyond the status of gig by the presence of independent record stalls and fanzines, the small-scale cultural production of which were key institutional features of this event and wider 'scene.' I was also part of the 'dedicated and receptive' audience at the Boardwalk that day (21/2/99), but with two significantly different questions in mind.

Firstly, although female participation is noted as one particular 'scene' feature, Strachan doesn't address in any detail - nor indeed, is it within his remit to do so - the critical issue, 'why?'<sup>172</sup> The second concerns place. Whereas Strachan identifies 'geographical dispersion' as a defining characteristic of the 'pan-local' UK DIY Independent Scene<sup>173</sup>, I

---

<sup>172</sup> Although he does usefully highlight the centrality of domestic space and home technology use, which are fundamental to both the 'lo-fi' aesthetic and 'part-time' nature of much creative activity on the 'scene', thus providing increased accessibility for women.

<sup>173</sup> Strachan (2004) offers the following definition: 'Pan-local (with its connotations of relating to all parts of a whole) therefore allows the term 'scene' to describe connections between social actors who do not have a primary grounding in locally collectivised musical activity.'



wanted to make sense of the ways in which Velodrome 2000 interacted with strands of *local* cultural activity, whilst simultaneously rejecting others. When combined with my focus on supporter fan/performer alliances, the following case study produces a very different analytical account to that of Strachan, illustrating the multiple readings that can be generated from even one ‘textual’ event.

### **Becoming a band: fandom, friendship and family**

Velodrome 2000 was conceived in 1993 by a friendship group of male ex-graduates. By the time I met them in 1996, they had played with several drummers, securing a stable line-up through the addition of two female friends: Penny on vocals, guitar and percussion and Steph on drums. Mark alternated or co-performed ‘lead’ vocals and played electric guitar; Tony played bass guitar and Chris played keyboards. Steph was the only member who didn’t sing but according to Penny, the opportunity was open to any and all members, regardless of authorship. Although there are no copyright notices on their subsequent recordings, song writing appeared to be an equally collaborative process which all group members contributed to during sporadic rehearsals. The strategic ideals of collectivism and *unconventional* competence were considerably more ambivalent than I initially assumed however, a point to which I will consequently return.

Born in 1966, Penny grew up in a middle class household on the outskirts of Manchester with her parents and older brother. Although she had learned to play the guitar at school, the conservative acoustic repertoire was at odds with her developing ‘passion’ for pop music. Unlike Emma, Penny wholeheartedly embraced her early pop fandom, citing the teen magazine *Smash Hits* as a key source of ‘fan cultural capital’ informing her fledgling aspirations of ‘making it’:

I wanted to be famous so that I could go on Round Table on Radio One and give my opinion of the new releases [laughter] and I wanted to go on Mike Reid's Pop Quiz cos I always got all the answers right [laughs]...I wanted to go on those things, not cos I had a desire to be a celebrity... but... because=

JR: =because you were a fan and you knew=

Penny: =I knew everything yeah! [yeah!] I absorbed every word of Smash Hits the day it came out, I learned all the words to all the songs, everything, just knew it all, whether it was like you know Def Leppard or Judas Priest. (2003, see appendix 2).

Following in her brother's influential footsteps and accompanied by her best friend, Penny started going to see live music at the Hacienda, and further a-field, in her teens. After completing 'A' levels, she studied drama at Huddersfield College which she describes as a 'means to an end', as an opportunity to see more bands. Despite becoming increasingly immersed in the culture of 'live', producing music had never occurred to her:

I never thought about me being in a band, that that was an option at all [yeah]. I went to see bands but most of the bands I saw didn't have women in. I couldn't be like Kim Wilde cos she was like a pop star and all the underground bands didn't really have girls in at all... there was nobody that made me think, christ I could do that [yeah yeah] until I saw Talulah Gosh and that was like a [laughs] a revelation, a massive turning point you know, listening to Talulah Gosh, the Pastels and the Shop Assistants [yeah] and thinking, I could do that [mm] you know, I could sing songs about that you know and I look like that and I could do that! [laughs]

These female role models were therefore acknowledged as enabling, 'intrinsic' factors shaping her choice of musical pathway, but the entry point remained obscured: 'I didn't know how you write a song ... I thought you had to be really special to write a song.'

Whereas the extended Travis family endorsed Emma's mainstream aspirations, Penny's 'alternative' lifestyle became (and remains) a source of parental disapproval, encouraging her move to Sheffield after graduating in the late 1980s.<sup>174</sup> Following a brief period of time on the dole, she began working at HMV records, which is where she initially met the

---

<sup>174</sup> Many of her friends had studied at either the polytechnic or university in Sheffield, and she had attended gigs in the city on numerous occasions before the move.

drummer Steph, identifying her Pastels t-shirt as a cultural symbol of recognition.<sup>175</sup> As we established in chapter five, venues are also significant sites for interaction and the scarcity of live music venues at this time enabled Penny to locate a broader social network of ‘alternative’ music fans, recalling the now defunct club, Take Two, as a fertile meeting place where she encountered two of her oldest Sheffield friends, Helen and Mark. Mark and Penny went on to form a musical project called ‘Tapestry’, developing ‘a taste’ for performance and ‘singing out loud - it’s just fantastic!’ (personal communication, 6/8/03).

### **Velodrome 2000 and Sheffield: the ‘translocal’ life**

All the band members were in full-time, white-collar employment apart from Penny, who left HMV to work for independent retailers in Sheffield and Doncaster, ‘because that’s the world of music I know best’. When the Doncaster shop, Forever Changes, relocated to Sheffield in the early 1990s, Penny eventually secured the financial means to take the shop over. She also began to DJ, developing a night at Sheffield University called the Offbeat Disco. Marketed as ‘Sheffield’s *real* indie night’, an exclusive set of sub-genres - ‘Classic Indie’, ‘Punk-Pop 1977-97’, ‘C86/C96’ and ‘Underground’, along with artists including The Smiths, Sonic Youth, Bis and Velodrome 2000 - were listed on the flyers.

The ‘logic of labelling’ is organised around recognisable genre codes which serve to hail a particular ‘taste community’ (Frith, 1996). As Thornton confirms: ‘after sexuality, the second most important factor determining who congregates where is taste in music...By whichever means the music is conjured, it relates directly to the promised crowd because taste is not, of course, an individual matter’ (1995, p. 112). Along with critically-engaged

---

<sup>175</sup> As Helen confirms, ‘it’s like wearing badges, you know a Cardiacs badge or if you’ve got a Wedding Present t-shirt on it just means that you can easily go up and talk to somebody else who’s got similar tastes’ (1998).

sceneists, Velodrome 2000's audience would typically include a core of around twenty, mixed-gender supporter fans, united (though by no means consensually) by an 'intrinsic' commitment to a punk-pop aesthetic, articulated through the band's eclectic live set of original songs and customised cover versions, from Baccara<sup>176</sup> to Take That. The 'logic of labelling' therefore helps to establish the cultural context of the band's influences and style/s, although they resisted classification in terms of gender, genre or place.

During 1997, Velodrome 2000 tended to play one or two local gigs a month, complemented by Penny's DJ-ing activities. Indeed, these would frequently be combined under the promotional banner of the 'Star Bar' and the Speakeasy became a regular setting for Star Bar nights. In chapter five, I discussed the ways in which individual venues have fluid characteristics shaped by the dynamic interaction of specific activities and social networks (Massey, 1994). This is especially evident when contrasting their Speakeasy residencies with those of Belief's, for whilst this particular venue was particularly significant to 'grass-roots' music making at this particular time, there was no audience cross-fertilisation.

Although they did establish local alliances<sup>177</sup>, Velodrome 2000 were also detached from many other Sheffield bands, for punk-pop represented a 'highly particularistic' pathway (Finnegan, 1989) in contrast to the more established sub-genres of electronica and 'indie' rock. Indeed, their 'purposeful imprecision' generated local hostility: 'most Sheffield bands hate us because we're crap, we can't play' (personal communication, Mark, The Grapes, 7/5/98). Their appropriation of what Cohen has coined 'musical incompetence as style' (1991, p. 169) can equally be analysed within a gendered framework.

---

<sup>176</sup> Baccara's *Yes Sir I Can Boogie* became such a staple of their set that it was one of the five tracks recorded for the Peel session (16/4/98).

<sup>177</sup> Including the female-led Floater, who name-checked the group in their 1998 single.



Penny: We were never part of that clique of Sheffield bands who played all the same festivals and practised in all the same places. Velodrome would have probably been actively chastised no not chastised you know like barred from that scene because we don't fit in... The blokeish bands who care about their bridges and their middle eights are never ever going to think 'hey! let's get Velodrome on with us.'

Consequently, whilst they were located on the margins of much local musical activity, this outsider status was actively cultivated as a rejection of 'nerdish homosociality' (Straw, 1997). Instead, they went on to develop a translocal network of 'alternative', mixed-gender bands, accumulating a wealth of social and 'subcultural' capitals that were converted into 'symbolic capital' through their various entrepreneurial activities (Thornton, 1995). As Penny explains:

I couldn't have achieved any of the things I've achieved if I didn't have an absolute and complete passion for music... it's probably really sad but it is almost every single aspect of my life [mm] buying records, watching music, making music, promoting music, you know DJ-ing. Most of my friends are involved in music and it's what I've always done, everything, it's always been about that.<sup>178</sup>

It was more difficult to assess how meanings of 'making it' were negotiated within the band, as the inter-group tensions precipitated by the Peel session (see below) served to obscure their collective and individual aspirations, particularly when contrasted with Belief's manifest desires. Nonetheless, underpinning their 'shambolic' approach to music making was a commitment to the principle of DIY, characterised by highly developed networking and organisational skills.

### **Making it narratives: do it yourself**

The idiosyncratic meld of punk and pop informed their 'sound, look and story' (Jones, 1997), combining a monotone snaredrum backbeat<sup>179</sup> with sing-a-long, catchy melodies

---

<sup>178</sup> Whereas Penny acknowledged her fan activities as a vital site of learning, employment opportunity and sociability, other female musicians were less ready to own the label with its negative connotations of passive or pathological femininity: 'I've never been a fan, I think it's sad' (Caroline Appleyard of Treacle cited in Bayton, 1998, p. 11).

<sup>179</sup> Steph cited the Velvet Underground's Mo Tucker as a particular influence.

and eccentric stage-wear, including leopard-skin bikinis and wigs. Each of these musical, cultural and visual elements became translated into an ‘extrinsic’ set of group practices informed by an ethos of hedonism. ‘It’s the whole event with Velodrome you know. It’s as much about arriving, getting pissed, having a laugh, getting dressed up, that’s as much a part of it as actually performing the songs’ (Penny, 2003). One regular supporter fan, Helen, also highlights the mutuality of pleasure produced through a ‘typical’ gig:

Well it’s shambolic<sup>180</sup> but very witty. It’s always amusing and you’ve got a big grin on your face

JR: Yeah I’ve noticed that at gigs when I’ve looked over at you and everybody else, everybody’s smiling. [yeah] So for you, what’s the grin about?

Helen: Erm it’s almost because they’re so bad, they’re so bad and yet they’ve got all this press attention... and maybe they’re on the verge of making it big but they are absolutely terrible! [laughter] They can’t play their instruments, they argue on stage, they start songs and then stop them cos they’ve messed up but it’s just, I think it’s the entertainment thing with Velodrome, they’re incredibly entertaining. They’re almost like a parody of a band... (1998).

Helen therefore understood Velodrome 2000’s ‘love and use of music’ within the interpretive framework of DIY, through which the sociable and creative dimensions of ‘making it’ are translated into a distinctive cluster of industrial, ideological and aesthetic practices (Strachan, 2004). The ‘do-it-yourself’ attitude’ (Laing, 1985) is frequently identified as a challenge to the capitalist domination of the mainstream music industry - ‘We don’t need to rely on rich businessmen to organise our fun for their profit, we can do it ourselves for no profit’ (O’Hara, 1995, p. 132) - a potent discourse which re-draws the mythical boundaries of ‘art versus commerce’ as a politicised ‘marker of authenticity’ (Strachan, 2004). Whilst Velodrome 2000 clearly celebrated the values of ‘anti-professionalism’ (Bayton, 1993) established during 1970s punk rock, their hedonistic ethos equally eschewed romantic notions of authenticity.

---

<sup>180</sup> Helen’s specific use of the concept (and my lack of subcultural capital) is tellingly highlighted in the following exchange:

JR: Do you read the Telegraph’s listings? [yes I do] Yeah I thought it was interesting when you described Velodrome as ‘shambolic’ cos that’s how Martin Lilleker always describes them []

Helen: Oh does he? To me that’s just like a 1986 label, you know for an indie-pop kind of band like The Pastels .

Penny, in particular, embraced the entrepreneurial opportunities generated through her 'professional' fandom; reinforcing McRobbie's observation that DIY culture 'provides pathways for future life skills in the form of work or self-employment...a job creation scheme for the culture industries' (1994, p. 161). They were nonetheless aware of the ideological values at stake in the DIY marketplace, confirming Strachan's (2004) argument that: 'What for the sociologist or musicologist may be understood as relating to identity politics and value distinction may for the small business be a matter of a target market and of product differentiation.' Thus, whilst their later landmarks were entirely dependent on building a 'target market', the sleeve notes to *20 Bubblegum Classics* insist that: 'this band [has] always existed for the sole benefit of those playing in it, as many a paying audience member will testify' (PopStar Recordings, POPCD3, 2000).

Along with Star Bar nights, Velodrome 2000 also played at other established local venues such as the Grapes, performing nine gigs over a six-month period in 1997, considerably more than the majority of bands in Strachan's (2004) study. Occasionally, they would play even more regularly, eliciting the following response from Martin Lilleker: 'twice in one week: What more could we ask for?' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 17/10/97). The group initially came to my attention due to the enthusiastic coverage of this local journalist, who claimed in one preview that, 'raucous cartoon popsters, Velodrome 2000, [are] possibly the most entertaining if shambolic outfit in Sheffield' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 12/9/97). Raucous and cartoon-like are useful descriptors of their live show and I will now consider these features within the problematic context of 'display.'

### **Doing display: 'bending' genders**

Steph designed many of the stage clothes, describing group membership as a 'license for fantasy' (personal communication, 1997). Both women drew on a range of stylistic influences, juxtaposing 1950s kitsch with the 'confrontational glamour' (Whiteley, 2000,



p. 98) of punk imagery to create a provocative visual identity. Penny's 'raucous' and 'witty' vocal delivery further disrupted what Green (1997, p. 31) calls 'affirmative feminine display-delineations.'

I guess me being a bit gobby on stage came as a response to the responses I was getting [from audiences?] Yeah you know people thinking I was just the totty or something [yeah] and I just refused to play that so it's kind of a way of saying I'm not going to make it comfortable for you, I'm not gonna be eye candy at all.

Mark's persona and attire were equally striking. He transformed into 'Markie' for live performances, appropriating an ironic American drawl and a range of outlandish stage wear, including wigs and dresses. The two other male performers were less flamboyant, although Tony reinvented himself as 'Tonieeee' when playing live. A romanticised subcultural reading would analyse the group as agents of subversion through style and they certainly did appear to 'bend' conventional gender-appropriate displays, thus challenging normative constructs of masculinity and femininity as a 'performance strategy' (Cohen, 2001). My feminist assumptions about their sexual politics were resolutely disputed however: 'we reserve the right to be girls in a band without having an agenda on gender!... We won't be you know categorised' (Penny, 2003).

This resistance to categorisation was equally signified through the band name: 'Velodrome 2000 doesn't mean anything' as Mark once triumphantly told me (13/9/97). The name, affectionately shortened to 'Velodrome', symbolised an 'imaginary' lifestyle (Moore, 1997) embraced by players and supporter fans alike. Audience apathy was their greatest concern and it was often engaged supporter fans that would 'heckle' the band. Intra-group banter was equally common and although not as explicitly sexualised as Emma's on-stage discourse, Penny would frequently solicit on 'Markie's' behalf - 'He's in need of a girl, any girl, anybody?' (The Grapes, 7/5/98), whilst simultaneously ridiculing his stage persona: 'from where I'm standing he turns my stomach' (The Grapes, 8/6/98).



'Markie's' inability to find a girlfriend became a familiar narrative theme for audiences in the know, with the moment he finally, allegedly, found a partner becoming a newsworthy event, in and of itself. 'The Velodromes go from strength to strength even if singer/guitarist Markie, *who always gets the girl*, is slowly transmuting into some American rock superstar' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 31/7/98, emphasis added). Penny continued to belittle his 'pulling power', congratulating local female supporter fans for exercising more discrimination than their Southern counterparts: 'The chicks in London have got nothing better to do than throw themselves at Mark. It's like, look at me Mam, I've had a Northern boy. You Sheffield girls have got more taste' (Virgin Megastore, 21/9/98). Female supporter fans were thus directly engaged by Penny's on-stage discourse, as Helen confirms: 'she's witty and charismatic and all these people are loving it and it's great to see a woman doing that' (1998).

Although initially reluctant to concede her influence as a role model, Penny also acknowledges the relatively powerful position she has constructed as a punk-pop performer:

A lot of girls used to say you know, 'oh I wish I could be like that you know, I wish I could say that' but you know the platform isn't there, I wouldn't just stand up in a pub and say that to people

JR: Yeah you need the stage

Penny: You need everything else [laughter], you need the whole package in order to be able to stand on stage and say some of that stuff but once you've got the platform, it seems like a damn shame not to use it properly [laughter]

These strategies of 'spatial reterritorialization' (Coates, 1998) extended beyond the gig to another typically masculinised space - the independent record store - where Penny had to 'battle' for legitimacy against the sexist assumptions of male customers and traders. 'Blokes will come in and go 'Is your manager in? Do you buy records here, shall I bring records back when he's in then?' 'Who?' 'The Boss'. 'Which boss is that then?' I think I get more negative responses owning a record shop than I do in the band' (personal

communication, 1997). Consequently, whilst there were significant differences between the ethos and networks of Belief and Velodrome 2000, both Emma and Penny effectively employed the interpretive strategy of humour to combat sexism and develop female alliances in a range of male-dominated settings.

### **Supporter fans**

Although Helen expressed similar modes of identification to that of core 'Believers', she cited age as the salient factor distinguishing levels of participation and affective investment for Velodrome's supporter fans.

JR [Referring back to your description of them as a parody of a band...] do you think the audience are in on that joke?=  
Helen =Yes oh yes, yeah I do. I think for a lot of the young fans, you know the adoring fans who sort of look up to them and go mad for it, I think they think about them more seriously [mm] but I think the older lot, we sort of laugh at them as well, you know laugh with them and laugh at them at the same time.

Helen =Yes oh yes, yeah I do. I think for a lot of the young fans, you know the adoring fans who sort of look up to them and go mad for it, I think they think about them more seriously [mm] but I think the older lot, we sort of laugh at them as well, you know laugh with them and laugh at them at the same time.

These distinctions were clearly mapped out in the spatial alignment at the Speakeasy and the Grapes. The older group tended to colonise the seating areas whereas younger, 'adoring' fans of both genders would pogo and cluster in front of the stage, actively demonstrating their support in the most frenetic zone of activity. Many of these were students in either Further or Higher Education, and several were also in - or about to form - punk-pop groups, thus blurring the traditional audience/performer divide as 'producers as consumers' (Willis, 1990). One band, the all-male Zebedee Vortex, described Velodrome 2000 as 'heroes'. They in turn, were referred to as 'cool'. When I asked the group if there were any similarities in their approach to music making, self-proclaimed 'fan' and singer replied:

Well it's not right serious...I mean it's not like we don't care about the music but like Velodrome, we do really really pop like songs and we have a good time playing them. Sheffield bands like [] ... are the epitome of wank music, they take themselves too seriously. Music is about having a laugh (The Speakeasy, 7/11/97).

Helen's assessment of the 'punch line' extends this common interpretive strategy to merge the hedonistic ethos with characteristics of competitiveness, noted in chapter five. 'It's just like fuck you to other bands, all the bands that can play and put so much time and effort into it and they, they don't at all and they just go up on stage and make complete fools of themselves and play craply and everybody loves them, everybody adores them, it's just so ironic.'

Audience divisions were similarly drawn in the song *Go!Go!Velodrome*, described as a 'statement of intent' to those in the know: 'shout it proud girls and boys! We don't give a fuck, when all the squares in the house say Velodrome suck!' (*20 Bubblegum Classics*, PopStar Recordings, POPCD3, 2000). The reference to 'squares' echoes Becker's (1963; 1997) elitist interpretation of the 'value gaps' between 'hip' musicians and mainstream audiences in the subterranean subculture of 1950s American jazz: 'a compelling analysis of 'distinction' under another name' (Thornton, 1995, p. 8). When assessed within the political economy of DIY however, it could be argued that the 'values and authenticities' of the 'hip' interpretive community - belonging, hedonistic escape and the pleasures of 'distinction' - are being skilfully reproduced to construct a niche market (Thornton, 1995; Hills, 2002; Strachan, 2004). As we established in Belief's case study, musical value judgements are constructed through the filters of 'aesthetic quality' and 'social relevance.' The following 'becoming a fan' (Hills, 2002, p. 6) story highlights the complex and contradictory interplay of the social and aesthetic in the formation and negotiation of musical 'taste' (Lewis, G., 1992; Storey, 1993; Frith, 1996; 1998).

#### *Doing supporter fandom: one fan's story*

Helen's story highlights several common themes concerning the role of music in everyday life. Growing up in Keighley, a small West Yorkshire town, she felt alienated from her peers. Music was therefore used as a means of compensatory companionship

(Wise, 1990) and marker of difference, themes that are further explored through the narratives of Pulp ‘fans’ in chapter seven.

Helen: I didn’t really get into music until I was about 16 and I used to think I was different from everybody else as every other single teenager does [laughs] []

JR: And why did you want to be different...what was that err search about for you?

Helen: I think it was that thing that nobody understood me because I was shy and I wasn’t like the other girls...I did like some of the [mainstream] music obviously but I think I was doing it on purpose to be more different sort of thing. I thought that I was better than them in a way, cos I liked better music [laughs]

Developing distinct musical preferences also helped to combat isolation through interacting with like-tasted others at university, establishing social pathways that enabled Helen to interact with ‘boys’:

[Music] really connected me to boys really, it taught me how to talk to boys cos that was where I could talk to them on an equal level and actually communicate [yeah] cos I didn’t know how to talk to boys at all. It helped to set up that relationship really

JR: And was that a conscious strategy or=

Helen: =No I don’t think so cos I did love the music as well, a bit of both probably. It is a good way to communicate with men because you can talk to them as equals

JR: You can talk to them as equals if you know enough about the bands then?

Helen: Yeah, especially if you know even more than them! [laughter]

This account superficially confirms Christenson and Peterson’s (1988) research, which suggests that women use music for ‘instrumental’ and ‘social’ purposes ‘in the service of secondary gratifications’ (cited in Thornton, 1995, p. 104), ‘for managing their moods, for courtship, as an aid in peer interactions’ (cited in Lewis, G., 1992, p. 140). Helen’s emphasis on capital accumulation complicates this binary reading however, as certain musics are both ‘central’ and ‘personal’ to her sense of self.<sup>181</sup> Her gender-specific modes of identification are equally deep-seated.

---

<sup>181</sup> Use values that Christenson and Peterson (1988) identified as being more typically male (Thornton, 1995).



Celebrating the upsurge of female musicians, both locally and nationally, Helen has developed friendships with several female artists. Below, she describes the affective intensity of one such connection:

When I see Sally who's one of my best friends and she sings, well the songs are very moving and I do feel really touched by them. I feel like her Mum in a way cos I feel so proud of her that she's getting up there and doing it [mm] singing beautiful songs with a beautiful voice so she really touches me. She sings quite personal songs you see and I know what she's been through, like I know that she split up with her boyfriend and she's been through a bad patch so when she sings... 'I didn't sleep for five nights', well I start crying in the middle of the Lescar [smiles] so yeah, I do find it quite touching.

She also insists that friendship isn't the only mediating factor for women watching women:

I think these days there are a lot more female singers and performers anyway who've got the guts to get on stage. [mm] But I do like to support them... [and] yes it is because they are friends of mine but it's also because as a kind of female member of this society, I do want to support women doing something like that [mm] They've got a lot of guts and it's great to see them.

One performer who inspired these feminist sensibilities was Penny, but to my surprise, Helen emphatically denied being a 'fan'. The following exchange illustrates the ways in which notions of 'good' and 'bad' are contingent constructs employed to signify 'credibility', which in turn confers 'prestige', in attempt to legitimate her status as a 'listener of distinction' (Vroomen, 2004).

JR: So would you call yourself a Velodrome fan? =

Helen: =No [no?] Well [laughs] it's very hard, it's hard to say cos I do, I do really enjoy the gigs but I don't particularly like the music much [right] and I think they're crap, I think they do play their instruments terribly. So I wouldn't like to consider myself a fan of their music [right] as opposed to being a fan of Radiohead [right. So you are a Radiohead fan?] Oh definitely... yeah [so what's the difference?] Well [laughs] it's more the prestige of being into somebody who's good cos I know that Velodrome are bad... I enjoy seeing... Penny up on stage, that is a real buzz for me [yeah] and I can sing along and get into the music when I watch them on stage but I wouldn't choose to listen to it you know more than once a month [laughs] at home []

JR: Yeah but you know this very specific concept of being a fan or not [mm]... well does that change as you get older? I mean for example would you still define yourself as a fan of The Smiths?

Helen: No no not any more. I was their biggest fan once [right] but I wouldn't say that I am now because that time has gone

JR: Yes but there are still people I know who would call themselves Beatles fans  
Helen: Yeah well I'm a Beatles fan [laughter] [oh right!] Maybe it's cos The Smiths have lost their credibility or something=  
JR: =Right whereas the Beatles have re-found theirs?  
Helen: Yeah it's probably that  
JR: Yeah it probably is yeah. So... what does credible mean to you? Bands you think are?  
Helen: Good erm=  
JR: =believable? [yeah], talented?  
Helen: Definitely []  
JR: ... this is probably why you don't define yourself as a Velodrome fan. I mean a lot of the ingredients are there: it's pleasurable [yeah] and you enjoy the live event [yeah] and you think Penny's fab [I do] but=  
Helen: =But the music's not up to standard  
JR: And like lots of fans, your standards are quite exacting aren't they [laughter]

George Lewis (1992) suggests that the ideological principle of free choice enshrined within Western democracies encourages an individualistic stance, but that the function of developing and articulating musical tastes is primarily social. Frith agrees, pointing out that 'the question of musical value is... inevitably tied up with questions of sociability. And the significant social differences may be less those between genres than between degrees of commitment... to them' (1996, p. 90). The flexible mantle of supporter fandom further complicates these perspectives, as the pleasures generated through 'fan social capital' (Hills, 2002, p. 57) may be directly offset against perceptions of 'distinction'.

Helen's early commitment to 'indie' shaped her aesthetic sense of the credible,<sup>182</sup> so whilst recognising 'shambolic' elements of Velodrome's sound through their shared love of The Pastels, she comments: 'but they're a bit more punk than that aren't they... and that's probably the bit that I don't like.' A key aspect of Helen's contradictory, place-specific pleasures can be located in the group's potential to 'make it big' and I will now assess the consequences of this prediction in the light of Velodrome 2000's two key landmarks: the independent single release and Radio One John Peel session.

---

<sup>182</sup> Although her genre tastes have since broadened to include folk and jazz (often female) artists, these are judged by the same tacit markers of value - (their) credibility and (her) prestige.

### **Bandmark one: the independent single release**

‘Sheffield’s newest record label’, Pop Star Recordings, was established and financed by the keyboard player, Chris Mabbs. The *Charity Shopping EP* (POP001) became the first vinyl release, and both products were launched at The Speakeasy on November 7, 1997. Conferring privilege and belonging for the invited few, the ‘come to my pop party - with raffle!’ invitation also set the ironic tone, with prizes including a Rick Astley video and Shaking Stevens LP. Around forty women and fifty men were present, creating a charged, celebratory atmosphere that was heightened by the band’s exuberant performance, as Penny informed ‘us’ that they were about to embark on a week-long promotional tour, playing London for the first time. Penny was particularly euphoric due to the record’s unanticipated Radio One airplay on Steve Lamacq’s Evening Session the previous night:

Penny: [He] said, ‘there’s two things I’m desperate to play before I go on my weeks holiday, and this is one of them’. And then it went bang bang [singing the introduction to Charity Shopping] ‘Take a trip...’ and I was like, fucking hell, I couldn’t believe it! And then afterwards he said loads of spiel about all the tour dates and everything and it was like, oh my god, he really liked it! I only sent it on Tuesday so he must have like heard it and thought, that’s got to go on the show straight away. We’re really really excited.

JR: I bet you are! That is great exposure [I know] for an unsigned, self-managed band=

Penny: =I know, without even trying! [laughter]<sup>183</sup>

In direct contrast to Belief’s musical labour, Penny’s ‘logic of access’ favours notions of play over ‘graft’ by implying effortlessness.<sup>184</sup> Martin Lilleker’s review reinforced this interpretive strategy - ‘It was knockabout fun all the way and hopefully they might be getting somewhere at long last’ (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 14/11/97) - whilst simultaneously highlighting the spatial dimension of progress beyond the local. This theme is developed in subsequent reviews:

Support from our own very wonderful Velodrome 2000 who record their own session for Peel in London... [in] a month which will also see the release of their

---

<sup>183</sup> Strachan (2004) identifies the Evening Session as ‘the most listened to ‘alternative’ show in the UK.’ Given the playlist restrictions of all Radio One shows (apart from Peel) and limited ‘free plays’ (usually 2 or 3), Penny’s surprise is founded.

<sup>184</sup> Therefore contradicting the parallel ‘regional sense of grievance’ (Taylor et al., 1996) narrative cited in chapter five.



latest EP, headed by Jet Boy Star Girl, which promises to take them another step closer to superstardom (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 20/2/98).

The Velodrome's ever onward and upward career curve continues apace (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 5/6/98).

The inferred connections between social and spatial mobility were apt, for by Christmas 1997, the band had achieved 'saturation' by playing too frequently to the same hundred or so faces in too few venues. In the Washington pub on New Year's Eve, Mark told me that they were 'sick of playing Sheffield', thus highlighting the restrictions of a geographically-based local 'scene'. Penny was excited nonetheless, because John Peel's wife had identified *Charity Shopping* as her favourite record of the year and in the early months of 1998, they secured a coveted recording session at the BBC's Maida Vale recording studios.

As we established in Belief's story, the realisation of strategic landmarks impacts upon both inter-group and intra-group relations. It is consequently not surprising that the prospect of an impending Peel session created frictions within the group. For example, at one Speakeasy gig (26/2/98), I noted 'an uncharacteristically apologetic stance. They are always 'shambolic' but tonight they apologised for being 'crap,' whereas they ordinarily celebrate it.' A familiar 'heckle' - 'can we have the next one in time?' - provoked this characteristically self-deprecating, but edgier exchange. Mark: 'Tell you what, we're shite but we have a laugh'; Penny: 'Tell you what, let's get on with it shall we?'

'Value gaps' were emerging in the Velodrome ethos, as both Mark and Tony told me that they felt like 'leaving' because it was becoming 'hard work'. Cohen identified similar tensions within Liverpool bands,

when they realized the[y] had a chance of... 'getting somewhere.'... Inevitably, such ambitions pressurized the creative process. They were usually accompanied by a drive towards greater musical proficiency and a more professional



outlook... which meant that relationships were strained if members' musical skills and outlook did not match up (1991, pp 44-45).

Unlike many of these groups, Velodrome 2000 did not disband, although rehearsals increased in preparation for the session in March.

### **Bandmark two: the John Peel session**

'I'm already making arrangements to have Velodrome 2000 tattooed on my inner thigh' (John Peel, 16/4/98).

John Peel's standing as the most 'influential DJ on British radio' (Word, December 2004) is reflective of the significant role that radio and DJs play in popular music promotion, whilst highlighting Peel's specialised career. After working at WRR Radio in Dallas, he returned to the UK in 1967 and after a short stint on the pirate station Radio Caroline, he joined the newly established channel for popular music, Radio One, where he remained until his death at the age of 65 (October 2004). Unlike commercial broadcasters, Radio One aimed to build and cater for a 'heterogeneous audience' (Frith, 1983, p. 124): Peel's late night, thrice weekly show became central to this remit of diversity.

In numerous tributes following his death, his dual role as a mediator of 'alternative' sounds and champion of unsigned bands is cited by scores of prominent music makers who have benefited from his 'patronage.'<sup>185</sup> Peel however eschewed the 'discovery' myth, stating: 'Bands discover themselves - they make the records, the records arrive.'<sup>186</sup>

Acquiring a 'Peel session' was therefore a significant bandmark in terms of kudos *and* promotion<sup>187</sup> and Velodrome 2000 were clearly aware of this potential, organising a

---

<sup>185</sup> Damon Alburn, [www.itv.com](http://www.itv.com) (October 26, 2004).

<sup>186</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (October 26, 2004).

<sup>187</sup> Although as Strachan (2004) notes, 'radio play to sales ratios have significantly declined since the 1980s' when, according to Hesmondhalgh (1996), a single play could generate thousands of sales. The cumulative effect of intertextuality is also noteworthy, for along with Martin Lilleker's rave reviews, the session was featured as one of the radio choices in the Guardian's Saturday guide, 11/4/98. The band also received a name-check in the Radio Times.

second mini tour which Peel duly announced on the night of their broadcast.

An immense letter from Velodrome 2000 who are in session tonight so forgive the rustling but they've got some gigs coming up. They play on May 7 with Jad Fair at the Grapes... then on June 4 or 8th, they're a bit vague about this obviously, with Longleg and Yummy Fur in Sheffield... Then on June 16 with Girlfrendo in Leeds, June 18 back to Sheffield... with Girlfrendo again. June 24th they move to London with Girlfrendo again, upstairs at The Garage, Highbury, and they say 'this'll be our second ever London gig, the first was a riot so it's definitely not to be missed. Our new single Jet Boy Star Girl will be out on Popstar records in May... It's a splendid record and we'll send it to you as soon as we can err and can you thank The Pig for nominating Charity Shopping as her end of the year tune and we hope she enjoys the session too, we certainly did. Mike and Nick, producer and engineer were so lovely to work with and dead helpful. We hope we'll all do it again sometime.' Well there you go, mutual admiration I think [laughs] (16/4/98).<sup>188</sup>

When assessed cumulatively, both landmarks represented crucial markers of mobility for the group, enabling them to access similarly specialised audiences and groups beyond Sheffield. Co-promotion and gig-swaps are central features of the 'translocal' punk-pop 'scene' and in the months that followed, they played with mixed-gender acts such as Gilded Lil (Edinburgh); Girlfrendo (Sweden); Airport Girl and John Sims (both from Leicester). Penny identified these collaborative networks as a particular source of support for women, many of whom were engaged in comparable small-scale cultural enterprises.<sup>189</sup> The ideal strategy of collectivism was therefore partially realised through the 'access aesthetic' (Rosen, 1997) of DIY, encouraging women to participate as music makers, listeners, promoters and fanzine producers.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Listening to the show, the point that struck me most forcefully was the vast amount of supplementary information he provided about the label, band and recordings - 'it's the third track on side two if you want to make a note of that' - conjuring an image of people habitually listening to this indie guru with paper and pen poised at the ready, just as I was doing. Thus unlike the broader function of radio use as background noise, Peel listeners were assumed to be purposeful, engaged and acquisitive.

<sup>189</sup> Although several bands released records on their own micro-labels (e.g. Gilded Lil on Bosque), groups also utilised other micro-labels on the UK DIY Independent Scene, working with Slampt, Melting Vinyl, and later (for Girlfrendo), Where It's At Is Where You Are (Strachan, 2004).

<sup>190</sup> One particular zine writer, Melodie Cat, became increasingly associated with Velodrome events, designing the 'band cartoons' for their next single release and later Pop-A-Go-Go festivals.

As an 'outsider' to the more closed, private settings of rehearsal, recording and communication<sup>191</sup>, I constantly noted the apparent blurring of audience/performer divisions and increased visibility of women within the context of Sheffield's punk-pop pathway. Penny's immersion in the wider 'scene' furnished the following critique of access however, identifying two barriers that confine women's mobility: firstly, the lack of 'crossover' from punk-pop to the 'mainstream' and secondly, the restrictions for female players to move beyond 'doing a band':

I think it's the punk-pop scene that encourages women but you know, most of those bands will never get bigger... [because they] aren't artistically what people are seeking in the mainstream... and that's where a lot of girls just perish [mm], lose interest, move onto other things. 'Oh I used to do a band' [mm] you know, it just seems like a real shame... A lot of blokes will go on to do another band... or go into the industry and become tour managers or whatever. Girls just fade away from it cos it's hard to move into other areas.<sup>192</sup>

Velodrome 2000's trajectory was also hampered by limited cash flow, which delayed their follow-up EP for almost four months. 'We and the rest of the world are still waiting for the long promised new Velodrome single... which has now finally made it to vinyl but they are still waiting for the 3D sleeves' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 31/7/98). These delays, and increasingly strained inter-group relations, precipitated a significant shift the following year, as the band fractured into two distinct sub-groups: the all-women GG Action and all-male The Motherfuckers.

### **Bandmark three: the all-women group**

Along with three other Sheffield friends, Penny and Steph formed GG Action due to their

---

<sup>191</sup> Which, as Strachan (2004) points out, centres primarily on letter writing and e-mail, as well as face-to-face interaction at festivals and gigs. Velodrome also highlighted these communicative conventions, writing in the sleeve notes of the *Jet Boy Star Girl* EP: 'Velodrome very much appreciate the earth customs of sending rock music combos, mail/presents/fanzine interviews etc... so get in touch.'

<sup>192</sup> It is interesting to note how youth and gender are discursively constructed within this 'scene.' Some feminists (Steward and Garratt, 1984; Kearney, 1997) argue that female musicians are labelled as 'girl punks' or 'punk-ettes' in order to de-legitimize the status of women within the punk or riot grrrl movement. Those within punk-pop actively reclaim these labels to emphasise the flexible and imaginary qualities of youth and gender as social constructs rather than biological categories.



‘shared love of girl band stuff,’ confirming the interdependency of music listening and making. What I found most surprising were the underlying creative reasons Penny cites for leaving Velodrome, highlighting critical contradictions around issues of competency which belie earlier democratic claims.

I wanted to like write more stuff cos with Velodrome I write some stuff but the music would always be done by the boys and if I didn’t know it, if I couldn’t play it straight away it’d be like, ‘I tell you what, I’ll play the guitar, you play the tambourine’ and that’s quite frustrating after a while. [mm]...it’s so difficult to make mistakes in front of boys cos they’re quite judgmental even though those boys aren’t really judgmental [mm] and they’re my best friends [mm] erm it’s still difficult and even though...I don’t think Tony, Chris or Mark would ever want to make me feel like that, I make myself feel like that with them. You know if I fuck up and I do it wrong then I’m like, oh god, like you know when I first started, oh I’ve ruined it [yeah] and that’s you know my lack of confidence, you play it, you do it=

JR: =whereas if you’re with other women you think well one of us has to do it, so you all muck in?

Penny: Yeah! And we just do it and if we don’t do it right we just do it again until eventually we do [mm] and you know I’ve progressed more as a musician in GG Action in half the time I’ve been doing Velodrome, much much more.

Despite her reticence to rebuke a group of men she considers to be some of her closest friends, this account illustrates the recurring themes of judgementalism and lack of confidence women musicians in male dominated settings frequently experience (Bayton, 1990; 1997; 1998; Cohen, 1991; Green, 1997). Unlike the all-women bands cited in Bayton’s work (1993), GG Action are founded on shared aesthetic rather than political values which, paradoxically, precipitates ‘creative freedom’ for these women players.

Penny has continued to forge a career path in the local music industry, becoming Live Events Manager at Sheffield University’s Union of Students in 2002.<sup>193</sup> Her very presence continues to provoke ‘negative responses’ however:

---

<sup>193</sup> Chris subsequently assumed the day-to-day running of Forever Changes whilst Mark has established a new record label, Thee Sheffield Phonographic Corporation, releasing a compilation *A Box Of Odd* (2004), which featured two tracks from The Motherfuckers and G.G. Action. The sleevenotes are penned by Martin Lilleker, who writes: ‘It is, of course, a fallacy that the whole of Sheffield is completely obsessed with synthesizers. What boys and girls in Sheffield, and most other places, really want is guitars – and lots of them... Buy the singles, buy the album – and move to Sheffield. It’s the only way forward.’



Every single day of my professional life I battle as a woman in the music industry against narrow-minded, prejudiced pig-heads who think that because I'm a girl, I'm going to fuck up and I don't fuck up, I can do my job. And every single day I'm battling against being patronised and scolded for the fact that I've got the nerve to be a woman and to have got so far in the music industry... every job I've ever done is a job I shouldn't be doing as a girl (Penny, 2003).

A more recent interview in *Sandman* (August 2004) presents a significantly less empathic message for other aspirant women:

The only obstacle I can see in working in the music industry is allowing yourself to think that because you are a girl you are somehow at a disadvantage. Victim complexes don't help anyone get anywhere. I don't allow anyone or anything to be an obstacle. Sometimes you have to try a bit harder to win over someone's prejudices but then so does everyone... Obstacles are self-created. It's about how you choose to manage problems and personalities.

These contrasting accounts demonstrate the tensions between the 'private narrative' and 'public discourse' (Stacey, 1994) that Penny employs to make sense of her variable experiences. Whereas the former concurs with feminist interpretations which relocate individual stories as 'socially produced conflicts and contradictions' (Weedon, 1987, p. 33), the latter emphatically denies any sense of shared disempowerment in favour of meritocracy.

My research focus also generated hostility from other group members. For example, during the night of their single launch, the following exchange occurred.

Mark: Why are you looking at gender? I mean I wear a skirt and=

JR: =I know you do and that's why I think the band's so interesting cos you like subvert all the=

Mark: =We don't subvert anything. We just go on stage and wear skirts and have a laugh.

Penny was less openly hostile, although regularly insisting gender was not an issue. By 2003 however, she had begun to analyse the performative aspects of gender identity negotiated within the group. 'Along the way, it's almost like I became the boy and they became the girls [laughs] there was kind of a blurring of the genders which I really like

but it wasn't in any way a conscious decision. Velodrome never set about to make a point about gender or anything like that. It's just how it evolved really.' This later interview had a debriefing function, enabling us to jointly review her musical journey and 'test' the relevance of the developing analytical framework, thus highlighting the dialogic process of knowledge production. I am however acutely aware of reproducing a classed dimension in the data, with conversational quotes from 'Believers' and band members contrasted against the 'analytical' contributions of Penny and Helen.

These empirical anomalies illustrate the complexities surrounding a key organising concept of the thesis, that of access, for Emma was apprehensive about the formal interview process whereas Penny is an experienced interviewee, in both academic and media fields. The comparative case study method therefore presents benefits and drawbacks, the latter lessened by the temporal distance I have subsequently acquired, for whilst their pathways, networks, ethos and landmarks were clearly distinct, there are also many points of convergence and commonality between Emma and Penny's stories. In short, 'difference does not preclude similarity' (Charles, 1996, p. 13). It is to these issues that I finally turn.

## **Conclusion**

Both Emma and Penny loved and gained a sense of self-worth through singing, drawing directly on their fan cultural capital to facilitate creative opportunities. As the focal point of their groups, the 'circumscribed space' (Bayton, 1993) of vocalist did raise problems in terms of 'display' (Green, 1997), but they were able to use their relatively powerful positions on stage to disrupt stereotypical constructs of feminine respectability. Whilst they both experienced a range of contradictory freedoms and restrictions within the mixed-gender groups, the key barriers that Emma consciously fought against were the constraints of ageing and ideals of attractiveness. Similarly, although Penny developed a

more provocative visual identity, she is equally aware of being 'aged out' (Fonarow, 1997) as she approaches the age of forty.

With their emphasis on female instrumentalists, Bayton and Green fail to consider the ways in which female singers can denaturalise the homosocial norms of 'local' scenes by attracting female supporter fans. Emma's 'display' of humour and hardness helped to construct an interpretive community of proletarian matriarchy where the iniquities of life on the Manor were momentarily resolved, providing 'Believers' with a sense of collectivism, purpose and pleasure. As a more visible role model in the translocal pathway of punk-pop, Penny inspired women music listeners and makers alike through the interpretive strategies of humour and hedonism. And yet these gendered markers of identification, emulation and interpretation were also shot through with contradictions and conflict, illustrated by the 'disunity' generated by landmark failures, the 'public' discourse of meritocracy and 'value gaps'. When assessed within the social constructionist framework of *doing gender/fandom*, these complex alliances highlight the context-specific processes through which the relational categories of fan and singer are 'blurred', produced, contested and performed as a 'situated [and collective] doing' (West and Zimmerman, 1991, p. 24).

The performance sites and social networks of both groups usefully challenge taken-for-granted connections between the musical activities and geographical location/s comprising a 'scene'. We have also noted how musical practice enabled them to travel along established pathways beyond the local, although they were excluded, or indeed excluded themselves, from Sheffield's more 'fetishized' pathways. In addition, their stories illustrate how certain pathways and musical roles are more accessible to women, but equally, how movement is confined within, between and beyond scene/s, restricting 'upward mobility' for female music makers.

Above all, these case studies are products of their place and time, reproducing contrasting narratives of Sheffieldness that are shaped by the material conditions within which they lived, worked and played. Belief's musical and social pathways were simultaneously mobilised and constrained by a distinctive cluster of local conditions: the 'sink' council estate; tedious factory work; masculinised values of Sheffieldness and romantic perceptions of music industry access, highlighting the interdependent and particular manifestations of inequality which served to 'trap' Emma in local cultural structures. In contrast, Penny's entrepreneurial activities chime with post-industrial narratives of Sheffieldness that facilitate the 'trading up' of fan social and subcultural capital into legitimate employment across a range of cultural industries. There is however an interesting dichotomy between Penny's enduring 'amateur' musical practice and paid work, as she strives to be 'meticulous' in order to avoid accusations of professional incompetence, 'just because I'm a woman.' I therefore conclude that there are *no* 'uncircumscribed' spaces for women in popular music.

In the final case study, I return to the most feminised and denigrated of all popular music roles - that of 'mainstream' fandom, to assess the significance of Pulp's 'mainstream' success on the discourse and practice of gendered 'access' and 'exclusion'.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: PULP AND THEIR PEOPLE

For a relatively short period in a band history spanning over two decades, Pulp enjoyed both mass and critical acclaim. Three of their albums have been nominated for the prestigious Mercury Music Award which they won in 1996, for the multi-platinum album *Different Class*. The group were simultaneously embraced as local heroes and 'Britpop' icons with lead singer, Jarvis Cocker, being heralded as 'the most powerful pop star on planet Earth' (*Vox*, September 1996), after notoriously disrupting Michael Jackson's performance at the Brit Awards earlier that year. The ethnographic research for this case study was largely conducted during this particular historical period, but also connects with diachronic and synchronic factors to explore the process and consequences of 'making it' for both audiences and performers, re-constructed as fans and stars within the context of what I call *the framework of fame*. Given that this is the typical framework within which star/fan relationships are located, Pulp's journey represents a pertinent case to assess these emergent and shifting power relations. This chapter will focus on the ways in which meanings of fandom, stardom, 'making it' and the 'mainstream' were negotiated in the context of two significant landmarks in Pulp's career - the 1995 release of the single, *Common People*, and their third album for Island records, *This Is Hardcore* (1998).

The following case study draws on a wide range of primary empirical data generated through the methods of participant observation at two Pulp concerts, forty-four questionnaires, and six semi-structured interviews with 'fans'. Secondary data includes fan club literature, media interviews, reviews, documentaries and biographies of the group. Rather than privilege one particular source, I seek to assess the ways in which differing narratives construct and interpret the gendered discourses of access and exclusion produced through 'mainstream' fandom and fame.

## **Finding Fans**

When I began the research journey, Pulp had the highest profile of all Sheffield bands and I assumed that a local fan base would be equally identifiable, due to the group's media exposure at that time. As I discussed in chapter four, 'finding fans' proved difficult however. The questionnaires returned from those on the 'Pulp Express' generated useful information about age, status and musical preferences, which I incorporated into the informal interview framework. The first three interviews were conducted in November 1996. 'Rowan' was sixteen years old and had just begun studying three 'A' levels. Defining her family's status as 'middle-class' 'because Mum doesn't work,' she had an older sister who was away at university and a twin sister that, at the time of interview, she wasn't particularly close to. There was an underlying sense of rivalry in this relationship, for Rowan was less gregarious than her twin and had a couple of 'special friends', rather than being part of a 'gang.'

'Kathryn' was seventeen years old and in her second year of 'A' level studies. Part of a traditional nuclear family, both parents were in full-time employment and she was an only child - they moved to Sheffield when she was nine years old. Kathryn described herself as 'working class' and identified this as part of Pulp's appeal. Unlike the other two interviewees, she had a boyfriend and the majority of her friends were male. On the other hand, 'Jane's' parents were divorced and she lived with her younger brother and mother, who worked part-time. Because of the sensitivity of this information, the socio-structural positioning of the family was more difficult to assess, although they lived in a typically working-class area of Sheffield. Jane was also in the final year of 'A' level study and had a wide range of male and female school friends.

The fourth co-researcher, 'Caroline', was thirty-six years old at the time of interview and had a part-time job as an art teacher. Her partner is a well-established local musician and they have two sons. She is a self-defined feminist and friend of mine and when we were out socialising one night, I found that she had taken her elder teenage son to see Pulp at the Arena. Because of our personal relationship, I was more of a complete participant in the resulting opportunistic discussion (26/11/96) than the previous interviews.

The one local response from the request placed in Pulp People came from a 'mature admirer' of Pulp, and after many telephone discussions, we finally met in September 1997, in the Crucible theatre's coffee bar. Married and in her early fifties, 'Sheila' had a part-time job as a childminder and a twenty year old son who still lived at home. She grew up in Southend and then moved to Brighton with her parents in her teenage years, where she met her husband. They relocated to Sheffield in 1973 but Sheila still referred to herself as an 'outsider', due to a lack of kinship networks in the city. Like the ethnic makeup of the band, all the interviewees are 'white'.<sup>194</sup>

The sixth case study interview is with Pulp's drummer, Nick Banks, who described himself as a 'bit of a Pulp fan' before joining the band. Although Pulp's sole female member, Candida Doyle, would have been the more obvious choice, Nick and I have a personal relationship that made securing his time for interview somewhat easier. Of equal importance is access. Nick was, and continues to be, the only Pulp member who lives in the Sheffield area. He was also visible on the 'scene' at this time because he co-owned the Washington pub, described in the *Rough Guide To England* (2003) as a 'favoured

---

<sup>194</sup> Based on the results of a fanzine questionnaire, this small participant sample reflects the general trends in age and occupation of the 1996/97 fanbase. The majority of fan club members were 'school or college students' with an average age of 20.8, 'ranging from 10 to 50' (Pulp People, Winter 1997, issue 21).

musos' hangout'. After months of protracted negotiation, we met at his pub on the very day (30/3/98) that the album *This Is Hardcore* was released.

The research questions were organised chronologically to enable the participants' stories to unfold within the discussion. Rather than assuming their status as Pulp fans, I wanted to explore how music and other social practices were integrated within their everyday lives (for sample interview schedules, see appendix 1). I was equally interested in their perceptions of fandom and femininity and how these 'private' narratives negotiated the 'public' discourses of fandom identified in chapter two. The following 'becoming a fan' stories are consequently re-presented around salient themes suggested within the interview context, along with those generated by the participants themselves (Stacey, 1994).

### **Becoming Fans**

All the interviewees began listening to popular music in their adolescent years, developing preferences for particular artists and groups. These ranged from: Kylie Minogue and East 17 (Jane); Take That (Kathryn); Bananarama (Rowan and Jane); to Buddy Holly and the Rolling Stones (Sheila); Jackson Five (Caroline); and the Sex Pistols (Nick). With the exception of Caroline (art) and Jane (drama), music was cited as a primary leisure pursuit. They all regularly went to live concerts and listened to music on a daily basis, frequently as a backdrop to socialising and/or studying. Both Nick and Kathryn had previously joined fan clubs, but Sheila was the only member of Pulp People at this time. Jane was 'more of a comedy and film fan' and had been a member of the Red Dwarf and the Rocky Horror fan clubs, prior to getting into Pulp.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Jane joined Pulp People in 1997.



As I have noted in previous chapters, musical 'taste' operates as a social indicator of belonging and status and numerous studies highlight the multiple social, structural and cultural dimensions - from social class and gender, to ethnicity and religion - that shape 'who listens to what and with whom' (Lewis, G., 1992, p. 139). According to Euromonitor (1989) however, the most 'significant demographic' is age: 'to the extent that playing music in the family home is the most common source of generational conflict after arguments over the clothes sons and daughters choose to wear' (cited in Thornton, 1997a, p. 204). Whereas Nick fondly recalls his parent's mild distaste of 1970s punk rock, there was no indication of 'generational conflict' in the younger fans' accounts. Indeed, for Rowan and Kathryn, who described her affiliation to 'classic' bands such as Deep Purple and Pink Floyd as 'in my genes', music was a source of shared pleasure within the family, with fathers and/or elder siblings' record collections providing an important cultural resource for their developing musical tastes.

JR: But have you ever had that kind of relationship with your parents where they're saying 'turn that rubbish down?'

Rowan: Yeah we have done but they sort of like respect the music I like and there's some stuff of mine that they really like, although it's mainly my Dad because my Mum isn't really into music.

Jane's mother was also remote from contemporary popular music - 'she's into Perry Como and Nat King Cole' - but she had provided a prestigious source of 'social capital' for her daughter through her contact with Paul Mackey, the father of Pulp's bass player Steve. This enabled privileged access to the band which, in turn, heightened Jane's social standing with her peers and affective investment in the band.

While they all emphasised the sociability of attending gigs and listening to music with family and friends, Kathryn's musical alliances had initially developed as a solitary practice, as a form of companionship and solace. Sheila also used music to combat a

sense of isolation, although 'they were just records on radio one' until she started attending live concerts in her late 40s with a couple of female friends of the same age. 'It's amazing [that] lots of people of our generation do go to all these gigs and I thought it's time I did.' A range of sensibilities and use values are thus produced in differing contexts. Listening to an album on headphones or a song on the radio, and seeing that song performed live at a concert with others, produces different affective alliances and investments (Whiteley, 1998).

Along with family influences, musical preferences were a considered factor in Rowan's friendship choices. She had one favoured gig companion, a member of Pulp People, although she was openly critical about her friend's 'obsessive' fixation with the band, making what I found to be a familiar distinction between other female fans' assumed 'starlust' and her own aesthetically grounded appreciation of the music. Kathryn too had forged friendships through music use, discovering female solidarity and rivalry through an immersion in teenybopper culture and, more recently, a shared 'passion' for 'indie' music within a male-dominated friendship group at college. These shifting relationships and genre affiliations were interpreted as a metaphor of developing maturity. Indeed, the two were referred to synonymously - 'it's more of a more mature fandom if you like'. This sense of deepening appreciation for 'the music (form), rather than the people themselves (function)', was constructed against the majority of young women Kathryn knew who were less engaged in the *art* of music listening.

Underpinning these assumed gender differences was a willingness to embrace the label of fan as a general descriptor of discerning involvement:

JR: So did you move on from Pulp to Oasis, was it that clear cut? Or were you a fan of both? [yes] Can you be a fan of more than one band?

Kathryn: You can be a fan of anybody, of anything you like. But I don't know, it's hard to determine what a fan is really isn't it [yes it is!] I don't know, there are so many bands I like now and I could say 'I'm a fan of Kula Shaker cos I like them and I'm a fan of the Stone Roses cos I think they're amazing'

JR: Right so you're using the term really loosely aren't you [yes]

Kathryn: Yes it's just another word to say you're interested really and you like the music.

By 2003 however, she had reversed this flexible assessment, writing: 'as I've got older, the word "fan" means something different to me now. It conjures images of young teenagers - people my age aren't "fans" of certain groups... maybe it's a puberty thang?!' Age and gender were the most notable factors shaping perceptions of appropriate music use and it is the ways in which they present affirmative fan stories, 'in the face of external hostility' (Hills, 2002, p. 66), that I focus upon now.

#### *Negotiating discourses of fandom: passivity and pathology*

Along with adolescence, another life-stage during which female fandom is located and dismissed as 'hormonal lunacy' is the menopause (Cline, 1992, p. 70). As the oldest participant, Sheila was particularly sensitised to the discourse of fandom as pathology:

JR: Can we go back to this definition thing about being a fan [yes] cos I'm trying to find out what you know what it means to you. When you wrote to Pulp for example, you called yourself a 'mature admirer' [yes I thought I ought to] right so do you think age has got something to do with=

Sheila: =What, do you mean the fact I'm in the menopause and going a bit round the bend [no absolutely not! of course not []]

JR: Right yeah erm what I was really getting at was you not calling yourself a fan

Sheila: Yes because you think of fans as people who are a bit obsessed and a bit err scatty and this thing of erm giving the impression even to yourself that you're younger than you really are. We all don't want to get older but unfortunately I still only feel about 30 unfortunately [is that unfortunate?] yes because if you're not careful you're called, what is it, mutton dressed as lamb, or trying to get in with your teenager's bands and all that... The irony is I like these bands and when my teenage son first picks up on them he says, 'what rubbish are you listening to now?' And then in a couple of years he's going to see them.

Thus, whilst her lived experience challenges McRobbie's claim that female fandom 'is an interim state' (1991, p. 172), Sheila is equally aware of the gender stereotypes of the

'silly' passive girl or pathological older fan. Indeed, such is the perceived stigma of the label that she refused to acknowledge Pulp People as a 'fanclub', referring to it instead as a 'newsletter' and 'information contact'. Caroline had no such qualms about self-identifying as a fan, although 'fearing' for her continued participation on the 'scene'. In similar ways to Sheila, Caroline insists that musical influences are transmitted within the family, flowing from parent to child, a position that has generated accusations of 'muscling in' on teenage pop culture. Sheila's relatively late involvement with pop culture also provoked veiled disapproval and censure from her husband and son.

Many of the participants were acutely aware of the 'abject' characteristics of pathology and passivity, readily identifying other fans as obsessive, whilst distancing themselves from the charge of irrationality and emotionality by emphasising their diverse and purposeful engagement with a range of popular musics.

Jane: I'm a huge Pulp fan yeah? [mm] but it doesn't stop me from liking other music because erm my CD collection is so varied that it's unbelievable. I wouldn't say that I have like one straight narrow view, Pulp and that's it, I'd go mad if I had to listen to Pulp all the time, I really would, I like to have a variety.

Kathryn: I don't like to stick to one band cos it's like tunnel-vision that and I don't think it's right. You should have a wide variety of bands you know and I thought why stick to one band when there's so much good music out there?

Sheila: I don't like the music for the sake of it. I pick out bands that I like because I hear them and follow them.

They consequently presented themselves as 'listeners of distinction' (Vroomen, 2004) and as dynamic players in what Harris (1998) calls 'the game of cultural politics', what is particularly striking is their tacit understanding of the rules. Rowan for example, aimed to confound the assumption of 'predictability' (Grossberg, 1992c) by consciously seeking alternative sounds to her peers:

JR: So do you feel that you're pursuing or defining your musical tastes?



Rowan: It's more like I'm exploring different angles of it [right] and finding it all out [mm] and there's bits where you are influenced by your friends you know, but when everyone likes a certain kind of music like grungy type music and you think no, I actually don't like this [right], you then do what you want... I sort of buy just what I want now rather than what other people want, and I try to get away from the typical sort of music that you buy... there's you know more to music than just what's in the charts and stuff.

Kathryn was equally confident when articulating her likes and dislikes, citing 'difference' as a key factor in her musical choices as a means of establishing individuality. Difference is also identified as a significant component in Nick's 'becoming a fan' story, but the socio-psychological process of constructing and maintaining a fan identity based on difference is dynamic and inherently contradictory, as Nick points out below.

JR: So what did being a fan mean to you at that point in your life?

Nick: Erm trying to be different, trying to be different to that whole sort of general townie youth thing of short sleeved-shirts and tashes, you know beating each other up and all that. But because you were going against that category you didn't think that because you were say with a gang of six other people who were into the same kind of thing as you that you were like conforming as well, you thought, it's us against them...

JR: Was joining the Strangler's fan club part of that kind of refusal?

Nick: I don't know cos you're just so into it so I don't know. It was more like you kind of want to be closer to what was your, I wouldn't necessarily say they were idols but you kind of think I agree with what they're trying to do. You didn't really understand that they may have been a rip-off of any other kind of group. I think as well it's about naiveté cos you see older people who are say into the group and you think wow they look cool! That's cool. I wouldn't mind looking that kind of cool to somebody else, do you know what I mean [yeah I do yes] It's kind of like, it's almost like a hierarchy of fans [mm] and so it's like erm something to erm [aspire?] yeah aspire to but you didn't think well this is the goal I'm aiming for, it was just like they're cool and I wouldn't mind a pair of those leather kecks or whatever.

Through identifying a pecking order of fandom with the band at the 'pinnacle of the cool hierarchy', Nick introduces a critical theme that, in part, chimes with Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of cultural status - a hierarchical perspective that contrasts with claims for mutuality:

Kathryn: I think the majority of bands are around because they want to do it, and they need their fans. It's like I always feel that there's a mutual interest between the band and the fans cos they're both there for music, it's just music isn't it,

that's why they're there, they're not there to say right I'm more powerful than you.

Two issues inflect these standpoints. Whereas Kathryn is keen to have her fandom validated, Nick's fandom is mediated through various band memberships which, in the context of Pulp's success, is further fractured by his subsequent re-positioning as a professional producer-as-consumer who has himself generated fans<sup>196</sup> - highlighting a range of complex power dynamics both within the star/fan relationship and between fans themselves. In Bourdieu's model, the 'metaphor' (Skeggs, 1997) through which power is systematically accrued is that of capital. In the light of these fan narratives, the following section re-assesses the correlation between social, economic and cultural capital and the production of gender inequality.

#### *Doing fandom, gendering capital*

All the narratives confirm that fandom is a site par excellence for 'doing gender', for 'casting particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"' (West and Zimmerman, 1991, p. 14). A rational, individuated engagement with the object of fandom is socially constructed as masculine, whereas an emotional and relational engagement with the stars and a female fan community is assumed to be a 'natural' expression of femininity. Caroline introduces a further critical theme, noting how specific gender differences are produced through the accumulation and dispersion of different kinds of knowledge: 'men seem to have a greater monopoly on those kind of technical details about labels and engineers and stuff'. She continues:

It's a nightmare living with Mike cos he's really into like 'who produced this?' like it's really interesting [laughter] and he's like 'who played you know maracas on this record?' [hilarious laughter] and I, well I don't even know the names of

---

<sup>196</sup> As Nick confirms: 'You know how we've been saying that some people are into a group because no-one else is, like they've discovered them first, well there are also people who then get into the band member that no-one else likes [and that's me].'

the musicians actually, I'm not really into that [why because it's not important?] no not to me no, but like Mike is really shit hot on that sort of thing and we're in The Vine and it's pop quiz night and it's like 'in 1962', do you know what I mean? [yes!] 'who was the engineer on such and such?' [laughter] and I'm going, aaah, this isn't what music's about for me!

While her partner has both an economic and cultural incentive for acquiring and converting his 'fan cultural capital', another male friend is labelled as 'a music connoisseur':

He doesn't play an instrument...but he listens intently to music and remembers the lot, you know, this thing of musicians, dates, whatever. I don't know if it's a male thing, I dunno, I'm really putting my head on the block here aren't I, but I do find it interesting because I'm like, 'I remember Jarvis was wearing this really great shirt' because that's important to me and Paul's like [pulls a nonplussed face]

Drawing on a sample of over 3,000 people, a survey conducted by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) also highlighted significant differences in the consumption trends of men and women. Although women constituted 51% of the singles market in 1996, only 39% were classified as 'heavy purchasers', with sixteen or more annual purchases (*BPI Statistical Handbook*, 1997, p. 59). The survey concluded that 'men are more than twice as likely as women to have large (500+) collections of singles and albums' (*ibid.*, p. 65). While seemingly neutral, the construction of 'heavy' and 'light' consumers reinforces the active/passive divide within pop consumption almost twenty years after Frith and McRobbie's contested thesis. The results are held to be self-evident: women are less interested in the systematic acquisition of recorded music. The 'trainspotter mentality' (Cooper, 1995) and 'nerdish homosociality' (Straw, 1997) of connoisseurship identified by Caroline may indeed serve to deter 'heavy' female consumption, but the focus on cultural and social capital excludes an equally crucial consideration - the economics of fandom: 'the crude fact remains [that] men, by and large, have more money' (Cooper, 1995, p. 3).



All three students received a monthly allowance (averaging £30) from which they purchased clothes and other leisure items, including records, concert tickets and magazines. Rowan described this as ‘a bit of a juggling act’, alleviated by additional parental subsidies for more expensive items such as a coat. Whilst unwilling to disclose details of her financial situation, Sheila’s fan productivity uncovers a further dimension complicating the active/passive gendered divide. As an avid collector with limited financial resources, she demonstrated great resourcefulness in the ‘art of making do’ (Fiske, 1989), taping programmes and interviews from various media and swapping these with her neighbour. ‘We [have] our Pulp stuff that we exchange ‘cause she can only afford to buy some and I can only afford to buy some so we exchange... We exchange tapes of the CDs, my live concerts off the radio as well.’

What quantitative, marketing-based analyses inevitably miss therefore is the widespread practice of home taping (Willis, 1990).<sup>197</sup> O’Brien identifies ‘a huge female tape underground’ amongst women who actively carve out musical identities apart from men: ‘collecting is a way of fighting passivity’ (1995, p. 437). Collecting also requires a temporal investment apart from family demands, as Sheila explains: ‘I think loads of people do more than I do cos they’ve perhaps got the money. But it’s about opportunity as well because my life is such that when I’m at home I can just switch the tape recorder on in the day’. She has therefore accumulated a wealth of ‘fan cultural capital’ within a private, domestic context, yet Straw’s masculinised model of the connoisseur highlights how ‘fan social capital’ is equally significant in the power/knowledge nexus.

---

<sup>197</sup> And more recently, illegal downloading (Straw, 2001). According to Willis, ‘home taping of music is, in one sense, a strategy directly tailored to recession conditions’ (1990, p. 62). He also argues that it represents a prime example of the symbolic creativity *young* people display. This unwitting ageism is typical of the elitist assumptions informing subcultural theory, of which he was a key contributor.



A typical site for the *public* display of power/knowledge is the pop quiz. The quiz on the ‘Pulp Express’ therefore provided an ideal opportunity to unpack the assumptions informing the gendering of cultural capital, with questions incorporating both ‘technical’ and ‘personal’ categories of expertise: from ‘which member of Pulp is credited with playing ‘Fire extinguisher’ on the *His ‘N’ Hers* LP?’ to ‘what is Jarvis’s middle name?’ As one of the winners, Jane views the process of knowledge acquisition as an inevitable by-product of pop fandom, as a common fan practice that cuts across gender:

Well the more you become a fan, the more you find out about them, from magazines, and stuff [like] the Pulp biography. I don’t buy Select or Q that often but if it’s got Pulp in it then I’ll buy it. From liking them you get to know more and more. You see, my knowledge of Blur or Oasis is very limited...but if you ask my friend about Oasis, he can tell you everything and that’s what I’m like with Pulp. They are my favourite band so I can tell you more about them.

Whereas Jane insists that female and male fans are equally acquisitive in their accumulation of artefacts and knowledge, it is the ways in which these practices are demarcated and validated that confers unequal status. Asking, ‘how can a single thing called ‘cultural capital’ exist even in a ‘single’ culture?’ (Hills, 2002, p. 48), these various accounts support Hills’ more fluid assertion that ‘networks of value’ circulate within and between subcultures and communities as well as across social - and for our purposes, gendered - class fractions. What’s at stake however, is the battle for legitimacy. In the following section, I consider another significant discursive site that is frequently appropriated to reinforce assumed gender differences: that of genre.

### *Doing genre*

All the participants spoke of ‘seeing music live’ as a source of sensuous pleasure, citing the ‘atmosphere’, ‘buzz’ and mutuality between certain performers and audiences as important markers of belonging. The ‘love of live’ was also used to confirm their standing as ‘listeners of distinction’, most commonly articulated through a critical

evaluation and comparison between 'dance' and 'live' music. Echoing Adorno's pessimistic indictment of music as 'a social cement', Caroline's arguments were founded upon the escapist function of dance and club cultures:

I see like the dance music of today as pure escapism and I resent it deeply, the use of drugs with dance... it's now about getting into a cathartic state where you can forget about everything whereas for me personally, music isn't about that, it's about teaching you you know, music should be about making you think about what we're living in and what we're doing.

Both Rowan and Kathryn reproduce equally familiar tropes in their defence of 'live ideology' (Thornton, 1995), ranging from manipulation - 'dance is just marketed for money' - to a correlation between class and taste formations:

Kathryn: There's the townies you know that go to clubs and listen to erm things like dance music and then you've got all the indie people you know that wear long trousers and have got green hair and stuff but listen to indie and it's all about culture... And you'll find a lot of them don't mix, you know the indie people and the dance groupies from town, they don't mix.

Rowan: Everyone's so prejudiced towards different types of people [people or music?] well both. Like my sister's got two groups of friends and one of them sort of likes going to gigs and the other one likes going out to dance clubs and stuff and the difference between them is - I mean they refuse to go out together these two groups of friends and say the other's music is rubbish because you know a certain image goes with it and you don't want people to think you have that image you see.

JR: Right, and so what do you think the image is about live music that you relate to?

Rowan: You're more erm I dunno you're like it's really strange erm

JR: I know it's difficult to put into words

Rowan: Well it's that you have much more interest in music itself, you have much more talent to actually pick out what is good music.

Rather than endorsing a high/low cultural divide, the category of 'live' music is appropriated as a distinctive marker of value. Ironically, Thornton (1995) identifies parallel discriminatory processes within the 'masculine bias' of club cultural discourse and subcultural capital, as '*other* cultures' are denigrated and feminised. Several co-researchers similarly disparaged the feminised genre of teenybop.

Although deeply embarrassed about the intensity of her previous attachment, Kathryn offered to lend me her 'secret diary' with 'ENTER AT OWN RISK' emblazoned on the cover. This 'private' narrative of Take That fandom confirms key theories of teenybop. It is a sexually oriented and passionate social practice, enabling a safe exploration of emerging sexuality within a tight-knit female friendship group (McRobbie and Garber, 1976/1991; Garratt, 1984). What these studies don't account for however, is the latent competitiveness between girls:

Just tonight my three friends have gone to a Take That concert, I envy them all. My Mum didn't let me go - I know I shouldn't blame her but I do. I love Take That and I love my three friends, they mean everything to me (12.11.92).  
Mark winked at [] (lucky bitch) (13.11.92).

There is also a clear sense of rivalry between friendship/fan groups, using their musical alliances to stake out distinct social zones: 'East Bloody 17. Yes you've guessed it, I hate them. [] went to the concert last night and she said they were slagging TT off, saying how much they hated their music. Anyone who had an ounce of sense would realise how crap they are. I hate []!' (18.12.92). The following year, Kathryn counts down the days to a Take That concert and describes buying the tickets on her favourite member's birthday as 'the best day of my life' (13.2.93). The gig is written about retrospectively though, as her 'undying love/lust' for Robbie Williams is ceded by a crush on a boy at school, reinforcing the socializing function and 'interim state' of teenybop for this particular teenage girl, as real relationships subordinated the need for ideal, fantasy pop stars.

By the age of seventeen, Kathryn had attained sufficient distance to proffer an analysis on the drawbacks and benefits of the 'culture of femininity' in the early 1990s:

Well it's about growing up together and you know it's like, 'oh guess what, did you see the TV last night', 'oh yes wasn't it brilliant' [mm]. So it brings you closer together but also there's this thing of like... 'I went to Manchester and saw Robbie', and it wasn't it wasn't err sort of a verbal erm what's the word, there wasn't any competition verbally [right] it was all going on up here [what



psychologically?] Yes that's it, psychologically. But I think the thing with lads is that err society brings up boys to be more erm instrumental [mm] and women are more sort of emotional and that's what's sort of expected of them. So for a boy to be a groupie would be quite rare I think because they're not conforming to society. I don't think you can class girls and lads as fans as as similar, I think they're totally different things really.

Although Kathryn's account draws on the 1950's 'functionalist' view of sexual difference (Oakley, 1998), her story also illustrates the efficacy of a social constructionist perspective, for whilst teenybop represented a significant vehicle for doing femininity in her early teens, she has subsequently sought ways of doing fandom - and through fandom, gender - differently. Moreover, it is hardly surprising that these experiences are recalled with ambivalence, when notions of authenticity circulate as surely in everyday life as in the academy (Frith 1996; Hills, 2002).

As the only self-identified feminist, Caroline draws upon a more radical discourse to furnish her genre critique, by claiming that young female consumers are being 'denied politics'.

It's about time as well I think, it's about 17 years of Toryism as well because these kids have never really known erm disruption you know or the idea of striking or going against the norm

JR: And is this reflected musically do you think?

Caroline: Yes, so pop music has suddenly become this mediocre place.

Pulp symbolized a credible counterpart to these various justificatory narratives, embodying political and emotional integrity which provided all six interviewees with a pride of place. These themes will be developed in the rest of this chapter. Organised around Pulp's journey along the 'continuum of success' (Kirschner, 1998), the group's pre-fame 'career' is briefly examined. I then assess the impact of the band's subsequent success upon audience access, focusing in particular on the role of the fanclub editor in constructing an elitist, social hierarchy of 'Pulp People'. Next, I address a key



discriminatory mechanism shaping gendered star/fan relationships within the framework of fame - that of heterosexual desire, identifying a range of factors, from promotional strategies to the ritualised pleasures of live, which simultaneously naturalise and expose contingent constructs of power and value.

### **From the margins to the mainstream: Sheffield's longest overnight success story** <sup>198</sup>

'Because I felt quite an outsider when I was younger... I've always wanted to become part of the mainstream, and be accepted' (Cocker in Heatley, 1998, p. 9).

The story of Pulp is infused by adventure, indolence and crisis, beset by dodgy record deals and thwarted opportunities. There are several excellent (if occasionally competing) accounts of the band's twenty-five year history - Mark Sturdy's comprehensive eight-year study (2003) is particularly noteworthy<sup>199</sup> - and I don't mean to rehearse them here. What follows therefore is a succinct review of early landmarks to provide the socio-historical context within which their later achievements should be viewed.

Jarvis Cocker formed the first of many Pulp line-ups in 1978, whilst still at school. Inspired by the DIY ethos of punk rock, early members were recruited on the grounds of friendship and attitude rather than ability, although Jarvis had grown up within a musical household - his Father was a 'jobbing jazz trombonist' (Sturdy, 2003) - and he had played the guitar for several years. Punk also provided the cultural context for the group's developing alliances with local music makers and entrepreneurs such as 'Marcus Featherby'. In 1980, Featherby released *Bouquet of Steel*, a compilation of unsigned band recordings from the South Yorkshire sub region. Although Pulp didn't appear on the

---

<sup>198</sup> Borrowed from Bennett et al. (1993) and *The Star* (1/3/96).

<sup>199</sup> Although thorough, Sturdy's narrative is interestingly skewed towards a particular perspective of the band's development. The index references are telling in this respect. There are no entries for fans; 'Cocker, Jarvis as...sex symbol' and 'Deck, Alex' receive one and two references respectively, contrasted against seven entries for 'Yamaha Portasound keyboard'.

record, they featured in the accompanying booklet and performed at the launch night (16/8/80) at the newly opened Leadmill, providing considerable exposure for this group of 15/16-year-old novices, due to the dearth of places to play at this time.

Early 1980s Sheffield was very different to the vibrant contemporary scene/s outlined in chapter five. The lack of venues served to throw disparate groups of music makers together. Rock, electronica, punk and goth-inspired bands would play at the same places, frequently on the same night - Def Leppard and the Human League's gig at The Limit nightclub provides the most incongruous and celebrated example of cross-fertilisation. The Limit also hosted weekly - and since its demise, legendary<sup>200</sup> - unsigned band nights. Another performance space that was critical for developing unsigned acts was the upstairs room at the Hallamshire Hotel pub which, like the Limit, was situated on West Street, just outside the city centre. Before joining Pulp, Nick Banks promoted local band nights at the Hallamshire, where he operated a democratic bookings procedure:

I had me little book at home with dates...and my policy was like, if you ring up and ask for a concert then you can have one, anybody could play. I think it was 50 pence on the door but I never took any money...and that's where I met Jarvis and you know, a lot of people that I still see about today like yourself.

According to Sturdy's meticulous research, Pulp performed at the Hallamshire more than any other venue during 1980 and '81,<sup>201</sup> gaining a prominent and shambolic profile. One local musician and promoter who would briefly join the group, recalls that: 'Very quickly they got a reputation as the crappiest band in Sheffield - the absolute crappiest band, because they couldn't play. But they were entertaining, so everybody went to see them,

---

<sup>200</sup> To the extent that the Casbah regularly hosted 'Limit nights' (2002-4). The Limit re-opened on another site in December 2005, with the following promotional tagline: 'Build it and they will come'.

<sup>201</sup> 2/8 and 6/19 respectively, returning to the Hallamshire to perform two shows on the same night a decade later (Sturdy, 2003, pp 471-473).

even though they were crap' (Peter Boam cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 22).

The parallels with Velodrome 2000's performance style and local reception are striking. Even in this early Pulp incarnation, Jarvis had developed a distinctive dress code through a combination of financial necessity and sartorial eccentricity, a style that would later be hailed as jumble sale or 'crimplene chic.' Their shows were highly participatory, employing stage props including toilet rolls and sweets which they threw into an audience comprising loyal supporter fans from school, students, along with critical if amused sceneists. Pulp also secured a session with John Peel on the back of their first demo, generating both local and national press, with a small feature in *Melody Maker* (January 1982).

The key difference is of course generational, and Pulp's youthfulness was certainly the focus of media interest. Of equal significance was the 'turning point' (Finnegan, 1989) of imminent 'A' levels and university places, causing the group to 'fall apart' in July 1982:

Peter and Jamie wanted to go to university...I didn't go to university because I wanted to do something for myself...I just felt compelled to do it. I didn't feel I had the choice. It's like all that crap you hear about music being in your blood but I suppose it is (Cocker cited in Heatley, 1998, p. 13).

Jarvis did finally succumb to Higher Education, beginning a degree course at St. Martin's School of Art, London, in 1988. The interim years spent living on the dole in various seedy locations, furnished his growing sense of alienation and outsider-ness: motifs that were to be explored and embellished in a number of recordings, from *Freaks* (1987) to *This is Hardcore* (1998). He developed a style of lyrical realism as a means of 'storying the self', that has subsequently been appropriated by fans, biographers and journalists alike, providing a familiar 'recipe' for Pulp's pre-fame life. In defence of *Freaks* for example, one fan claims that what critics miss is the 'historical context!' He continues:

Jarvis was living with a junkie in some attic in Sheffield, and the band was completely broke-hence the awful production on *Freaks*...Is Pulp playing with insanity here, or are they really cracking up? Try to tell the difference, you can't. It's the tale of normal people being beaten down relentlessly by life, which considering Pulp's situation at the time is a pretty accurate expression of what their lives may have been like, at least Jarvis' life.<sup>202</sup>

The following section unpacks four further themes constructing this account: the industrial, material, spatial and relational contexts through which fragmented group identities and 'making it' narratives were continuously re-produced.

### **Becoming a band**

Stable memberships are crucial to the maintenance of band culture and Jarvis collaborated with many local musicians during this time, including: his sister Saskia; Candida's partner, Pete Mansell and brother, Magnus Doyle; Simon Hinkler from John Peel's 'favourite' Sheffield group, *Artery*<sup>203</sup>; and Hinkler's brother, David. The latter two contributed to Pulp's first album, *It* (1983), financed by *Artery*'s manager Tony Perrin<sup>204</sup> and distributed by Red Rhino records. A commercial and critical failure - *Melody Maker* dismissed the record as 'goeey to the gills' (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 64) - only three hundred copies were sold.

Not surprisingly, the second Pulp line-up ground to an unspectacular halt, as did the Red Rhino deal, and 'Pulp 3' (Sturdy, 2003) re-emerged with a more experimental musical and performance approach. Sceneists, from Martin Lilleker to Tony Perrin, agree that Russell Senior became the 'catalyst' for the new model Pulp, a driving role he would inhabit until his controversial departure in 1997. Candida replaced David Hinkler on

---

<sup>202</sup> 'Danny' on Adrian's Album Reviews: Pulp - [www.adriandenning.co.uk/pulp.html](http://www.adriandenning.co.uk/pulp.html) (27/9/05).

<sup>203</sup> Peel in 'Made in Sheffield', (slackjawfilm, 2002).

<sup>204</sup> Perrin subsequently managed several signed acts, namely the Mission - at the behest of new member, Simon Hinkler - and All About Eve (Aston, 1996).



keyboards in 1984 and a year later, the band entered into a one-album agreement with the independent London label Fire records, prompting the following announcement from a local fanzine: ‘the big build up’s happening again and it’s probably their last chance’ (cited in Aston, 1996, p. 12).

A recurring motif of Sheffieldness informing Pulp’s periodic ‘come back’ narratives (Finnegan, 1997a) is that of tenacity, fuelled by Cocker’s dream of recognition, acceptance and escape. This palpable desire to ‘make it’ also appeared to be adhering to the sketchy independent ‘logic of access’ (Kirschner, 1998) outlined in *Melody Maker* three years earlier. ‘I’m wary of signing to a big company...I think it’s better for credibility to release a single on an independent first...We just want to get on to Top of the Pops as soon as we can’ (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 40). However, Fire lacked the financial resources and promotional expertise to provide an idealistic stepping-stone to commercial success, with limited budgets resulting in under-developed mixes and delayed release dates.<sup>205</sup>

Inter-group tensions were heightened by these sporadic activities, and the back-line rhythm players left after being accused of lacking commitment by Russell Senior, who had assumed managerial responsibilities for the group. Candida Doyle followed her brother and partner, only rejoining when the band had specifically advertised for, but failed to find, another female keyboard player - despite being annoyed by the gender-specific classification of her musical role.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, Russell notes the ‘civilising’ benefits of a mixed-gender group, emphasising the creativity produced by ‘a clash of five disparate personalities’ (cited in Aston, 1996, p. 70). Committed new

---

<sup>205</sup> Recorded and mixed on a budget of £600 for one week in June 1986, *Freaks* wasn’t released until May 1987 (Aston, 1996; Sturdy, 2003).

<sup>206</sup> ‘I thought “Bastards, that’s a bit nasty”’ (cited in Aston, 1996, p. 69).

members proved elusive however, and the recognizable Pulp line-up wasn't in place until the end of the decade. It would take even longer to locate effective 'cultural intermediaries', namely Rough Trade management's Geoff Travis and Island record's Nigel Coxon.

Although Cocker's move to London loosened the geographical roots of the group, they continued to intermittently rehearse, perform and record in Sheffield, primarily at the Leadmill - where they were to build a consolidated audience base - and FON recording studios, whose spin-off label arranged to release Pulp's recordings. Due to a decided lack of progress, negotiations with Fire records were revived in 1989. With a comparatively sizeable budget, tracks were recorded that would eventually appear on the album, *Separations* (1992). Constrained by their lack of specialist industry knowledge or contacts, coupled with a potential debt of £10,000 recording costs, the group reluctantly committed to a skewed but legally-binding five album contract with a label that Nick Banks describes as 'the devil themselves.'

The first Fire release, *My Legendary Girlfriend*, was selected as the *NME*'s 'Single Of The Week' in early 1991. A further significant landmark was their nascent involvement with Suzanne Catty, who had previously been employed by Phonogram and Hollywood records, leaving the latter to establish a management company in Sheffield. Although the relationship ended acrimoniously, the various ingredients in Pulp's recipe for success seemed to cohere around this time. Catty was responsible for introducing various industry moguls such as Nigel Coxon to the group, as well as building a promotional team. The PR company Savage & Best, served to consolidate what had previously been a sketchy media profile, and with their first booking agent on board, Pulp began playing regular

gigs<sup>207</sup> in increasingly prestigious venues to increasingly appreciative audiences.

Crucially, Jarvis began to cultivate a more assured, charismatic stage presence:

He stopped doing the ‘I am a crap, specky git’, and seriously tried to be a proper pop star, and sexy, rather than a parody... I think he knew that we couldn’t just carry on in our own little underground way, held together with a rubber band, so he started taking it seriously’ (Russell Senior cited in Aston, 1996, p. 113).

Nick recalls a London gig at the Underworld in Camden<sup>208</sup> that highlights the critical combination of promotional and performance factors in developing a fanbase beyond the local.

We’d had these brown t-shirts made with this orange Pulp and it was like ‘they are a disgrace, they are disgusting, nobody’s going to buy them!’ and then every single one sold out and it was like, ‘what?’ We were really like gobsmacked you know that people had forked out six quid or whatever for these t-shirts. And then people started turning up to concerts who looked as if they’d studied what Jarvis had been wearing and tried to go for that kind of look you know. And that was noticeable cos it was in the age of the Wonder Stuff you know, that kind of baggy long-sleeved t-shirts and sort of big shorts and whatever and people started coming to our concerts looking a bit different you know [yeah] which was good

JR: And were they mainly men or was it mixed?

Nick: At the outset I suppose it was like 60/40 male to female split, all the kind of die-hard indie sort of audience you know who’d go to see any kind of new group to be able to say, ‘haven’t you been to see so and so yet?’, that kind of mentality you know

JR: Yeah people who want to be in the know and at the cutting edge=

Nick=Yeah exactly, it’s like, ‘you mean you’re not into Bumflap yet? God they’re brilliant!’ [laughter] And when Pulp started to get in the NME and things like that, Pulp started to become cool I suppose with that sort of London in-crowd... [who] did want to be into you know the new groups.

The fanclub was established in 1992 to capitalise on this growing interest and within several months, one hundred people had joined, receiving:

regular mailshots detailing the band’s activities; a press cuttings scrap book and a copy of the band’s self-produced magazine... which between them told you all you needed to know about the band’s long, tortuous and hitherto obscure history; and occasional giveaways such as a square of fabric cut from one of Jarvis’s suits (Sturdy, 2003, pp 223-224).

---

<sup>207</sup> Including their first European concerts in October 1991, supporting Blur and Lush.

<sup>208</sup> On either May 22, 1991 or January 24, 1992 (Sturdy, 2003, pp 473-4).

One major drawback was an increasingly strained relationship with Fire records, heightened by the 1991 collapse of their distributors, Rough Trade, which caused virtual bankruptcy for the label and the additional postponement of what was now considered an outdated set of songs. In direct breach of contract, Catty secured ‘a small developmental deal’ with Island records to record two singles that would be released on Gift, an imprint established by the Sheffield label Warp. This complex but pragmatic arrangement was intended to buy all parties some much needed time. The band wanted to extricate themselves from Catty and Fire, whereas Coxon had to persuade his head of A&R that Pulp were capable of recouping major label investment.

Catty’s demise was ironically precipitated by the publishing deal she successfully negotiated with Island Music in 1992, allegedly failing to mention that Pulp were already contractually committed to Fire’s publishing arm, Twist & Shout Music. Geoff Travis was the only professional manager prepared to tackle these legal complexities<sup>209</sup> and the following year (1993), Pulp signed a recording contract with Island records, a company combining the kudos of an independent<sup>210</sup> with the comparative financial security and infrastructure offered by the Polygram group. In sum, the significant theme informing Pulp’s ‘tortuous’ ‘becoming a band’ story is their enduring desire to ‘make it’, underpinned by Cocker’s longing for ‘mainstream’ acceptance. I will now examine the consequences of Pulp’s success, focusing initially on the role of the fanclub, Pulp People.

---

<sup>209</sup> Rather than insisting on an embargo, Fire agreed to a percentage of the record sales royalties from the next four albums released on Island records (Aston, 1996; Sturdy, 2003).

<sup>210</sup> Initially established as such in the late 1960s, ‘based on financial rather than ideological considerations’ (Frith, 1983, p. 98).



## **Pulp People: community or hierarchy?**

Fanclubs play a critical role in constructing fan identities and circulating knowledge about the object of fandom, seemingly representing the very notion of a consensual 'interpretive community'. As Jenkins explains:

To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labelled a subordinate position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticised by institutional authorities. Yet it is also to speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defence of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic (1997, p. 507).

Pulp People embodies this 'community of others' but rather than romanticising the group experience, I seek to assess the discriminating function of the fanclub as an 'institutional authority' (Stacey, 1994), in order to shed light on the ways in which discourses of fandom and stardom were constructed and regulated at this particular time.

Mark Webber ran the fanclub in a fairly ad hoc fashion until he made the rare and fascinating transition from supporter fan to 'producer-as-consumer' (Willis, 1990), initially as Pulp's tour manager, then session guitarist and finally, as a full-time group member, invited to join during the recording sessions for *Different Class*. Mark's friend, Pulp fan and librarian Alex Deck, was consequently enlisted, thus assuming the mantle of 'professional fan'. At the height of Pulp's fame, the Summer 1996 edition of Pulp People contained a breakdown of the current fanbase in terms of geography and gender. Alex expressed surprise at the recent swell in female membership - 1666 against 612 males - given that 'it was only a year or so ago that boys outnumbered the girlies by a couple of hundred'.

In a subsequent letter (20/8/96), she proffered the following explanation for this surge in female participation:

Well it's Jarvis isn't it - before Pulp 'made it', fans went for the music rather than the Jarvis-as-sex-symbol thing - it was a different type of fan altogether...Seems to me the fact they see him in that light is more important than the music. Perhaps. Or it's what attracts them to Pulp now, whereas before it was the fact they made great music...We now get letters from people whose 'fave bands' are Boyzone [and] Pulp...Pulp fans used to be different but now they're pretty much the same...as any other fan. Once the music is accepted into and by the mainstream, the fans, by definition, will be 'mainstream' - if you can use that word. Pulp fans used to be very unusual people but they aren't any more.

Her appropriation of the concept of 'mainstream' is very revealing, using it as an ideological yardstick against which cultural worth is measured (Thornton, 1995). Moreover, introducing an old/new division chimes with, and further complicates, the 'moral dualisms' identified by Jensen (1992) and Hills (2002), by providing a gendered lens to examine the processes through which 'different types' of fandom are valued and authenticated.

... 'authenticity' takes the measure of the music's relationship to its audience by questioning whether different audiences are properly appreciating specific musics (or are even capable of appreciating them in the 'proper' ways)...Such people traditionally draw a line between their own preferred music...and that which has 'sold out' to or been 'co-opted' by the musical mainstream. Thus, the language of authenticity encodes a certain kind of elitism into the heart of popular music: the fans, or musicians or critics who speak with the authority of 'authenticity' on their side justify their tastes, relegating the unauthentic to the realm of a poor, undesired and even evil relative (Bennett et al., 1993, p. 172).

In the light of this, we can clearly distinguish the 'new' fans as undesirable additions to a rapidly expanding family of Pulp People, but what Bennett et al. don't expand upon are the internal divisions *within* a fanbase. Drawing on Bourdieu and developing Nick's earlier observations, this specific fan 'community' can usefully be analysed as a social hierarchy.

In *Uncertain Utopia* (1998), Andrea MacDonald addresses the predominantly female fan base of the TV programme *Quantum Leap*, arguing that 'these women are not mere vessels of mainstream popular culture; they take that popular culture and use it as the

starting point for their community of and for women' (1998, p. 136). Where her work differs from the cosy view of community espoused by Jenkins and Bacon-Smith<sup>211</sup> lies in her identification of the 'hierarchized' structure of this fan culture. 'Hierarchies exist along multiple dimensions. These dimensions may be broken down by knowledge, level of fandom, access to "inside" knowledge, leaders and control of venue' (ibid.). MacDonald identifies one particular fan that occupies these multiple positions: 'she is a leader, a controller of venues, has direct access and is considered the ultimate source, save the show's own personnel, for interpreting the fictive universe' (ibid., p. 138). This status isn't assured however, but depends on her ability to maintain these various roles. There are significant parallels and differences between the hierarchical organisation of both fan cultures. Focusing on two critical dimensions - knowledge and access - these will now be clarified.

Powerful fans become those with greatest knowledge of the canon and the recognised status to represent the 'story' to journalists and academics. Fan club personnel simultaneously adopt the position of buffers or 'speedbumps' to shield the stars from the 'fanaticism' of their fans (Vermorel and Vermorel, 1985). The editor of *Pulp People* fulfils these criterion, filtering communication between fanclub members and the band themselves, who often contributed to the fanzine. Described as 'the coolest fan in *Pulp*' by Nick Banks, her direct access generated a wealth of both fan cultural and social capital, 'traded up' through the role of 'professional' fan.

The key similarity between the two women is their capacity to mediate the fan worlds to outsiders such as myself, thus legitimating certain practices, whilst silencing 'the

---

<sup>211</sup> A view that QL fans equally endorse however, claiming 'equality, tolerance and community' in contrast to 'mundane' social norms (MacDonald, 1998, p. 136).

multiplicity of voices that exist within the fandom' (MacDonald, 1998, p. 139). The chief difference lies in their institutional positioning. As a waged employee of the group, Alex's status was validated through the distinction of paid work, in direct contrast to 'hobbyists'. The profit incentive of a fee-charging fanclub<sup>212</sup> also precludes direct intervention when 'determin[ing] who is and is not worthy of participation' (ibid.), but as we shall see, the authoritative voice of fanclub editor provides scope for both censorship and censure.

In order to contextualise and develop these observations, the subsequent analysis will unpack the socio-economic and cultural milieu within which Pulp's 'mainstream' career flourished, identifying two critical themes informing old/new fan distinctions: firstly, the relationship between access and success in the 'feminization' of Pulp fans; and secondly, the contested role of heterosexual desire in the star/fan relationship.

### **Pulp and fame: transformation**

'1995 is certainly a year to look forward to' (Webber, *Disco-Very 2*, January 1995).  
'Will success spoil Jarvis Cocker?' (*Select*, October 1995).

After several years of a UK singles market saturated by teenybop and rapidly circulating sub-genres of dance music, the mid 1990s saw a resurgence of the cult of the band. Blur, Oasis, Suede and Pulp, amongst others, heralded a more optimistic era in British popular music, labelled 'Britpop' by the music press.<sup>213</sup> Defined as a 'defiantly nationalistic and anti-grunge movement...firmly cemented in...aspirations to stardom' (*Rolling Stone Yearbook 1995*, cited in Shuker, 1998, p. 36), these bands produced a distinctive brand of

---

<sup>212</sup> Pulp People charged an annual subscription of £5 during 1994-1995, rising to £12 in 1996.

<sup>213</sup> Whilst Cocker and other key players hated the label, Britpop signified a nostalgic re-working of the 1960s golden age of British pop culture, initially highlighted by Oasis and Blur when plundering their pop heroes, the Beatles and the Kinks. Their record companies (Creation and Food) marketed the constructed and material differences between the two groups in terms of place, class and style, to create a North versus South battle over chart supremacy; culminating in the simultaneous single releases of *Roll With It* and *Country House* that made headline news (26/8/95).



‘alternative’ pop that momentarily straddled the credible and commercial. It is hardly surprising that this combination of ‘indie’ cool and unabashed populism attracted a generation of young female consumers, some of whom joined Pulp People.

Pulp’s introduction to a predominantly female, teen audience occurred when they supported Blur in America, followed by two UK stadium concerts in October 1994. One *Melody Maker* review stated, in typically elitist tones, that ‘this was always more Pop Concert than Indie gig. Pulp, only lately getting used to cheers, are greeted tonight with screams, proper screams, that ring like tinnitus through their set’ (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 248). As we have already established, the band had long aspired to popularity however, appropriating the mantra of ‘making it’ as a rallying call to sustain them through what Nick calls ‘the wilderness years.’ And following the promising sales of the first Island album, *His ‘n’ Hers* (1994)<sup>214</sup>, their self-confessed aim was to produce a record of ‘twelve pop songs and everyone could be a single’ (Steve Mackey cited in Aston, 1996, p. 159). In short, Pulp’s ‘aspirations to stardom’ were dependent on harnessing the consumer power of a wider audience base, particularly women. As O’Brien confirms: ‘it is women who make an act mass-market, tipping the balance... from cult to chart success’ (1995, p. 437).<sup>215</sup>

#### *Feminizing fandom: success and access*

Whereas women over twenty-five are identified as a ‘lost demographic’, young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-four were hailed as the primary consumers for a singles market that, in the mid 1990s, was particularly crucial to a UK market dominated

---

<sup>214</sup> Achieving a top ten position in the UK charts.

<sup>215</sup> For example, REM’s album *Automatic for the People*, ‘crossed over’ into the mass market due to the targeted marketing of female consumers (David Terrill, marketing manager of HMV, cited in O’Brien, 1995).

by domestic acts.<sup>216</sup> After a relative slump at the beginning of the decade,<sup>217</sup> single sales dramatically increased during the key Britpop years, rising from sixty-three million units in 1994 to over seventy-eight million in 1996: the highest level of sales since 1982 (*BPI Statistical Handbook*, 1997, p. 8).<sup>218</sup> Pulp were on the margins of this boom until the release of *Common People* (1995), ‘arguably one of the defining songs of Britpop’ (Shuker, 1998, p. 36). The overwhelming popularity of this anthemic record<sup>219</sup>, coupled with their last minute appearance at the Glastonbury festival in 1995, provided unprecedented media exposure for the band.

Unlike A&R ‘men’, who claim that decisions about which acts to sign and develop are founded upon the ‘x factor’ and their own intuition, marketing departments apply a more ‘calculating’ logic (Negus, 1992) when attempting to foster a sense of mutuality between music makers and listeners in order to construct identifiable links between the ‘sound, look and story’ of an act (Jones, 1997). Appropriate media coverage is a vital component of the marketing mix, and a process of audience repositioning became apparent in Island’s promotional strategies for Pulp. The alternative favourites of *Melody Maker* and the *NME* were now broadening their reach into the teen press.<sup>220</sup> For example, as early as May 1995, Jarvis Cocker featured on the front cover of *Top of the Pops* magazine with Kylie Minogue in his arms. I don’t mean to suggest that ‘new’ fans were ‘duped’ by this process of commodification and transformation, but rather stress the industrial context

---

<sup>216</sup> Reaching a ‘record level in 1996’, with almost 60% of singles and over 50% of albums being produced by UK acts (*BPI Statistical Handbook*, 1997).

<sup>217</sup> 58.9, 56.3, 52.9 and 56.3 million units were sold between 1990-93 (*ibid.*).

<sup>218</sup> Due to the impact of downloading, amongst other factors, the 12-19 age group’s share of the singles market has now rapidly declined, from 48% in 1999 to 28% in 2003 ([www.BPI.co.uk](http://www.BPI.co.uk)).

<sup>219</sup> 70,000 copies of *Common People* were sold in the first week of release, although this wasn’t enough to knock Robson and Jerome off the number one slot (Aston, 1996).

<sup>220</sup> As Coxon tellingly observes, ‘I never felt it was at the expense of any credibility at the time - maybe later’ (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 259).

within which young women are ‘hailed’ but frequently do not heed.<sup>221</sup> Above all, the correlation I propose between success and audience access is both mediated and conditional given that, as Jones (1997) persuasively argues, the majority product of the music industry is failure rather than success.

The contradictory interdependence between success and gendered access is further highlighted by line-up changes in the Human League. Joanne Catherall and Susan Sulley’s introduction into the previously ‘all-male cult band’ concurred with, and precipitated massive international sales for the album *Dare* (1981), inspiring a much greater female fan-base than the band had previously attracted. Similarly, this *dual* feminization process stimulated tremendous hostility from ‘die-hard’ fans:

Susan: It was that whole thing, I hate to say sexist, but I think that’s it. On the first tour we had men coming up to us or coming up to Philip and saying, ‘why have you got women in?’

Joanne: The die-hard Human League fans at that time thought they should remain an all-male cult band (personal communication, 1994).

Despite provoking a more blatantly misogynistic reaction, both cases illustrate a cluster of ‘musician/listener value gap[s]’ (Frith, 1996, p. 63) that are paradoxically heightened by the landmark of mainstream chart success. Notions of both ‘selling out’ and *letting in* lie at the core of this particular ‘value problem’, and the function of the old/new fan binary will now be assessed in the light of these themes.

### *The paradox of popularity*

Aspirant rock and pop musicians tread familiar and contradictory pathways when negotiating the ‘continuum of success’, ‘oriented as they are both to the locality, the

---

<sup>221</sup> Numerous commercial failures are cited in defence of this argument, including the Roaring Boys (Rimmer, 1985) and Upside Down (Cloonan, 1998).

community, and to the mass pop media. Making it locally and making it nationally have never been the same thing: 'Selling out' has always been essential to the British rock career' (Frith, 1993, p. 21). Russell Senior attempts to resolve these inherent contradictions by drawing on the ideological narrative of 'making it' in terms of making a difference, stating:

We didn't hide behind that, 'Oh you've sold out if you get in the charts.' We were the first people that I know of in that kind of scene to say, 'Look we're failures [if] we're not selling records. And we believe in what we're doing and if we don't sell records, it means nothing because we've got something to say' (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 191).

'Selling out' was therefore justified as an essential marker of progress in Pulp's *pop* career, providing a potent combination of accessibility and apparent political integrity that, as I have already established, chimed with the sensibilities of many young female listeners. Highlighting the significance of social class as a marketing tool, McRobbie (1991) cites Roland Barthes' (1972) tenet, 'Look at me: I am like you', to analyse the popularity of 1970s' 'working-class' pop stars such as David Essex. Bourdieu and his advocates also identify this process of recognition as a key to stimulating popular pleasures (Bourdieu, 1984; Ang, 1985; Stacey, 1994). Again, the wider context of Britpop needs to be considered when examining the particular socio-psychological conditions that attracted Pulp's female fanbase.

There was a corresponding rise in so-called Lad Culture in the mid 1990s, epitomised by the magazine *Loaded*. Unlike Oasis, who drew upon this culture of 'libidinous laddishness' (Straw, 1997, p. 8), Pulp's eclectic style - combining electropop, disco and 'knowing references to Burt Bacharach' (ibid.) with Cocker's characteristic often-whispered, intimate first person address and developing personas of 'Class Warrior', 'Pop Clown' and 'Tabloid Escape Artist' (*NME*, 8/11/97) - eschewed machismo in favour of a



quirky outsider-ness and confessional, lyrical realism. And whilst he claimed to be writing for a thirty-something audience, ‘for people like myself’ (No Sleep ‘til Sheffield, BBC2, 18/12/95), Pulp were producing protest-pop that teenagers could relate to. ‘It’s like Jarvis understands what we’ve got to put up with’ as Kathryn explained, thus highlighting the fragility of authorial intent and the range of expectations and competencies that listeners bring to a text, foregrounding their concerns, needs and desires.

Many commentators identify Pulp’s appearance on ‘This Morning with Richard and Judy’, with ‘the fans pressed up against the glass doors’ (Aston, 1996, p. 168), as ‘the Zeitgeist pop moment’ (Nigel Coxon cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 258) that signified the group’s ‘transition to *teenybop* status’ (op. cit., emphasis added). It is this simplistic equation of success+mainstream=teenybop which, I would argue, informs the crux of the old/new fan binary. The fanclub editor displaces her frustration at Pulp’s ‘co-optation’ by condemning the ‘new’ fans for diluting the band’s authenticity. Drawing upon Adorno’s ‘dialectic of value’, Hills suggests this response is typical, illuminating the ‘inescapable contradiction which fans live out’ (2002, p. 29) as they are positioned ‘simultaneously inside and outside processes of commodification, experiencing an intensely personal use-value in relation to their object of fandom, and then being repositioned within more general and systematic processes of exchange value’ (ibid., p. 44).

As a ‘professional’ fan, Alex is actively engaged in the commodification process, but she skilfully erases this cultural work in order to justify her discrimination of a ‘new’ fanbase who lack the ‘proper’ modes of appreciation to be embraced as authentic Pulp People. In an attempt to preserve the integrity of her version of *her* group, Alex therefore adopts a more distanced and critical stance in contrast to the ‘mainstream’

mass of fans she feels she has to contain.<sup>222</sup>

In sum, the very 'local life' and sense of possession that 'old' fans enjoy prior to a band's mainstream exposure is nostalgically defended at the moment of 'crossover' from cult to mass market - couched less in the rhetoric of 'selling out' than that of letting in - for what's at stake is the loss of exclusivity and perceived intimacy, diluted and displaced within the framework of fame. Thus, the landmark of mainstream chart success highlights the ambivalence of 'making it' in terms of audience accessibility, as 'new' female consumers are typically 'scapegoated' (Cohen, 1991) for their assumed 'starlust'. In the following sections, I address the consequences of these limited and limiting assumptions, before exploring the multiple strategies of identification shaping old/new constructs of the interpretive community.

### **Forbidden fantasies: the dialectic of desire**

Without exception, the 'fans' I interviewed and talked to insisted that their interest in Pulp was not sexually motivated, although conceding that they did, to differing degrees, find the male musicians attractive or 'nice'. Of course, as The Vermorels point out, fan fantasies are continuously censored and this cross-section of participants are clearly aware of the stigma associated with excessive consumption and its intimate connection to the forbidden realms of female desire. Caroline aside, they were acutely embarrassed by this line of inquiry, although both Rowan and Sheila admitted to harbouring dreams about meeting the group. Rather than revelling in the liberation of safe sexual desire (McRobbie and Garber, 1976/1991), Rowan highlights the distressing aspects of unfulfilled fantasy:

You know when you really like a band, it's not very nice because you like them too much [how do you mean?] Well you know when you really like them and stuff, you think God they're just so cool and everything err err I dunno

---

<sup>222</sup> And crucially, Alex assumes that I too endorse the 'bad consumer' (Hills, 2002) perspective.

JR: What, is it actually quite a painful experience?

Rowan: Yes 'cause you really want to meet them but you know you never will... and I just got to the stage where I thought, yeah it'd be good if you could meet them but you know, there are more important things.

Sheila was equally self-critical, and it would be reasonable to assume that an element of self-censorship shaped all their stories. Radway (1984/1987) met with similar resistance when attempting to explore the sexual fantasies of her group of romance readers and McRobbie puts this 'typical' reticence down to the constraints of 'traditional femininity' (1991, p. 140).

Fan fantasies were also discouraged in 'public' narratives. When questioned about his fans - 'Any stalkers?' - in the *Official Pulp Festival programme, V96*, Jarvis replied that although they 'seem to be a psychologically well-balanced bunch', he was 'disturbed' by the overt starlust of some girls. 'The strangest thing I had recently was a letter from a thirteen year old girl who went into minute detail about how she'd like to make love to me. I find that disturbing. You think, you shouldn't know about things like that young lady'. Whilst denying the pathological tendencies of *Pulp* fans, the taboos around conspicuous female desire are clearly reinforced and this paternalistic disapproval was not only levelled at adolescent girls.

After collating the results of a fanzine questionnaire in *Pulp People* (Winter 1997, issue 21), Alex noted her 'concern' 'at the number of housewives offering their services to Jarvis should he feel like an *Acrylic Afternoon*', asking: 'what about your husbands?!' And in response to a request from a would-be biographer for 'dreams, poems, and fan fantasies', the author and potential contributors were castigated for their adulation:

It seems to me that if such a book was written about someone like say Michael Jackson there would be an outcry - the idea of people clinging onto his every word, the way he affects people's lives to such a great extent. Remember, it's only

Jarvis, he's just an ordinary guy - you criticise Michael Jackson like mad for portraying himself as some God-like figure, then you go and build Jarvis up in exactly the same way. Double standards, that's what you lot have got. Double standards (Pulp People, Autumn 1996, issue 17).

As a key 'player' in the interpretive community, Alex's preferred reading connotes ordinariness, an interpretation reinforced by Jarvis himself: 'I'd never wanted to construct a public persona because I used to pride myself that what you saw was what you got' (*The Guardian*, 27/3/98). Drawing on Nietzsche, Russell Senior confirmed Pulp's ethos as follows: 'I have my feet on the ground and my head in the clouds, thus I grow taller' (*NME*, 24/2/96), identifying the 'inescapable contradictions' of maintaining ordinariness within the framework of fame by acknowledging that:

There is of course a combustibility to all this. We draw our inspiration from elevating ordinary life, therefore ordinary people relate to it, therefore we become famous, therefore we are no longer common people, therefore we lose the sap that pushes us to the clouds and it goes snap! This is exactly how it should be...(ibid.).

And in the light of his resignation from the group eleven months later (14/1/97) - allegedly claiming Pulp were no longer 'cool' (*NME*, 8/11/97) - this statement was predictive.

Shifting discourses of stardom and fandom were increasingly refracted through the twin lenses of 'cool' and 'ordinariness'. The fissures within these discursive constructs, chiefly Cocker's metamorphosis and corresponding fan reading as extra-ordinary sexual object, are particularly evident at this critical juncture in Pulp's career. Although finding the notion of desire particularly difficult to broach with the interviewees, thus highlighting fundamental limitations in the method of descriptive interviewing, ethnography's multi-method approach offered less intrusive opportunities to explore this 'classic' model of pop fandom for girls (Lewis, 1992). Focusing on Pulp's Sheffield Arena concert and the 'local' alliances between the band and this cross section of 'fans', I will now explore the



principal discourse of fandom that many feminist studies have identified - that of pleasure.

*Negotiating pleasures: the significance of 'cool'*

'In the concrete corridors, more mature Pulp fans talked of the old days when the band played upstairs in the Hallamshire pub. Inside the main arena, the next generation were calling - in voices broken and unbroken - for Sheffield's longest overnight success story' (David Dunn, *The Star*, 1/3/96).

The charged atmosphere at this concert was initially constructed and maintained by the intensity and sheer volume of the participatory 'home' audience, as the ritualised fan practices of screaming, cheering, clapping, stomping, singing and shouting were employed by both female and male fans. This mixed-gender audience response supports Showalter's observation that 'screaming' is a plural expression of Western 'fan' behaviour adopted by both women and men in appropriate group contexts (Woman's Hour, Radio Four, 11/6/04). It also embodied a vast array of passions and located amongst these were overtly sexualised requests for Jarvis to get his 'kit off' for example. Although I observed these to be specifically female desires at the time, the following ironic exchange destabilises the 'classic' heterosexual model:

F1: He is the most amazing looking sexy guy on this planet. The way he moves on stage, I think that's what makes him...so good.

M1: He really gives us something to think about in the evenings=

M2: =Really rather too much to think about in the evenings!

F2: Everyone fancies him, even all the men.

M3: Yeah I love him, he's gorgeous.

F2: He gets offers from everyone you know, everyone's just shouting 'oh Jarvis, I wanna shag you.'<sup>223</sup>

These 'manifest' responses at first appear to uphold Bourdieu's (1984) division between popular and more 'intermittent and distant' bourgeois modes of participation discussed in

---

<sup>223</sup> From an interview with fans outside Sheffield City Hall after Pulp's 'homecoming' concert in the BBC2 documentary, *No Sleep 'til Sheffield* (18/12/95).

chapter two, but the marked contrast between the public reception of prodigal proportions and studied indifference of the invited back stage ‘audience’<sup>224</sup> serves to complicate Bourdieu’s static, binary perspective. Goffman (1967) provides a useful theatrical analogy to contextualise and analyse these distinctive behaviours, relating public and private ‘faces’ or social identities to that of frontstage/backstage performances. As a more abstract concept, ‘backstage’ is defined ‘as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course’ (cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, p. 51). This was clearly marked by the disparity between Jarvis Cocker, who continued to enact the role of star by signing autographs for younger ‘fans’, and the distinctly muted ‘backstage’ performance of the select, invited few.

When comparing his early affective alliances with the Stranglers and Pulp, Nick’s account sheds light on the social conventions informing these context-specific modes of participation, by highlighting the critical impact of cultural and social proximity:

Well you’d go down the Limit and kind of get to know [Pulp] a bit, you were kind of swimming round the same pond [yeah] so you know you could find yourself having a piss with Jarvis stood next to you and I suppose if you were a big fan of the Stranglers... and Hugh Cornwall was having a piss stood next to you, you’d be like ‘ooh ooh’ cos it’d be like such an unexpected thing you know... I’d still go to as many concerts of Pulps that I could [right] and I still bought the records but it was never like, will you autograph my record or anything. Because people were swimming round the same pond

JR: What like there isn’t that safe kind of distance?

Nick: Yeah I mean we’re all going down the Limit and on the same kind of level and if you think about that hierarchy kind of thing, if you started doing something like that then I suppose the hierarchy gets=

JR:=That’s right, you kind of elevate them

Nick: Yeah and that you know wouldn’t be cool.

---

<sup>224</sup> Including pop ‘stars’ such as Joanne from the Human League, local journalists, other less successful musicians, friends and family members.

The notion of 'cool' signifies a cultural barometer to demarcate appropriate levels of affect that simultaneously confirms intimacy and saves 'face', given that the maintenance of face is a fundamental condition of interaction (Goffman, 1967). Thus, both backstage and frontstage modes of participation are highly ritualised and regulated, not in terms of socio-economic status or indeed gender, but access (Fonarow, 1997).

According to Stacey, Bourdieu also overlooks the ways in which pleasures 'operate at a sensual and emotional level for female spectators' (1994, p. 97). This emphasis on setting is particularly relevant when analysing the gendered pleasures of frontstage fans I observed. In direct contrast to the seedy rock 'n' roll milieu of many local venues, the Arena provides a more 'feminised environment for consumption' (ibid.), representing a safe cultural space for women of all ages to consume collectively and with greater emotional and sexual freedom, within the boundaries of frontstage norms, than the small-scale, male-dominated gig. As I noted that night:

There are two young women in front of me who have literally stripped to their underwear [in response to the song of the same title] and they're having the time of their lives. They appear to be oblivious to the rest of this block and are clinging to each other, singing to each other. Pulp are secondary here and Jarvis's voice merely a backdrop for their own exclusive pleasures.

This is not to deny the power inequalities produced and perpetuated within the framework of fame, whereby the very construction of 'pop star' relies on a complex combination of media positioning, cultural distance and fan fantasy, as Caroline explains:

I went to see them thirteen years ago...at The Hallamshire or some other grotty pub somewhere, some pub, and I saw them about three or four times, do you know what I mean? Pulp were just a local band that you go and see...when I'd seen them previously it was a very small stage and I was pressed right up against it, you know about 6 feet away and then suddenly you're like at this major thing in awe...I remember [Jarvis] being this very ugly quirky guy and then suddenly this transformation. Oh wow, it's brilliant, I love it.

What is particularly incongruous is how, with ironic pleasure, Cocker viewed his newly constructed role of sex symbol as a 'triumph' because - as he readily admits - he was never conventionally attractive (No Sleep 'til Sheffield, BBC2, 18/12/95). Herein lies the fundamental contradiction within the ethos of ordinariness, for it is the band rather than fans who have been transformed - and have simultaneously transformed themselves with the aid of Island record's 'starmaking machinery' - into desirable and unobtainable commodities for mass consumption, thus generating a process of mis-recognition for younger female fans: Look at me because I am not you.

The group's complex investments in fame and ordinariness, invention and authenticity are clearly articulated in the following statement: 'Thou shalt not worship false idols. Can't you see that you are the future, the bearers of the flame and all that stuff? It's easy - just close your eyes and count to ten' (cited in the *Official Pulp Festival programme*, 1996). Thus, embedded within the ethos of ordinariness is an arguably more transformative theme: Look at me because you too are - or could be - like me. All the co-researchers identified Sheffield as a specific site of identification that validated their pleasures of both recognition and ownership. Below, I examine the critical role of place in these particular fan/performer alliances.

### **Pulp and Sheffield: re-location**

'To local indie lovers in Sheffield, Pulp are ever present. Just try and go to the Leadmill on a Saturday and not hear a Pulp song - trust me, it's impossible. They are as dyed in the wool of the city's musical fabric as Shakespeare is embedded in GCSE curriculums'.<sup>225</sup>

The local takes on a particular resonance in global narratives of stardom, functioning as a marker of authenticity. Cocker's Northern dialect and local references, his very

---

<sup>225</sup> BBC website- South Yorkshire Sense of Place - Pulp (19/4/03).



Sheffieldness, thus obscured the marketing processes involved in the transformation from gangly outsider to Britpop icon and sex symbol. As one *Guardian* review proclaimed, ‘in an age of prefabricated pop stars, Jarvis is the genuine article’ (cited in Heatley, 1998, p. 6).<sup>226</sup> The working class roots of band members further enhanced Pulp’s authenticity: ‘they represent the working class of Sheffield, they are someone to identify with’ (questionnaire comment, 1996).

*Common People* is the song that most clearly combines the politics of place and social class, achieving ‘a kind of grand consensual splendour’ (Ian Penman, *The Guardian*, 16/6/95) which cemented Cocker’s standing as ‘ambassador for the misunderstood working classes’ (*Time Out* review cited in Aston, 1996, p. 168). However, Skeggs queries the romanticised notion of class as ‘a noble category’, rhetorically asking: ‘who would want to be seen as working class?’ (1997, p. 95), apart from academics once they have achieved middle-class ‘citizenship’ and can reflect on the fact that ‘what I was is not what I am now’ (ibid., p. 97).

A process of repositioning was equally apparent for Jarvis, the emergent pop star, as his social status only became politicised when he relocated to London, subsequently adopting a kind of writer-in-exile persona to contemplate Northern working class life from the vantage points of a prestigious art college and later, recording company. These reflections produced the pivotal album, *Different Class* (1995), with the title embodying and expanding upon Bourdieu’s ‘generative formula’ to signify ‘both socio-economic category and a particular level of quality’ (Storey, 1998, p. 427). As Cocker explains:

---

<sup>226</sup> Other journalists were equally effusive. ‘Jarvis Cocker stood for The Truth; here is a man who knows that life is dull and difficult and full of bad sex and sorrow and cockroaches...A star had come among us, but this was one truly rare in the constellation of bona-fide glitterati: a human being...He’s just like us - only more talented and cleverer and funnier’ (Sylvia Patterson, *Vox*, September 1996).

It's a phrase in Sheffield that describes something good, like 'top class' or something, but there is the fact that a lot of the subject matter is me coming to London, which is the first time I found out I was from a different class, so the title seems appropriate...the idea of dealing with my experiences in London and the differences between Sheffield and London (cited in Heatley, 1998, pp 27-28).

Due to this combination of seemingly autobiographical introspection and class-consciousness, identification with Jarvis as lyricist was particularly noted. 'It's like we all know where he's come from, he was brought up at Intake you know, not a good area, and he's been through it all, so he'll be singing about things and you're thinking 'yeah, I feel like that a lot of the time, yeah I know what you mean Jarvis'' (Kathryn, 1996).

This assumed intersubjectivity functioned as a key source of social and cultural capital for local fans, legitimating their everyday experiences and local knowledge within the context of 'belonging, community and a shared past' (Lewis, G., 1992, p. 144). Sheila in particular, allies herself with local music as a 'symbolic anchor' (ibid.) to fulfil her need to belong:

This identity thing is about trying to adopt a place and put down roots...like when people say to me 'oh you're an in-comer' and I say, 'Yeah are you?' 'No I was born and bred here' and I say 'well you're lucky then that you haven't had to move' [mm] but loads of people move all over the world so we've all got a right to live somewhere and err I have had the good fortune to have stayed in Sheffield...to have a music identity does sort of make you feel you're part of something.

Pulp in general, and Jarvis in particular, were thus constructed as 'place identifiers' (Lovering 1995) that literally grounded the lived experience of local fans to a sense of place. Many assumed a privileged affective connection to the group, embodying both spatial and possessive qualities:

Jane: [It's because of] songs like Sheffield Sex City and Disco 2000 with its 'fountain down the road'. I think it's because Sheffield people can relate to them...whereas people round the country can...[only] imagine it, we can actually see it in our minds when we're listening to it, and that's what I love so much about it.

Rowan: You know like people say erm gigs are so much better in their home town because like people say Oasis play better in Manchester because it's their home town? [mm] Well it was like that in Sheffield. People seemed to have that sort of err connection because he talked about all the places that had changed and stuff and it makes you feel better because that makes it personal to like.

Cocker's narrative of place is indeed a 'fictional reality' (Moores, 1997, p. 241), re-constructed as 'Pulpsville UK' on Pulp People's website, Pulponline. Here, a nostalgic version of 1980s Sheffield is re-presented for fans across the globe, with photos of old landmarks that are commemorated in various tracks, including: the fountain 'possibly' outlined in *Disco 2000* (1995); Kelvin flats (*Deep Fried in Kelvin*, 1993); Forge Dam (*Wickerman*, 2001) and Stanhope Road (*Babies*, 1992). Of this entire city's musical heritage, it is Pulp who most evocatively personify 'local structures of feeling' (Taylor et al., 1996) that remain to this day, symbolically Sheffield.

To summarise, the 'social psychology and affective relations of fan-performer identification' (Negus, 1992, p. 77) operated on a multiplicity of levels for fans, both old and new, articulating a sense of belonging, authenticity, intersubjectivity and pleasure. The gendered distinctions of aesthetic discrimination versus starlust are therefore both reductionist and over-simplistic, yet all the participants constructed similar narrative devices to privilege their cultural status against imagined 'others'. Grossberg suggests that 'this practice of critical encapsulation divides the cultural world into Us and Them, but that difference does not necessarily constitute an identity' (1992c, p. 163). Rather, it negates assumptions about passive or pathological fandom by marking out who they are not. It is important to note that fandom is only one of many channels through which these differences are articulated and experienced. Gender, age, social class, place and ethnicity are significant factors; but of equal importance are the shifting social relationships within which music making and listening are grounded.



One recurring motif employed to establish an illusory boundary between the discerning few and feminised mass is the ‘loaded colloquialism’ (Thornton, 1995, p. 92) of the ‘mainstream’. I will now assess the group’s second significant landmark, *This Is Hardcore* (1998), to explore how perceptions of the mainstream shift according to where music makers and listeners are positioned on the success continuum.

### **Pulp and the mainstream: dislocation**

‘Having been a marginal person on the dole...you feel you’re part of this section of society that is shoved to the sidelines... It seemed really important to actually get in there and be heard...but the mainstream dilutes and blands you out. I had to make sure that we didn’t lose ourselves’ (Cocker in the *NME*, 28/3/98).

‘It’s as if they are saying fuck you to all the non believers, saying we know we are the greatest and we don’t care if people don’t recognise that; it really doesn’t matter any more’ (Pulp People, Spring 1998, issue 22).

After their concert at the V96 festival in Warrington, Pulp retreated to various studios for over a year to write and record their third album for Island, *This Is Hardcore* (TIH). Controversy surrounded this record, from its advertising and ‘pornographic’ cover art to musical styles, variously described as ‘twisted and savage’, ‘leftfield’ and ‘as commercial as yesterday’s pants’ (*Select*, April 1998). *The Independent on Sunday* (19/4/98) denounced the imagery as ‘sexist’;<sup>227</sup> posters were defaced and the anti-fame/mainstream stance, filtered through the metaphor of pornography, created a furore amongst Pulp fans fought out in the letters pages of the popular music media. I cite one letter that captures the essence of this raging debate:

Pulp should tread very carefully over the next few months. They’re a great band and all, but am I alone in thinking that the single ‘This is Hardcore’ is little more than a deliberate attempt to shed those pesky teen fans they’ve accumulated over the past two years? I hate it when bands decide that they want to be taken seriously, preferably by middle-aged men who think it’s all gone down-hill since

---

<sup>227</sup> Although Candida didn’t concede the claims of sexism, her singular status in the group was apparently made manifest by the choice of artwork: ‘I was a bit surprised when Jarvis showed me the picture – it really hit me at that point that I was a girl in a group with 4 boys, which is something I’m not usually conscious of. I mean on the whole a girl wouldn’t have chosen that picture’ (Pulp People, Autumn 1998, issue 24).



the mid-70's. Coming from Jarvis and co, it's a real betrayal. They seemed to understand pop music at all its various levels, but now I'm not so sure. 'This is Hardcore' might be a great song, but deliberately alienate/patronise your fans and you might find you don't have any left. Watch out, Mr. Cocker... (*Select*, May 1998).

That bastion of rock media, the *NME*, contributed to this received opinion, describing the record as a 'self-consciously adult project' 'deliberately' produced to 'alienate the two million teenyboppers who bought *Different Class*' (*NME*, 28/3/98). On a quantitative level, many fans did appear to withdraw their 'consumer power' (McRobbie and Garber, 1976/1991). The first single entered the charts at number twelve, representing the lowest Pulp placement in four years (*The Guardian*, 27/3/98). And while the album went straight in at number one with 50,000 sales<sup>228</sup>, it dropped to number seven the following week which, as *The Guardian* remarked, 'isn't even enough for a gold disc' (17/4/98).

In numerous interviews, Cocker presented variations of the following two explanatory themes. Firstly, that the pornographic imagery was intended to signify the dehumanising aspects of celebrity<sup>229</sup> and secondly, that the album was a necessary development from the overt pop optimism of *Different Class*. Indeed, Candida claimed that 'there were some songs that could've been instant hits, but we took them off!' (*NME*, 28/3/98). Even the singles that were released appeared to adhere to 'a strange plot to sell fewer records' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 5/6/98). Island A&R, Nigel Coxon, suggested the following cyclical analysis as a justification for the 'perceived industry failure' of TIH:

Things were very much swinging against Britpop... and you were seeing the birth of... this new sort of celebrity pop, post-Spice Girls, and then into S Club, All Saints, all that stuff. So the climate changed very quickly, and it's a fickle climate... if you analyse it demographically, market trends, buying patterns with alternative music and mainstream music, generally alternative's down at about 20 percent... and mainstream pop is at 40 percent, and occasionally you get moments

---

<sup>228</sup> In contrast to the 133,000 sales *Different Class* generated in the first week of release.

<sup>229</sup> Eric Clarke and Niccola Dibben's musicological analysis of *This is Hardcore* draws similar conclusions, stating: 'The effect [of the treated tannoy-like vocal] is distant, listless, empty, hollow, and the overall character... is of a run-down, worn-out glamour' (2000, p. 236).

where the alternative, like the Pulp-Blur-Oasis moment, gets catapulted right up at about 40 percent, and they usually drop off again (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 335).

In short, the feminization of 'mainstream pop' rendered it, once again, 'a dirty word' (Susan Sulley, 1994). Indeed, the *gendered* logic of art versus commerce (Weinstein, 1999) is so powerfully entwined in popular music myth that Coxon, who became Director of A&R at Island during 1999-2000, subsequently established his own alternative label, stating: 'Being director of A&R... was just awful 'cos you're being told to sign hits hits hits! I'm more interested in doing independent stuff really' (cited in Sturdy, 2003, p. 426). Sturdy proffers the most reasoned aesthetic assessment of TIH's low sales, pointing out that it lacked the coherent vision of earlier albums, arguably because Jarvis had finally exhausted his retrospective trawl through early Sheffield life. Thus, the media inflated the anti-fame alienation of a record that was, conversely, 'probably the most conventional collection of music ever to have been released by Pulp... an archetypal Chris Thomas rock production in fact' (ibid., p. 334).

The slippery 'logic of labelling' (Frith, 1996) charting the band's journey from 'underground' obscurity through 'cutting edge' indie and 'mainstream' pop/teenybop into 'leftfield' or 'conventional' rock provides a powerful illustration of the ways in which genre ideologies are appropriated to reinforce constructed gender and generational differences in the discriminatory quest for value *within* the popular; a quest which simultaneously attracts and expels female consumers. Pulp's story therefore confirms the work of Thornton and Frith, who argues that processes of discrimination are as prevalent within mass culture as in high, identifying new tensions within 'low' culture as the mainstream versus the avant-garde. 'Perhaps the most striking and recurrent feature of the continuing standoff of the aesthete and the philistine (a necessary discursive counterpoint) is that for both sides *the other is feminine*' (Frith, 1998, p. 579).

Thornton reaches similar conclusions. Examining the work of Hebdige, McRobbie and others, she argues that ‘inconsistent fantasies’ of the mainstream are reproduced throughout the subcultural literature: ‘they are probably the single most important reason why subsequent cultural studies find pockets of symbolic resistance wherever they look’ (1995, p. 93). In the classic text, *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (1979) for example, Hebdige denigrates the mainstream as a site of bourgeoisification against which subcultural identities are constructed. When addressing the cultural activities and locations of young women, McRobbie (1984; 1991) reverses but also maintains this subcultural divide, by ‘celebrating’ the mainstream (Thornton, 1995, p. 96). Although challenging these taken-for-granted academic distinctions, Thornton notes the enduring ideological significance of the mainstream in clubcultural discourse, constructed as a place ‘where Sharon and Tracey dance around their handbags’ (ibid., p. 99). Employed as a ‘synonym for unhip’ (ibid., p. 104), imaginary mainstreams are thus feminized and despised.

Crucially, the principal dualisms of ‘mainstream’ versus ‘difference’ and ‘artifice’ versus ‘ordinariness’ articulate ideological rather than musical value judgements: what is particularly fascinating are the ways in which these distinctions were continuously re-negotiated according to Pulp’s location on the ‘continuum of success’. Previously imagined as a place of belonging and acceptance, Cocker’s perceptions of the mainstream, highlighted by this second ‘hardcore’ landmark, increasingly cohered with that of ‘old fans’ to ‘other’ the feminine. In the final part of this case study, I therefore return to the ‘fans’ themselves to consider how they subsequently re-negotiated their affective alliances in response to Pulp’s retreat from the so-called mainstream.



## **Pulp and their people: a postscript**

After one more album release (*We Love Life*, 2001), the following announcement was posted on Pulponline.

Pulp are to end their relationship with Universal/Island Records after their next album, which will be a Greatest Hits package scheduled for the Autumn. Keen to avoid the suspicious flannel which usually attends such partings of the ways, the band are attempting to be as straightforward as possible about events without boring the arse off everyone. Put simply, the option for the band's next (fifth) album with Universal/Island was pretty expensive (record contracts being structured with ascending advances); Island proffered a re-negotiation and Pulp said 'no, ta', preferring to walk away (28/6/01).

And the following year: 'Pulp aren't splitting up; they are simply taking time out to do other things...It follows that without a working group a fan club is of less importance - hence the decision to wind down' (Pulp People, Summer, 2002, issue 38). Pulponline was sporadically updated (14/9/03 and 4/4/04) but the fanclub is now defunct. Several 'unofficial' fansites have kept their message boards open however, and checking out the posts in 'Bar Italia' and 'Common People' illustrates how fantalk continues to circulate after the demise of the object of fandom. These self-identified 'hardcore' enthusiasts appear to have attained the status of 'cult' fan, according to the three dimensions proposed by Hills (2002): tautological, whereby fans self-define; temporal, in that fandom provides enduring (if contested) cultural identities; and affective, drawing on Grossberg's notions of investment and invigoration. Hills also notes the potential contradictions when attempting to identify all three dimensions at work. Pop fandom, for example, may be an intensely felt experience, but may not endure over time (2002, p. xv).

This was certainly the case for several of the co-researchers that I re-contacted in the summer of 2003 (see appendix 1). Jane continued to define herself as a Pulp fan, although she didn't buy the final album and left the fanclub in 2000. After graduating from Queen's University, Belfast with a degree in Byzantine Studies, she moved to



Greece to teach English. In response to the question, 'how did you feel when you heard about the break-up of the band?' - she wrote:

I could understand their decision because they have been in Pulp for many years and now all have families they want to devote more time to I imagine. It was a shame that their last couple of singles weren't hits like in the 1995/96 heyday. Moreover, when I look back at bands such as Blur and Oasis who are...still producing quality music...it makes me think that Pulp went out on a bit of a low which doesn't seem right after all they achieved. I suppose I was disappointed when they broke up because I expected them to have a 'come back' album which would be a high to go out on.

There are two interesting themes contained in this account. Firstly, the 'come back' is a typical motif in the process of 'storying the self', whereby people construct themselves as 'heroines' in their own life stories (Stacey, 1994), simultaneously drawing on their idols' achievements to re-present these narratives in terms of 'progress and personal control' (Finnegan, 1997a, p. 89). Secondly, the 'heyday' she nostalgically refers to was borne out by the majority of people voting on-line for the 'Best Pulp Single/Album In The World - Ever', as *Common People* and *Different Class*<sup>230</sup> were the most widely nominated records.

The links between success and access clearly shaped this populist consensus, causing others such as Kathryn, who returned to Sheffield after achieving a degree in 'Lit and drama', to relocate value in less accessible texts. 'Tunes like *Razzmatazz* or *Pink Glove* rarely get an airing in public, but I like that. Those tunes are for the people who Pulp mattered to, people like me I suppose.' Kathryn is equally reflective about her favourite 'outstanding' album. 'Listening to *His 'n' Hers* always makes me feel nostalgic about my mid-teens, the mid nineties (going to concerts and festivals and hanging around my mates houses listening to indie albums). Pulp made us feel good to be a little geeky.' Outlining

---

<sup>230</sup> *Different Class* received 4,483 nominations, 43.58% of the vote (www.pulponline.com).

the centrality of music to her 'friendship circles', Kathryn restated her ongoing sonic 'love affair' over several pages. Although clearly continuing to value her 'eclectic' tastes, the resulting distinctions were framed in a confessional mode: 'If I'm honest, I judge people on their taste in music' - 'I'm a bit fussy as I know what I like. Sad isn't it?!

Rowan was much less communicative. She had also been away at university and wrote briefly of her impending isolation in returning to Sheffield, a place that held such an evocative sense of belonging in earlier years. Describing her younger fan-self as 'more obsessive then', Pulp were now relegated to the past. On the other hand, Sheila felt her appreciation had developed with time: 'I've admired all they've done with greater depth of feeling and thought', whilst continuing to eschew the label 'fan' - 'admirer more the word, or just totally in love with certain musicians!' After giving up work as a childminder in 2002, Sheila subsequently enrolled on the aptly named 'Access Course' in English Literature and History at Sheffield College, with a view to studying at degree level. The connections she draws between a love of music - 'I cannot live without it!' - and her 'other passion' for poetry and literature, 'which has been dormant for many years', underlie this return to education. I can envisage a time when Sheila and Kathryn, who described music researcher as 'a dream job', are both grappling with their 'double access' (Grisrud, 1998) status as 'scholar fans', thus converting their 'extracurricular' (Thornton, 1995) fan cultural capital into a legitimate asset to trade.

At the time of writing (March 2006), Caroline has left teaching to become a full-time artist. Her partner is still in a prominent Sheffield band and refusing to be 'aged out', she continues to go to gigs. Their youngest son has also formed a band and literally following in his father's footsteps, his instrument of choice is the bass guitar. Kathryn too acknowledged a particular debt to her father: 'my love of music came from my Dad and

we talk about it whenever we're together - I even took him to Glasto 2002.' These enduring familial pathways and the multiple social networks that serve to keep them open provide a further reminder of the significant and meaningful value certain music has in our everyday lives.

The 'value problem' (Frith, 1996) remains a challenging one nevertheless, raising particularly sensitive issues for feminists. Frith suggests that claiming the transformative potential of specific popular texts and practices, as I have just done, necessitates a scrupulous evaluation of our own processes of aesthetic discrimination. 'Not to say that Charles Dickens was better than Barbara Cartland (which I certainly believe) seemed to me to be not only dishonest and/or condescending...but also to evade an important analytic problem, how judgement works in all cultural spheres' (1996, pp 8-9). If Dickens is 'better' than Barbara Cartland, does it then follow that Pulp were 'better' than Boyzone? As an early supporter fan whose esteem - for the music and the makers - has developed exponentially as a result of a considerable immersion and investment in the group, my answer is a most resounding 'yes!' Crucially, Frith claims that to make this judgement doesn't necessarily 'denigrate' Cartland readers - or Boyzone fans - and yet I find this problematic.

When writing about female desire in slash writing for example, Mirna Cicioni avows to 'deliberately avoid value judgements of all kinds as irrelevant to the question of "what some women want"' (1998, p. 154). Hills also critiques Cultural Studies' enduring engagement with the politics of taste, suggesting that 'perhaps, when academics describe subcultural capital and its authenticities...they are, in part, describing a cloaked version of themselves' (2002, p. 54). Whereas Frith concurs, arguing that the academic fascination with the popular is prefaced on a mind/body split - 'as intellectuals fantasize

about the pleasures of mindlessness...audience demands are determined by the taste of academics' (1998, p. 581), he also suggests that as 'organic' intellectuals, fans are likely to be engaged in similar anxiety-driven struggles over cultural worth (1992, p. 182). Pulp's story highlights the ways in which these ongoing struggles produced a social hierarchy of fandom structured by longevity, proximity and 'hipness'.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this case study has examined the most typical role in popular music for women and girls, that of being a fan. I noted two key processes at work. Firstly, that fandom offers a range of mediated pleasures, providing a meaningful context through which social relations and a sense of value were constructed. Secondly, how these pleasures were regulated by external agencies such as the fanclub as well as the fans themselves, through acknowledging and simultaneously distancing themselves from the pervasive, feminised discourses of passivity and pathology. These discourses have particular resonance within the framework of fame, as female fans are typically dismissed as an indiscriminating passive mass or as starstruck 'groupies'. When assessed from a social constructionist perspective however, the notion of 'doing fandom' serves to problematise these static, negative representations by highlighting the ways in which star/fan power relationships are under a constant process of negotiation according to their position on the success continuum. The industrial context is therefore a vital mechanism shaping the 'logic of access' for music makers and listeners, reconfigured as stars and fans within the framework of fame.

Pulp's particular pathway was informed by inconsistent narratives of 'making it' and the 'mainstream', producing a significant cluster of band/fan 'value gaps' at the height of their popularity. For whilst the consumer power of female fans is a crucial element in



securing the landmark of chart success, the realisation of this key landmark illustrated the paradoxical consequences of both 'selling out' and 'letting in' for music listeners and makers positioned at the 'pinnacle of the cool hierarchy'. Ultimately, the hierarchy of fandom doesn't revolve around notions of value per se, but authority (Bennett et al., 1993; O'Brien, 1995; Frith, 1996; MacDonald, 1998). Although I clearly have the power to re-present these narratives and control this particular version of the story, the authoritative voice of Pulp People was the fan-club editor, who did indeed represent Frith's 'self-declared' fan.

As the arbiter of 'cool', Alex's role was threefold: to establish and police the legitimate boundaries of Pulp fandom, shield the band from the perceived excesses of their fans, whilst simultaneously 'sav[ing] [the] musicians from themselves' (Frith, 1996, p. 67). Her institutionally-sanctioned status of 'professional fan' enabled the pronouncement of highly elitist judgements that 'worked' in conjunction with the shifting interpretations of two other significant players in Pulp's 'game' of cultural distinction: Cocker and Coxon. I suggest therefore that rather than being a bit 'peculiar', the 'dialectic of value' underlying Alex's paradoxical stance continues to resonate with some of the key gendered narratives that shape how pop is made to mean. What is less certain however is the exchange value of her accumulated capitals beyond the context of Pulp and their People, as legitimate currency in the material 'world of work'.

April 2003

Josie Robson (Sheffield Hallam University type person) here.

I was sorry but not surprised to read about the demise of a great institution and I just wanted to ask, what next for you? A well-earned rest I suspect.

Hi Josie,

You were certainly right - I've been in Australia 'resting' for 4 months, just got back and am contemplating my re-introduction into the world of work. Will be doing a bit of updating and tidying up of the site but since I'm no longer being paid, it will be a very small amount!

Alex

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

The purpose of feminist ethnographic study is to elicit and interpret women's experiences of, and roles within, the culture under analysis. Using 'the female fan' as a contradictory metaphor of access and exclusion, this feminist ethnography has investigated the ways in which gendered musical practices are constructed and contested within an 'extroverted' research setting - Sheffield's live music scene/s. The holistic, relational principles of anthropological ethnography and comparative case study method, have enabled place-specific and 'extra-local associations' to be drawn across disciplinary perspectives, pathways and places, thus providing some important links between previously discrete areas in popular music studies and feminist theory. Doing ethnography has also strengthened my commitment to the transformative possibilities of feminist praxis, combining the 'emancipatory impulse' (Charles, 1996) of feminist politics with pragmatic strategies for social change, through the integration of knowledge and action (Reinharz, 1992).

In this concluding chapter, I will clarify how the empirical findings, theoretical framework and political research aims contribute to, and further our understanding of, the relationship between theory and practice. Firstly, I outline key empirical findings to illustrate how social constructions of gender are variously produced through meanings of fandom, 'making it', scene and place. Secondly, I examine the usefulness of a social constructionist epistemology - and through the lens of social constructionism, theories of fandom, cultural capital, interpretive communities and scene - for analysing the ways in which gender inequalities are negotiated within particular spatial, cultural and socio-economic contexts. Thirdly, I discuss how the research findings have been put into practice, in order to highlight the constructive and yet 'fundamentally ambiguous' (Hekman, 1990) consequences of feminist praxis.

## **Finding the female fan: empirical conclusions**

### *Meanings of fandom*

The sociological and psychological dimensions of consuming and investing in popular music are extremely varied, ranging from peer acceptance and compensatory companionship to feelings of superiority and prestige. Two themes are articulated in all the participants' accounts nonetheless: establishing difference from other cultural groups and the need for belonging. Firstly, declaring individualised musical preferences operates as a means of identification and differentiation from other taste/fan cultures. To paraphrase Bourdieu (1984, p. 173), taste both classifies and is classified. The contentious notion of musical taste is therefore used as a vehicle for developing and maintaining social relationships with like tasted others. Belonging is the second recurring theme. Shared musical value judgements represent a 'symbolic anchor' (Lewis, G, 1992) and affective alliance to particular scenes, 'pathways' or performers, but the case study findings also problematise romantic notions of community by highlighting divisions between and within fan cultures that are typically constructed around perceived gender differences.

In order to present themselves as 'listeners of distinction' (Vroomen, 2004), many participants attempted to evade the 'abject' characteristics associated with female fans - femininity, immaturity (Lewis, 1992) and irrationality - by appropriating a masculinist model of connoisseurship. Their 'fandom' was constructed as a productive, rational cultural engagement in contrast to 'obsessive' friends, or even their younger, less-discriminating selves. Identification with the category and label of fan is therefore negotiated through feminised discourses of fandom - pathology, passivity and pleasure - that serve to devalue the status of girls and women as discerning music listeners.

Meanings of female fandom are also mediated and regulated via ‘mainstream’ institutions such as the record company, media and fanclub, whereby discourses of stardom are typically constructed to reinforce the ‘great divide’ between music consumption and production. The stereotype of a hysterical, subordinate mass of female fans ‘in awe of the male on a pedestal’ was advanced and simultaneously challenged in the case study of the ‘Britpop’ act Pulp, as the group’s success enabled a wider audience of young women to access previously restricted pleasures. This ‘feminization process’ (Frith and McRobbie, 1990) was seen to dilute the authenticity of the ‘object of fandom’, creating divisions within the fanbase organised around ‘old’ and ‘new’ constructs of fan. Consequently, the pleasures of access that ‘mainstream’ success allows were perceived to be in direct conflict with the pleasures of exclusivity so-called ‘old’ fans attempted to preserve, illustrating the ‘inescapable contradictions’ (Hills, 2002) between use and exchange values in the popular music marketplace.

Viewing fandom as a social hierarchy provides a plausible framework for assessing the ways in which power inequalities are perpetuated and legitimated within fan cultures (Bourdieu, 1984; MacDonald, 1998). When considering the role of ‘Pulp People’ as an ‘institutional authority’ (Stacey, 1994), I found the ‘hierarchized’ structure of the fanclub to be organised around key markers of status conferred upon ‘old’ male *and* female fans: authority, ‘hipness’ (Thornton, 1995) and longevity. Members of this imaginary elitist clique were assumed to privilege form over functionality, mirroring Bourdieu’s bourgeois modes of audience participation. By contrast, ‘new’ fans were assumed to privilege functionality over form and were thus sexualized and trivialized for their inability to appreciate the music in ‘appropriate’ ways. However, whereas Bourdieu argues that conceptions of the body represent material distinctions of inequality, I found that ‘cool spectators’ were classified according to their proximity to the object of fandom. In short, the more distant the relationship, the more ‘appropriate’ the fantasy, although



heterosexual notions of 'mindless' pleasure were censored by the authoritative female fan club editor and by female fans themselves.

The masculinist discourse of productivity sheds further explanatory light on the inconsistencies or 'value gaps' (Frith, 1996) between 'ordinary' fan readings and the meta-discourse of 'professional fans', including Pulp's fan club editor, drummer and A&R man. These various constructs of professional fandom both confirm and extend Willis's (1990) notion of 'producers as consumers', by demonstrating how fandom is a springboard for 'symbolic creativity' which, in turn, may provide the potential for exchange and legitimation into 'symbolic capital'. Therefore, while Fiske (1989) supposes that fan productivity is undertaken by powerless groups to compensate for their lack of status, aspirations to legitimacy represented a key site of struggle within Pulp's fanclub, not merely reflecting an essentialist hierarchical structure determined by gender and other markers of inequality such as class or youth, but rather, fought out on the grounds of authority.

Belief's fanclub was organised along similar aspirational lines to that of 'Pulp People', but lacked the institutional legitimation of the major record company and press. Due to their aspirant but amateur status, the fan/performer nexus was also more apparent in the band's use of cover versions, although Emma was keen to erase the 'taint' of fandom in an attempt to construct and maintain some cultural distance between her 'natural' stardom and core supporter fans of 'Believers'. The notion of the 'producerly consumer' was more immediately evident in Velodrome 2000's DIY pathway, which promoted an 'access aesthetic' for many of the female participants. However, 'value gaps' were equally common within both case studies, highlighting discrepancies between the acquisition and status of fan social and cultural capital.

In line with Hills (2002), I would argue that Bourdieu's model can be critiqued for failing to recognise unpredictability, conflict and movement within taste/fan cultures. I found the concept of interpretive communities more flexible for assessing the ways in which the interdependent values of 'aesthetic quality' and 'social relevance' are under a constant process of negotiation within interpretive communities (Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998). This is not to suggest that interpretive strategies are so inconsistent as to defy analysis. One of the main strengths of 'ethnography proper' is the emphasis placed on viewing relationships in a range of contexts over time - and over time, recognisable ways of knowing and doing cohere.

Within the live, local 'worlds' of rock and pop, I developed the interlocking and overlapping categories of *supporter fan* and *sceneist* to demonstrate how meanings of 'local' fandom are variously constructed in relation to place, genre, gender and interpersonal links with particular performers. Finnegan's spatial and social metaphor of 'pathways' has proved particularly useful in challenging perceptions of the passive, mass audience, by emphasising the 'purposive' and habitual elements of musical activities, viewing them, above all, as socially produced collective rituals. In Sheffield's numerous 'amateur' pathways, distinctions between production and consumption are equally blurred because participatory audiences are an elusive and therefore powerful factor in the success of live events. These empirical observations confirm Kirschner's (1998) theory of the 'continuum of success', whereby at a 'low level' of music making, many groups compete for audience recognition and support. And yet, supporting Cohen's findings, I have also found that the male domination and celebration of homosociality 'performed' at many small gigs in Sheffield serves to 'structurally exclude' female audiences (a contentious point I will return to below).

To summarise, whereas feminised discourses of pathology, passivity and pleasure are overwhelmingly used to demonise, trivialize and sexualise meanings of female fandom, the discourse of productivity enables the reintegration of relations of cultural production and consumption by locating the producerly impulse within fandom. Whilst this perspective confirms my hypothesis that musicians are ‘always already’ fans, the discourse of productivity reinforces a masculinist construct of the expert, ‘professional’ fan. As a result, the power relations and patterns of male and female behaviours produced through gendered discourses of fandom serve to limit popular music making as a viable means of self-expression for many girls and women. Thus, ‘abject’ constructs of female fandom and the structural exclusion from masculinised spaces produce multiple disadvantages for aspirant female musicians. In the following sections, I review the ways in which exclusionary practices are constructed and contested through meanings of ‘making it’, scene and place.

### *Meanings of making it*

For those women who struggled to circumnavigate widespread ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ (Coates, 1997), the desire to ‘make it’ was a powerful motivational force. Building on the work of Finnegan (1989), Cohen (1991), Frith (1992), Becker (1997), Kirschner (1998) and Strachan (2004), I identified five narratives of ‘making it’: romantic; economic; social; creative and ideological. Members of the interpretive communities employed various combinations of ‘making it’ narratives in three particular ways. Firstly, as an attempt to validate the quest for success; secondly, to provide consolation for potential failure (Weinstein, 1999); and thirdly, as a distancing mechanism from accusations of ‘selling out.’ Supporting Strachan (2004), I would argue that each narrative is ideologically constructed because they serve to shape the aesthetic practice of musical groups.

In the contrasting case studies of the unsigned groups for example, the possibilities of economic reward and social recognition were negotiated according to specific values informing their specialized pathways. Belief's 'mainstream' aspirations were shaped by the 'discovery myth', which promotes the tropes of 'luck' and 'talent' in the quest for success (Frith, 1983). The romantic ethos of 'talent will out' became so bound up with Belief's definition of success that they failed to develop the necessary 'social cultural capital' to access localised networks of power. Consequently, their 'logic of access' (Kirschner, 1998) was founded on the assumption that the music industry exists outside the boundaries of the local. On the other hand, the DIY aesthetic informing Velodrome 2000's translocal trajectory spurns conventional musical competence in favour of independence, collectivism and small-scale cultural productivity (Strachan, 2004). Meanings of making it are therefore constructed in line with ideologically informed musical value judgements which are, in turn, shaped by the discursive counterparts of success, failure, art and commerce.

Kirschner highlights the relative status of these concepts, arguing that they are variously interpreted according to a group's position on the success continuum. In order to test this assumption through the lens of both gender and genre, I developed the notion of *bandmarks* as a means of plotting each group's movement through social space. I found that bandmarks represent significant moments of negotiation and articulation for interpretive communities. In all three case studies, key moments - the record company showcase, John Peel session and top ten chart success - served to draw attention to a number of 'value gaps' within and between music makers and listeners. Kirschner's argument was most clearly reinforced in the Pulp case study, whereby 'quintessential' notions of success were renegotiated to exclude the imaginary mass of 'mainstream' fans. When assessed within a gendered *framework of fame*, we can see how meanings of making it are informed by elitist perceptions of 'selling out' *and* letting in.



Within the confines and concerns of this study, I conclude that the landmark of ‘mainstream’ success has two significant effects. Firstly, it enables increased accessibility for young female consumers, which in turn instigates dissent within the original fan ‘community’. Whilst highlighting the ‘inescapable contradictions’ between access and success, what I have coined the *paradox of popularity* also illustrates how meanings of making it are inextricably linked to meanings of the mainstream, which continue to be feminized and denigrated (Thornton, 1995; Frith, 1998). Secondly, success stimulates local productivity by raising the profile of a geographically based ‘scene’. This ‘feedback loop’ (Gilmore, 2001) was particularly evident in the mid-to-late 1990s in Sheffield and is equally apparent in the wake of the Arctic Monkey’s recent success. And yet wider patterns in pop production, illustrated by the renaissance of the band, serve to normalize the masculinism of music making within the chart friendly pathway of ‘indie’ rock. Consequently, although the sociable, creative, romantic and economic dimensions of ‘making it’ encourage many aspirant music makers, including women, the pathways that women enter and the musical roles they take up, are informed by a cluster of spatial, social, material and aesthetic factors, along with more widely established ‘extra-local’ conditions. When considering the meanings of ‘scene’, I will compare and contrast these conditions with those identified in Milton Keynes and Merseyside.

### *Meanings of scene*

Scene is an everyday concept employed by local media, music makers, listeners, promoters and so forth. Interpretations of meaning and use differ widely however, to articulate particular musical and social alliances, a pride of place or ‘regional sense of grievance’ (Taylor et al., 1996). Whilst genre differences were the most commonly cited distinctions informing contrasting perceptions of scene, the ideology of live was upheld as a marker of authenticity, ritual and pleasure across a range of pathways. Local scenes are also important sites of apprenticeship for music makers, although many bands within

Sheffield's scene/s function as micro 'men's clubs'. Attempting to 'find the female fan' from a local scenes perspective therefore proved to be equally problematic.

Homosocial cultures, from football to rock music, can be viewed as a 'celebration of masculinity' (Lees, 1986; Cohen, 2001), as active sites for forging relationships apart from women. Local popular musical practice is no exception. In line with Cohen and Finnegan, I was overwhelmed by the absence of women within Sheffield's 'worlds' of rock and pop, identifying a number of barriers - from the masculinist traditions perpetuated through band culture, to the male ownership of institutional spaces and places such as venues and training facilities - which exclude or deter women's participation in a range of music industry roles. Local media also contribute, by advancing the 'discursive exclusion' (Frith, 1992) of women. Drawing on narratives of 'Sheffieldness' produced through the city's topography and tradition of artisanship; insularity, independence and competitiveness have become typical masculinist characteristics ascribed to music makers. Of particular importance therefore are those moments of disruption when naturalised power relations are disturbed, illustrating how spaces and practices can be 'reterritorialised' (Coates, 1998) and potentially transformed.

The case studies of Belief and Velodrome 2000 establish two 'hidden' pathways where women performers are more evident. They also confirm and complicate the 'ideal' gendered strategies of inclusion I have identified - competence, collectivism and commitment. Belief's cabaret/rock aesthetic ran counter to Sheffield's prominent pathways of electronica and 'indie' rock. Indeed, they purposely dissociated themselves from the majority of local bands; drawing instead on a collective network of supporter fans generated through well trodden, classed social pathways. Emma's 'display' of performative femininity was characterised by the values of humour and hardness that - along with her 'god given' talent - attracted a core fanbase of women. She was, however,

constrained by a lack of economic, institutional, social and feminine capital, compounded by inter-group conflict and the material necessity of playing working men's clubs, which perpetuated Belief's isolation from wider scene activities.

Punk-pop also represented a 'highly particularistic' pathway in late 1990s Sheffield, but Velodrome 2000 were a visible, contentious presence and have since become a significant force in its promotion and extension. Indeed, at the time of writing (March 2006), there are a number of mixed-gender bands engaged in similar DIY activities, some of whom cite Penny as a role model. Yet she also contends that 'upward mobility' for women is restricted within the marginalised pathway of punk-pop, identifying the 'ageing out' process as a key barrier for all female artists. It would therefore be premature to suggest that the 'ideal' values of collectivism, commitment and 'incompetence as style' promoted through punk-pop provide a more agentic construct of scene for women players. Even so, whilst there are striking similarities between Cohen and Finnegan's empirical findings and the construction of Sheffield's scene/s as male, these 'hidden' case studies usefully disrupt the commonsense homosocial and heterosexist meanings of scene.

To summarise, each case study highlights many of the entrenched barriers that women 'producers as consumers' experience. Local scenes are male dominated and subordinate pathways are marginalised. Even chart success, founded on an economic imperative that actively promotes inclusion, is filtered through a peculiarly British lens of elitism which invests concepts such as 'selling out' and the 'mainstream' with continued ideological significance. What I have called the gendered logic of 'art versus commerce' therefore situates and scapegoats *the female fan* as the antithesis of creativity. In short, many women continue to be excluded from the creative and social opportunities afforded to male music makers and listeners. These general observations are complicated by particular manifestations of inequality produced in particular places at particular times.



In line with Massey (1994), I would argue that places construct identities and practices that are, in turn, influenced by wider material and ideological norms. Taylor et al.'s concept (1996), 'local structures of feeling,' provides a useful framework for identifying specific narratives of 'Sheffieldness' such as 'craft and graft', quality, individuality, insularity, sociability, familiarity, inequity and tenacity. These 'local structures of feeling' shape perceptions of access and exclusion for a range of 'scene' participants. They also contribute to the masculinist characteristics of Sheffieldness, for as Massey confirms: 'particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations' (1994, p. 2). Meanings of place are therefore produced through a complex interplay between social and structural conditions.

Sheffield, and South Yorkshire as a whole, remains insular and divided by local class and cultural structures. This is evident in the three distinct narratives of Sheffieldness produced in the case studies. Jarvis's Sheffield is 'a fictional reality' (Moore, 1997), a place he escaped from and subsequently reinvented from a distance. Emma's Sheffield is based on the traditional working class values of 'craft and graft'. Penny's narrative and lived experience of place also values these principles, but the 'DIY aesthetic' chimes with a visionary postmodern Sheffield of cultural productivity and entrepreneurship. These competing narratives of Sheffieldness illustrate the significance of place-specific conditions in the production of both opportunity and inequality, supporting Kirschner's assertion that 'the logic of access guarantees that the production of music is completely bound by relations of power' (1998, p. 253). For every Jarvis Cocker success story, I suspect there are thousands of people like Emma investing in the 'discovery myth' in an attempt to escape, however temporarily, the socio-structural conditions that define and



confine their social mobility in a post-industrial Northern city that is failing its 'common people'.

Building on the themes of exclusion (Cohen, 1991; Frith, 1992; Skeggs, 1997; Coates, 1997) and access (Skeggs, 1997), I will now examine the key organising concepts of study - fandom, cultural capital, interpretive communities and scene - to draw some theoretical conclusions which critique and develop popular music study from a feminist social constructionist perspective.

### **Finding the female fan: theoretical conclusions**

#### *Doing fandom*

When assessing various approaches to the study of gender, Condor notes that 'a tendency to conceive of flexibility in terms of variations in the *strength* of category identification had led to a tendency to underestimate the potential for flexibility in the *meaning and use* of the category Woman' (1989, p. 26). Similar limitations have informed the field of fandom. In an attempt to establish clearly defined fan practices and differing levels of status, scholars have identified the degree of immersion (Harris, 1998) or productivity (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), intensity of affective investment (Grossberg, 1992c) and levels of access and participation (MacDonald, 1998) as benchmarks which distinguish fans from 'ordinary' consumers, thus isolating the 'object of study' according to specific theoretical disciplines (Hills, 2002).

From the condemnation of critical Marxists to the romanticization of subcultural theorists, academic accounts have created a range of 'us versus them social maps' (Thornton, 1995). Whether these 'moral dualisms' (Hills, 2002) are predicated on the pathological 'seduction of separateness' embodied in high modernity (Jensen, 1992) or articulated through a denial of the imaginary mainstream (Hebdige, 1979), the 'us versus them'

binary serves to polarise and naturalise gendered constructs of fandom: the expert male versus the hysterical girl. Even popular music studies that have attempted to reclaim the concept by emphasising the value of popular expertise, 'fan cultural capital' (Fiske, 1992), reinforce a masculinist model of connoisseurship (Straw, 1997) that furthers the pervasive mind/body dualism underpinning gendered constructs of fandom.

Although more recent research acknowledges the heterogeneity of fan cultures, thus reconceptualising fandom as a variable concept (Harris, 1998), female fandom is still overwhelmingly characterised and understood as an 'abject category' (Vroomen, 2004) which stabilizes hegemonic gender relations (Bayton; 1997; Coates, 1998). Feminist work has therefore contributed to the 'discursive exclusion' or derogation of female pop fans. With a few notable exceptions, feminist popular music studies have produced a new set of 'moral dualisms' by privileging female music makers at the expense of music listeners, thus upholding the 'weary' (Kirschner, 1998) romantic binaries informing rock ideology: production versus consumption; rock versus pop; art versus commerce; the alternative versus the mainstream.

The 'star making machinery' of major and minor recording companies serves to promote performative masculinities by valorising the rock rebel, superstar DJ and expert consumer: socially constructed 'doings' that are enacted, embodied and represented as naturally male. Consequently, the lack of empirical feminist study on fans reinforces the 'subcultural pop music myth' (Frith, 1992) that 'underground' popular music is produced by and for men. 'Given the persistence of the figure of woman as mass culture (the irony of modernism)' (Morris, 1998, p. 368), feminist research has, however unwittingly, contributed to a lack of 'real' women in the literature by reproducing a modernist view of 'imaginary femininity' (ibid.).

Two influential feminist researchers have also critiqued the most accessible performance role for women and girls: that of vocalist. Green and Bayton draw on different theoretical paradigms to dismiss singing as a 'display' that reinforces patriarchal constructs of femininity (Green, 1997), or as a 'circumscribed space' (Bayton, 1993) that supports the male hegemony of rock (Bayton, 1998). The role of vocalist is indeed the most feminised route into music making, but I have found female singers to be important role models for female audience members and other aspirant performers, thus representing a potentially powerful means of disrupting the fragile and yet taken-for-granted homosociality of local scenes. I don't mean to suggest that women instrumentalists, 'composers', promoters, sound engineers and so forth are any less central to this process. But by isolating and relegating singers (and fans in Bayton's case) to the position of least agency and greatest collusion, both writers fail to consider how musical roles are blurred in everyday practice. Moreover - as many participants have demonstrated - the identities of singer and fan can be mobilised to dispute normative constructs of passive or sexualised femininity.

For Weedon, 'a theory is useful if it is able to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed' (1987, p. 20). It is precisely the interplay between the social and the structural, between human agency and material constraint, that West and Zimmerman's thesis of 'doing gender' (1991) achieves. They demonstrate how gender must be continually performed according to gender-specific 'ideals' in order to maintain socio-structural differences between women and men. I have found the concept of *doing fandom* to be equally salient for assessing 'flexibility in the meaning and use of the category' Fan. Drawing on additional social constructionist perspectives advocated by Charles (1996), Whiteley (1997) and Cohen (2001), 'doing fandom' serves to denaturalise socially constructed relations of gender inequality that are produced and performed with others through popular music practice, in ways that acknowledge cultural and historical specificity and

allow for the possibility of social change: ‘because members of social groups must constantly “do gender” to maintain their proper status, the seeds of change are ever present’ (Lorber and Farrell, 1991, p. 9).

In sum, whilst fandom represents a key site in the production of gender difference, the classifications of girl, woman, fan and vocalist are not stable constructs but rather fragmented identities that are under a constant process of negotiation, transformation and exchange. Viewing fandom in process therefore presents a critical challenge to Bayton and Green’s reductionist feminist focus - along with those writers who privilege production over consumption - by enabling us to rethink music makers as consumers, and singers as producers. As the empirical findings have shown, fandom also functions as a key site of struggle in the production and legitimation of power. The second theoretical strand I propose seeks to clarify the relationship between interpretation, legitimation and social status through the metaphors of capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Skeggs, 1997; Hills, 2002; McRobbie, 2005) and community (Fish, 1980; Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998).

### *Doing knowledge*

Underpinning all forms of research are epistemological assumptions about who can be ‘knowers’ (Harding, 1987) and which frameworks of knowledge are drawn upon, challenged or endorsed. I have developed a Bourdieusian analysis to complicate populist, romantic notions of community by highlighting power inequalities within fan cultures (MacDonald, 1998), pathways and scenes. Whilst the study of cultural formations is typically founded on the status and exchange of knowledge, Hills (2002) argues that the focus on cultural capital has obscured the significance of ‘fan social capital’, generated through specialized social networks. Given that the music industry is frequently characterised as a ‘men’s club’, I have found considering fandom as a social hierarchy organised around the accumulation and legitimation of fan cultural and social capital to



be particularly useful for assessing how differing levels of fan status are accrued and converted into ‘professional fandom.’

In an analytic move from Hirsch’s more static theory of ‘gatekeepers’, Negus applies Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural intermediaries’ to ‘recording industry personnel’:

This concept...refers to an emerging social grouping...working in such areas as marketing, advertising, design...journalism...occupations [that]...have often not acquired the rigidity of the older bureaucratic professions and recruitment is frequently via...shared affinities, values, and lifestyles rather than formal qualifications (1992, p. 46).

This position chimes with Thornton’s (1995) account of ‘the fraternity of interest’ generated through the acquisition of subcultural capital within club cultures. Both writers identify ‘hipness’ as a critical asset for ‘professional’ fans, although Negus points out that for A&R personnel, ‘enthusiasm and knowledge of music’ rapidly needs to be converted into a ‘taste for success’ (ibid., pp 144-145). Of particular significance, Thornton’s clubcultural ‘aficionado’ and Negus’s A&R ‘worker’ are constructed as ideologically and empirically male.

The continued male-domination of this influential occupational category was confirmed by Caroline Elleray of BMG Music during the ‘New Model A&R’ panel at In The City, Manchester (14/9/03). She argued that the consequence of a ‘predominantly white, male and middle class’ group of ‘British A&R’ is that ‘they’re only signing the known’. Bourdieu’s analysis of how ‘scholars’ aspire to become ‘gentlemen’ has efficacy when assessing the work and recruitment practices of A&R, as a process of mimicry perpetuates the ‘game’ of distinction. Thus the interdependent metaphors of ‘fan cultural capital’ and ‘fan social capital’ shed explanatory light on how the inequities of professional fandom are perpetuated and legitimated to mystify the ‘competences’ of taste, through what Negus (1992) calls the ‘intuition of acquisition’. When combined with

‘local structures of feeling’, it becomes apparent how exclusionary values and networks are transmitted within ‘local’ - and more widely established ‘men’s clubs’, to normalize the *absent presence* of women.

However ‘magnificent’ (McRobbie, 2005), the underlying premise of *Distinction* is flawed. As Hills points out:

it simply *assumes* the legitimacy of a fixed and monolithically legitimate ‘cultural capital’, rather than considering how, cultural capital may, at any single moment of culture-in-process, remain variously fragmented, internally inconsistent and struggled over (2002, p. 48).

Frith (1998) usefully revises Bourdieu’s model by addressing the ways in which ‘problems’ of value are ‘struggled over’ in popular music discourse and practice. Drawing on the work of Becker, he details three discourses - art, folk and pop - that influence how cultural judgements are formed and in what circumstances. ‘Transcendence’ from the everyday, ‘integration’ in terms of belonging and ‘fun’ characterise the three discursive experiences. The significant departure from both Becker and Bourdieu lies in Frith’s attempt to show how the ‘worlds’ of the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘avant garde’ are interconnected both discursively and structurally, rather than divided and determined by class tastes. One consistent feature unites these worlds however: ‘for both sides *the other is feminine*’ (1998, p. 579).

The metaphor of cultural capital is also reworked by Skeggs. When assessing ‘the intersection of class and gender in subjective production’ (1997, p. 7), she concurs that ‘femininity [as a form of cultural capital] provides only restricted access to potential forms of power’ (ibid., p.10). Whilst I have argued that the transitional routes from ‘amateur’ to ‘professional’ fan are masculinised *across* cultural sites, we have also seen how Pulp’s fan club editor maintained her hierarchical status of ‘coolest fan’ by invoking what McRobbie terms ‘specifically feminine modalities of symbolic

violence...thoroughly projected onto, and inseparable from, the female body' (2005, p. 146). Although claiming Bourdieu's work has 'great relevance' for Cultural Studies, McRobbie does critique his pessimism for failing to develop the political potential of 'breaking the spell' of distinction in ways that would enable 'radical social change', concluding that 'he is...constrained by the disciplinary boundaries [of sociology] which are also...of his own making' (ibid., p. 142). Crucially, what is missing within Bourdieu's 'generative formula' is a consideration of how 'networks of value' are in a continuous process of flux and exchange (Hills, 2002).

In addition to 'doing fandom', the concept of interpretive communities provides a more fluid framework to analyse how particular groups of music makers as listeners, professional and supporter fans, are mutually engaged in the creation and negotiation of cultural meanings. In *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), Fish developed the concept to challenge the textual determinism prevalent in literary theory. Founded on a social constructionist epistemology, he argues that 'interpretive acts' are produced in accordance with other readers through their membership of an interpretive community: 'the only "proof" of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community' (1980, p. 173). Radway also adopted the concept to explain 'how similar readings are produced' by 'similarly located readers' who 'learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes which they bring to bear on the texts they encounter' (1987, p. 8). She does however argue that the concept is insufficiently theorized.

It has since been adapted to consider how ethnicity (Schroeder, 1994; Gillespie, 1995) and other socio-cultural categories shape competing interpretations, including those of community itself. Thus, unlike the relativistic view of 'consensual unity' proposed by Fish (1980), a more politicised notion of interpretation recognises elements of 'disunity'

and conflict within overlapping interpretive communities, or ‘from communicative practices that span or criss-cross the social structure’ (Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin, 1998, p. 243). Viewed in this more flexible light as ‘an accomplishment of social negotiation’ (ibid.), I have found the interpretive community concept to be a useful analytical tool for interrogating the ‘value gaps’ generated through various landmarks, underpinned by the shifting and contradictory meanings of ‘making it’, fandom, scene and place. As Lindlof, Coyle and Grodin confirm, ‘if media-related discourses are more loosely coupled to the structural positions of audience members, then interpretive strategies may exhibit more heterogeneity, conflict and change’ (ibid., p. 223). I therefore propose a more elastic social constructionist approach to the analysis of *doing knowledge* that integrates metaphors of ‘capital’ *and* ‘community’, in order to assess how groups of ‘knowers’ or ‘fans’ are continuously engaged in the dialectical process ‘of ‘creating culture’ as well as being caught up in it’ (Hills, 2002, p. 93).

Contextualising the production and performance of gender as a ‘situated doing’ (West and Zimmerman, 1991) represents the third theoretical strand. As Skeggs confirms: ‘just as metaphors of capital provide a framework for understanding power and exchange in the reproduction of inequality, metaphors of space have a similar explanatory value for understanding movement through social space and restrictions on it’ (1997, p. 12). The concept of scene is one such metaphor.

### *Doing scene*

Academic constructs of scene are organised around three general types: local, translocal and virtual (Peterson and Bennett, 2004). While Peterson and Bennett argue that ‘each scene is unique’ (2004, p. 6), Sheffield’s multiple pathways and competing but equally distinctive narratives of scene are produced through all three categories. Indeed, it is highly likely that all place-specific scenes will be constructed within and beyond the local



through virtual and translocal ‘coalitions’ (Straw, 1991/1997). Straw’s theory usefully highlights the interdependent social, aesthetic and industrial dimensions of scene and the ways in which these elements ‘work’ to produce a sense of ‘community’. When assessing the gender dynamics of Sheffield’s shifting ‘communities’, I found they were characterised by collaboration and conflict due to the perceived and material inequalities of access informed by two locally-specific conditions: cultural policy and masculinist narratives of Sheffieldness. Supporting Olson (1998), I argue that local scenes are not passive spaces but productive places that shape particular forms of musical activity, identities and social relations. They are simultaneously constructed through media exposure (Thornton, 1995), and the research process itself. Scenes can thus be described as ‘fictional realities’ (Moore, 1997), with both structural and imaginative characteristics. In short, local scenes are productive (Olson, 1998) and performative (Cohen, 1997), representing a complex and contradictory site of imagined and material freedoms and constraints.

Throughout the thesis, I have utilised the concepts of ‘discursive’ and ‘structural exclusion’ to explain the *absent presence* of women in the literature, media and Sheffield’s scene/s. Rather than reproducing an essentialist view of women’s subordination, I seek to rework the notion of ‘structural exclusion’ within a more contingent, place-specific framework. A key issue for women is that of personal safety. As Taylor et al. note (1996), one particular ‘adaptive strategy’ that women employ when negotiating threatening, ‘overwhelmingly male places’ is ‘avoidance’. In line with Cohen (1997), I suggest that many women exclude themselves from the ‘night time economy’ of local live music, comprising smaller ‘underground’ venues and male dominated urban spaces. Instead, they tend to go to larger venues where they can consume collectively and in comparative safety.

Building on the correlation between setting, success and access, I have also noted that the gender dynamics of small-scale gigs are potentially transformed when the ‘performers on the pedestal’ are female. Along with the significance of role models in terms of emulation and gender identification, the concept of supporter fandom serves to highlight the interpersonal, social connections that encourage women music listeners to ‘support’ women music makers, thus contextualising notions of access within a localized framework of ‘social relevance’. The ‘ideal’ gendered strategies of inclusion I have identified are simultaneously constrained by spatial politics and complex sets of inter and intra-group gender relations, relations which are socially constructed within music scenes to embody difference and inequality (Cohen, 2001). I therefore conclude that gendered musical practices are shaped by ‘mechanisms of exclusion *and* inclusion’ (Coates, 1997) that are produced through a number of intersecting factors - from academic absences and reductionist theories, to ‘local structures of feeling’ and elitist modes of ‘distinction’ - which serve to obscure more hidden ‘scene’ activities, pathways, relationships and ways of knowing.

All three theoretical perspectives provide ‘explanatory value’ for the complex meanings of fandom, ‘making it’, scene and place that have been generated and developed through the ethnographic data. The interaction between the methodological, empirical and theoretical confirms Skeggs’ assertion that ‘methodology is the archaeological foundation from which theories are constructed’ (1997, p. 38). I have attempted to demonstrate how the comparative, holistic, change-oriented principles of feminist ethnography provide a critical challenge to essentialist assumptions, by foregrounding the lived experience of ‘real’ women and the ways in which abstract concepts are negotiated, or indeed rejected, through everyday relations and interaction with others.

Each theoretical strand is preceded by the notion of *doing* in order to emphasise the critical interplay between process, practice, knowledge and action in the denaturalisation of inequality (Stacey, 1994). Below, Charles highlights the political and epistemological issues at stake:

If feminist politics is based on a *socially constructed* and therefore contingent identity then post-structuralism's deconstruction is of only theoretical interest: it is immaterial whether identity is essential or socially constructed if it provides a basis for political action. Indeed...feminist politics both arises from socially constructed identities and is a means of their transformation (1996, pp 9-10).

Crucially, a feminist social constructionist epistemology allows for the 'heretical' possibility of *undoing* the gender hegemony of popular music. By deconstructing the pervasive, binary distinctions informing notions of gender, genre and success, we are able to rethink music makers *as* listeners, rock *as* pop and art *as* commerce. This affirmative standpoint is conditional nonetheless, for although 'extroverted' perspectives of place and scene are vital when making wider knowledge claims (Massey, 1994), generalizations are necessarily tempered by the specificities of geography, identity, and - for the purposes of this final section - cultural policy.

Meanings of the mainstream for example, are repositioned within discourses of social inclusion to promote access and productivity. Thus the strategy of 'gender mainstreaming' has been developed to tackle some of the fundamental inequalities occurring at both a local and European level. Several 'gender focused interventions' have been implemented through the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme to address the local problems created by 'entrenched' socio-economic deprivation (Yeandle et al, 2004). And whilst this thesis is modest in comparison, it also represents a 'gender focused intervention'. Finally then, I want to consider the political implications of conducting feminist ethnographic research with an action remit, to demonstrate how the empirical findings have been used to develop localized strategies for social change.

## Finding the female fan: political conclusions

### *Doing training*

Popular music continues to be hailed as a ‘thriving’ growth area in Sheffield, ‘bucking the trend’ of a global industry in flux (CIQA Quarterly, February, 2004). However, as the thesis has shown, local women face a range of barriers that discourage or obscure their participation and recognition on the ‘scene’. Music industry training programmes are a recognised strategy for equipping women with the competences and confidence to ‘compete’,<sup>231</sup> yet the recently established Sector Skills Council for the music business cites ‘the lack of quality training in the UK’ as a ‘crisis’ for the sector (*Music Week*, 14/11/05). The dearth of female trainers across South Yorkshire is an additional ‘hurdle’ for women wanting to gain music industry skills (Bayton, 1998; Marshall, 2003; Robson and Tams, 2005).

I established Harmony Training with Dr. Elly Tams in an attempt to redress ‘entrenched’ gender imbalances. Below are the aims and objectives of our organisation:

Harmony Training is a social enterprise which aims to raise the profile and participation of women working in the South Yorkshire music industry. Harmony’s key objectives are to:

- Provide bespoke music industry training and professional development for women, through mentoring, networking and showcasing events.
- Create opportunities for women to gain meaningful work in the industry through work placements, job shadowing and business support.
- Build the capacity of the local music industry by providing specialist music industry skills and personnel that current training providers in South Yorkshire lack.
- Evaluate our innovative training and employment model and disseminate findings to a wider audience including policy makers, training delivery organisations and creative industries support agencies.

...Harmony works in partnership with a range of organisations to produce a creative and cultural environment that offers access and opportunities for all (Mission statement, [www.harmonytraining.org.uk](http://www.harmonytraining.org.uk)).

---

<sup>231</sup> Alison Wenham of the Association of Independent Music (AIM) on Woman’s Hour (Radio 4, 21/12/04).



Three issues we had to address were: how to fund training? Who to train? And where to run training? Sheffield City Council's policy focus on developing facilities, coupled with increasingly affordable music technology software, has resulted in 'a robust infrastructure of training, studios, production...and specialist support' (CIQA Quarterly, February, 2004). Harmony lacks the economic and cultural capital to set up a fully equipped training centre. Elly and I are equally keen to avoid perceptions of the organisation as either a women-only ghetto or as competition to the more established training providers. Our emphasis on partnership working and capacity building is therefore pragmatic and politic. It has also proved to be problematic.

### *Doing change*

Harmony began training in January 2006. The first course was extremely revealing, confirming many of the findings I have outlined, whilst refining others. Called 'Training the Trainers', the fully subsidised six-week programme was designed to refresh and update women's technical and training skills. Twenty-three women applied and eight were selected, ranging in age from twenty-five to fifty-two. Their musical identities and experiences are equally diverse. Three have had deals with major and minor record labels. Two are singer songwriters, currently working on self-financed, solo albums. The rest are accomplished DJs, filmmakers and/or multi-media trainers. Only one participant had a higher-level qualification in sound engineering, but she also juggles multiple roles as a live engineer, promoter, DJ, remixer and singer. All the women came on the course to expand their technical knowledge and develop employment opportunities to subsidise their varied cultural 'work'.

Although the majority have considerable music industry experience and are well known in localised, male-dominated networks<sup>232</sup>, only two of the women had previously worked together on independent projects. Indeed, several were apprehensive of ‘women-only training’ per se. Two reasons emerged. Firstly, because they felt it may be ‘competitive and bitchy’ and secondly, due to an underlying suspicion of Harmony’s feminist intent. Concerns were initially raised in the selection interviews, with comments ranging from the typically individualistic position, ‘gender is not an issue for me’ to more ‘backlash’ type claims that feminism alienates men. Indeed, the hostility and fears that feminism engenders are so powerful that the woman who initiated the idea of Harmony subsequently left the (then) unincorporated organisation because of our choice of logo<sup>233</sup>.



Additional tensions were generated, not surprisingly, through the spatial politics of the recording studio/training environment. Because of the dearth of women technology trainers in the sub-region, the ‘state-of-the-art’ facilities we hired also provided a tutor to deliver and help design the course. Although professing to support the project, he and the owners became increasingly critical of some of the women’s ‘lack’ of technical expertise<sup>234</sup> and punctuality, along with our ‘unprofessional partiality’ when evaluating the process. Thus, a cluster of local and more widely established ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ further modify the ‘ideal’ gendered strategies of inclusion I have proposed.

Firstly, the scarcity of women on the ‘scene’, and a paradoxical tendency to inflate their presence (Bayton, 1998), highlights the potential for isolation and competitiveness as well

---

<sup>232</sup> To the extent that one male sceneist took great pleasure in being able to second-guess five of the eight women on the course.

<sup>233</sup> She instigated the process by conducting Arts Council funded research in 2002-3, which Elly and I both contributed to. There were however other significant factors that precipitated her dissent and departure, including an early lack of funding and her long-term illness.

<sup>234</sup> Although all the women have home studios or access to other peoples, their software and computers were not compatible with the more expensive and contemporary programmes (such as Protools) and platforms, particularly ‘Macs’.

as collectivism. Secondly, the notion of competence, which Kirschner somewhat naively suggests is a 'primary issue' for effective mixed gender collaborations, is clearly problematised by subjective processes of judgement that tend to devalue women's musical practice and knowledge (Milestone and Richards, 2000). Thirdly, perceptions of commitment are equally subjective, frequently employed to justify the existence of 'men's clubs' within the 'night time economy' of cultural industries work, constructed and maintained apart from everyday, domestic responsibilities (Milestone and Richards, 2000; Tams, 2003).

The two 'single' parents on the course, who were often unavoidably late, identified the last factor as a particular barrier. Moreover, virtually all the women had stories to tell of commonplace and occasionally violent experiences of misogyny. Consequently, the tensions within the training environment served to strengthen relations between the women, as well as their allegiance to Harmony. By working in a consciously formulated spirit of co-operation rather than competition, and establishing social time for reflection in pubs or cafes after training, many identified 'getting to know other women' as a particular strength of the course. Evaluation comments reinforced this sea change. 'We are on the course to become trainers who women can have as support and role models. We are trying to change the climate which is especially important for young women coming through'; 'it's the same issues that face all women in the industry. A women-only course depersonalizes the experience of dealing with the sexist male environments of studios'. Ultimately, 'Training the Trainers' has exceeded our expectations. It has produced a host of creative, social, material and political benefits, promoting creative alliances, social networks, employment opportunities and the transformative potential of 'breaking the spell' for other *female fans*. I would therefore argue, in line with Bayton, that 'most women *are* feminist, despite not owning the word' (1998, p. 207).

The most significant ‘extra-local’ constraints that Elly and I face are financial.<sup>235</sup> We are currently receiving grant funding from three different sources with competing ideological remits, each highlighting how the ‘art versus commerce myth’ is variously translated into cultural policy. The Last Mile Development Partnership: South Yorkshire is part-funded by the European Social Fund under the Equal programme, which endorses thematic priorities such as ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘equal opportunities’ and ‘employability’. The ‘Last Mile’ initiative is founded on the latter, defined as: ‘helping people who have a difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into a labour market that must be open to all’ (*Equal Handbook*, 2000-2006). Thus, the ideological shift from culture as play to culture as work underpins the remit of ‘Last Mile’, as our contractual outputs - to train twenty ‘beneficiaries’ and support fifteen of these into ‘meaningful’ work - demonstrate.

In direct contrast, the Esmee Fairburn Foundation (EFF) is founded on an older model of charity and patronage which promotes social inclusion and educational opportunities for ‘hard-to-reach’ social groups. So although the trustees have recently approved a significant amount of funding for the trained trainers (and ourselves) to deliver women-only music workshops, it is on the proviso that 80% of participants are ‘poor educational achievers’.<sup>236</sup> As the Grants Manager for their education programme confirmed: ‘we are about education for education’s sake rather than pre-vocational, into employment type courses’ (personal communication, 19/1/06). On the other hand, the Arts Council, England, Yorkshire favours art for art’s sake. Their local focus raises problems about which kinds of art should be prioritised however, and due to a ‘standstill’ in National

---

<sup>235</sup> At present, Harmony relies on grant subsidies to fund core organisational costs and provide ‘free’ training, due to the fact that women, on the whole, have less disposable income (and time) to invest in personal and professional development. As a young organisation, we have been very successful at generating funding. This process is likely to become more difficult because of the end of Objective 1, coupled with our reluctance to exploit social disadvantage, and the perceived ‘hipness’ of music industry training, as an asset to trade (see below).

<sup>236</sup> In line with national government targets, ‘poor educational achievement’ is defined as five GCSEs or less, although for EFF, ‘no GCSEs would be even better’ (personal communication, 20/1/06).



Lottery subsidies, the three-year spending plan, 2005-2008, proposes to ‘fund fewer organisations better’ ([www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)).

To summarise, Harmony’s ‘heretical vision of the possible’ is under a constant process of negotiation and compromise as we strive to implement ‘a change of scene’ (Harmony in *Sandman*, March 2006). Indeed, negotiating the frequently competing demands of academic rigour and the gender inequalities of local music industry networks to develop material strategies for social change has proved to be a ubiquitous feature of this ten-year research journey. Yet it is argued that all feminist praxis is informed by a ‘fundamental ambiguity’ (Hekman, 1990, p. 188) between difference and sameness: ‘a radical challenge to the very foundations of western thought and social structure. But... intimately tied to the emancipatory impulse of the Enlightenment’ (Charles, 1996, p. 10). I would like to add a caveat to these reflections, which brings us full circle to McRobbie’s astute question, ‘who do we produce the research for?’ (1991, p. 71).

Although I trust this ethnographic study will have something to contribute to popular music study and feminist theory, arguably I am the greatest beneficiary of the research, for I have converted my institutionalized cultural capital into gainful employment, not - as is more typical - in the academy but rather, through the burgeoning sphere of the creative economy. Within the world of grant funding and social enterprise, sociological markers of disadvantage such as gender, social class, poor educational achievement, ethnicity and disability become quantifiable assets to trade for the social entrepreneur. Indeed, as I write, Sheffield City Council’s Employment Unit, who manage Red Tape Studios, have been accused of misusing funds provided by the charity, Children In Need, ‘to put 72 disturbed teenagers on a music technology course’ (Rotten Boroughs, *Private Eye*, 31 March-13 April, 2006). These contentious observations highlight a further critical dialectic informing action research: on the one hand, emphasising the ‘fundamental

ambiguity' about the purpose and benefits of such projects, whilst on the other, providing a cautionary reminder that the 'emancipatory impulse' of feminist praxis needs to be pursued within an ethically informed framework of social accountability.

## Bibliography

- Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*, Sage.
- Adorno, T. (1990) On Popular Music, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), Routledge.
- Adorno, T. (1998) On Popular Music, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.
- Aizlewood, J. (ed.) (1994) *Love is the Drug...Living as a Pop Fan*, Penguin.
- Althusser, L. (1971) *'Lenin and Philosophy' and Other Essays*, London: New Left Books
- Ang, I. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*, London: Methuen.
- Ang, I. (1998) Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.
- Aston, M. (1996) *Pulp*, Pan.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992) *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Baehr, H. and Gray, A. (eds.) (1996) *Turning It On: A Reader in Women and Media*, Arnold.
- Banister, P. et al. (1994) *Qualitative Methods and Psychology*, Sage.
- Barker, M and Beezer, A. (1992) Introduction, in *Reading Into Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1977) *Image Music Text*, Fontana Press.
- Baym, N.K. (1998) Talking About Soaps: Communicative Practices in a Computer-Mediated Fan Culture, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.
- Bayton, M. (1990) How Women Become Musicians, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), Routledge.
- Bayton, M. (1993) Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions, in *Rock and Popular Music* (edited by T. Bennett et al.), Routledge.
- Bayton, M. (1997) Women and the Electric Guitar, in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.
- Bayton, M. (1998) *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press.

Becker, H. (1997) The Culture of a Deviant Group: The 'Jazz' Musician, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Bennet, H. S. (1980) *On Becoming A Rock Musician*, Massachusetts Press.

Bennett, A. (1997) 'Going down the pub!': The pub rock scene as a resource for the consumption of popular music', *Popular Music* Volume 16/1, Cambridge University Press.

Booth, G. (1998) *Diamonds in Brown Paper: the colourful lives and hard times of Sheffield's famous Buffer Lasses*, Sheffield City Libraries.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bowers, J. (1996) Hanging around and making something of it: Ethnography, in *Psychological Research* (edited by J. Haworth), Routledge.

Breen, M. (1993) Making Music Local, in *Rock and Popular Music* (edited by T. Bennett et al.), Routledge.

Brower, S. (1992) Fans as Tastemakers: Viewers for Quality Television, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Brown, A., O'Connor, J. and Cohen, S. (1998) Local music policies within a global music industry: Cultural Quarters in Manchester and Sheffield, in *Popular Music: Intercultural Interpretations* (edited by Toru Mitsui), Graduate Program in Music, Kanazawa University, Kanazawa, Japan.

Brunt, R. (1992) Engaging with the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say about Them, in *Cultural Studies* (edited by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler), Routledge.

Burgess, R. (1984) *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, George Allen and Unwin, London.

Burns, L. and LaFrance, M. (2002) *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity, and Popular Music*, Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge.

BPI (1997) *British Phonographic Industry Statistical Handbook*, London: BPI

Charles, N. (1996) Feminist Practices: Identity, Difference, Power, in *Practising Feminism: Identity Difference Power* (edited by N. Charles and F. Hughes-Freeland), Routledge.

Cicioni, M. (1998) Male Pair-Bonds and Female Desire in Fan Slash Writing, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.



Clarke, E. and Dibben, N. (2000) Sex, Pulp and Critique, *Popular Music* Volume 19/2, Cambridge University Press.

Clarke, G (1990) Defending Ski Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), Routledge.

Cline, C. (1992) Essays from Bitch: The Women's Rock Newsletter, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Cloonan, M. (1998) Class Acts? Taste and Popular Music, in *Popular Music: Intercultural Interpretations* (edited by Toru Mitsui), Graduate Program in Music, Kanazawa University, Kanazawa, Japan.

Coates, N. (1997) (R)evolution Now? Rock and the political potential of gender, in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.

Coates, N. (1998) Can't we just talk about Music? Rock and Gender on the Internet, in *Mapping The Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory* (edited by T. Swiss, J. Sloop and A. Herman), Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Cockburn, C. (1985) *Machinery of Dominance: Women, Men and Technical Know-How*, London: Pluto.

Cohen, S. (1991) *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*, Clarendon Press Oxford

Cohen, S. (1993) Ethnography and Popular Music Studies, *Popular Music*, Volume 12/2, Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, S. (1997) Men Making a Scene: Rock music and the production of gender, in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.

Cohen, S. (1998) Sounding out the City: Music and the Sensuous Production of Place, in *The Place of Music* (edited by A. Leyshon; D. Matless and G. Revill), The Guildford Press.

Cohen, S. (2001) Popular music, gender and sexuality, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (edited by S. Frith, W. Straw and J. Street), Cambridge University Press.

Condor, S. (1989) 'Biting into the Future': Social Change and the Social Identity of Women, in *The Social Identity of Women* (edited by S. Skevington and D. Baker), Sage.

Cooper, S. (ed.) (1995) *Girls! Girls! Girls! Essays on Women and Music*, Cassell.

Craib, I. (1984) *Modern Social Theory from Parsons to Habermas*, Harvester.

Creed, (1998) From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.

Davies, J. (1999) 'IT'S LIKE FEMINISM, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BURN YOUR BRA': Girl Power and the Spice Girls' Breakthrough, 1996-7, in *Living Through Pop*, (edited by A. Blake), London: Routledge.

Deck, A. (ed.) (1996-2002) *Pulp People*, issues 16-39, Juma.

Dell, C. (1998) "Lookit That Hunk of Man!" Subversive Pleasures, Female Fandom and Professional Wrestling, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.

Ehrenreich, B., Hess, E., and Jacobs, G. (1992) Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Ehrenreich, B., Hess, E., and Jacobs, G. (1997) Beatlemania: A Sexually Defiant Consumer Culture?, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Equal (2000-2006) *Handbook for Applicants*, Community Initiative Programme for Great Britain and Gibraltar.

Evans, L. (1994) *Women, Sex and Rock 'n' Roll - In Their Own Words*, Pandora.

Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: The Undeclared War on Women*, Chatto & Windus.

Finnegan, R. (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making In An English Town*, Cambridge University Press.

Finnegan, R. (1997a) 'Storying The Self': Personal Narratives and Identity, in *Consumption and Everyday Life* (edited by H. Mackay), Sage.

Finnegan, R. (1997b) Music, Performance and Enactment, in *Consumption and Everyday Life* (edited by H. Mackay), Sage.

Firminger, J. and Lilleker, M. (2001) *Not Like a Proper Job: The story of popular music in Sheffield 1955-1975*, Juma.

Fish, S. (1980) *Is There a Text in This Class?* Harvard University Press.

Fiske, J. (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture*, Unwin Hyman.

Fiske, J. (1992) The Cultural Economy of Fandom, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1976) *The History of Sexuality Volume one*, Peng.

Fonarow, W. (1997) The Spatial Organization of the Indie Music Gig, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Frith, S. (1983) *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, Constable.

- Frith, S. (ed.) (1988) *Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture*, Mandarin.
- Frith, S. (1992) The Cultural Study of Popular Music, in *Cultural Studies* (edited by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler), Routledge.
- Frith, S. (1993) Popular Music and the Local State, in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (edited by T. Bennett, S. Frith, L. Grossberg, J. Shepherd, G. Turner), Routledge.
- Frith, S. (1996) *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, Oxford University Press.
- Frith, S. (1998) The Good, the Bad and the Indifferent: Defending Popular Culture from the Populists, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Prentice Hall.
- Frith, S. and McRobbie, A. (1990) Rock and Sexuality, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), Routledge.
- Frith, S., Straw, W., and Street, J. (eds.) (2001) *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, Cambridge University Press.
- Gamman, L and Marshment, M. (eds.) (1988) *The Female Gaze: Women as viewers of Popular Culture*, The Women's Press.
- Garratt, S. (1984) All Of Us Loves All Of You, in *Signed, Sealed and Delivered: True Life Stories of Women in Pop* (edited by S. Steward and S. Garratt), Pluto Press.
- Goodwin, A. (1992) Rationalization and Democratization in the New Technologies of Popular Music, in *Popular Music and Communication* (second edition) (edited by J. Lull), Sage.
- Gilligan, C. (1998) Getting Civilised, in *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing Through the Backlash* (edited by A. Oakley and J. Mitchell), Penguin
- Gilmore, A. (2001) 'City beats: local popular music and cultural policy', *International Journal of Urban Labour and Leisure*, Volume 3/1.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence&Wishart.
- Green, J. (1997) Preface to the 1997 Edition, in *Groupie* (by J. Byrne and J. Fabian), Omnibus Press.
- Green, L. (1997) *Music, Gender, Education*, Cambridge University Press.
- Green, S., Jenkins, C. and Jenkins, H. (1998) Normal Female Interest In Men Bonking: Selections from The Tera Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.
- Greig, C. (1989) *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?*, Virago.



Griffin, C. (1986) Qualitative methods and female experience: young women from school to the job market, in *Feminist Social Psychology: Developing theory and practice* (edited by S. Wilkinson), Oxford University Press.

Griffin, C. (1989) 'I'm not a Women's Libber but...': Feminism, Consciousness and Identity, in *The Social Identity of Women* (edited by S. Skevington and D. Baker), Sage.

Griffin, C. (1996) Experiencing Power: Dimensions of gender, 'race' and class, in *Practising Feminism: Identity Difference Power* (edited by N. Charles and F. Hughes-Freeland), Routledge.

Grisprud, J. (1998) 'High Culture' Revisited, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.

Grossberg, L. (1992a) *We gotta get out of this place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, Routledge.

Grossberg, L. (1992b) Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Grossberg, L. (1992c) Rock and Roll in Search of an Audience in *Popular Music and Communication* (edited by J. Lull) (second edition), Sage.

Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds.) (1976) *Resistance through Rituals*, Hutchinson.

Hall, S. and Whannel, P. (1990) The Young Audience, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), Routledge.

Hall, S. and Whannel, P. (1998) The Young Audience, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (1998) *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide*, (second edition), Longman.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1990) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (fifth edition), Routledge.

hampton, d. (1995) Confessions of a Hip Hop Critic, in *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap* (edited by E. McDonnell and A. Powers), Plexus Publishing Limited.

Harris, C. (1998) A Sociology of Television Fandom, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.

Heatley, M. (ed.) (1998) *Jarvis Cocker, In his own Words*, Omnibus Press.

Hebdige, D. (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen.

Hills, M. (2002) *Fan Cultures*, Routledge.



- Hoggart, R. (1957) *The Uses of Literacy*, Chatto & Windus.
- Hollway, W. (1989) *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology*, Sage.
- hooks, b. (1998) Postmodern Blackness, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.
- Hornby, N. (1996) *High Fidelity*, Indigo.
- Irigaray, L (1993) Women: equal or different, in *Women's Studies: A Reader* (edited by S. Jackson et al.), Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Jackson, S. et al., (eds.) (1993) *Women's Studies: A Reader*, Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Jenkins, H. (1992) 'Strangers No More, We Sing': Filksing and the Social Construction of the Science Fiction Fan Community, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (1997) Television Fans, Poachers, Nomads, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.
- Jensen, J. (1992) Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.
- Jones, M. (1997) *Organising Pop: Why so few pop acts make pop music*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Popular Music, Liverpool University.
- Kearney, M. (1997) The missing links: Riot grrrl – feminism – lesbian culture, in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.
- Kirschner, T (1998) Studying Rock: Towards a Materialist Ethnography, in *Mapping The Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory* (edited by T. Swiss, J. Sloop and A. Herman), Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Kitzinger, C. and Wilkinson, S. (1996) Deconstructing Heterosexuality: A Feminist Social-Constructionist Analysis, in *Practising Feminism: Identity Difference Power* (edited by N. Charles and F. Hughes-Freeland), Routledge.
- kolawole, h. (1995) sisters take the rap...but talk back, in *Girls! Girls! Girls! Essays on Women and Music* (edited by S. Cooper), Cassell.
- Laing, D. (1985), *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*, Open University Press.
- Lather, P. (1992) Postmodernism and the Human Sciences, in *Psychology and Postmodernism* (edited by S. Kvale), Sage.
- Lees, S. (1986) *Losing Out, Sexuality and Adolescent Girls*, Hutchinson.
- Lees, S. (1993) *Sugar and Spice: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls*, Penguin.

Leonard, M. (1997) Rebel Girl, You are the queen of my world: Feminism, subculture and grrrl power, in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.

Lewis, G. (1992) Who do you love?, in *Popular Music and Communication* (second edition) (edited by J. Lull), Sage.

Lewis, L. (1992) ‘Something More Than Love?’: Fan Stories on Film, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Leyshon, A., Matless, D. and Revill, G. (eds.) (1998) *The Place of Music*, The Guilford Press.

Lindlof, T., Coyle, K. and Grodin, D. (1998) Is There a Text in This Audience? Science Fiction and Interpretive Schism, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.

Livingstone, J. and Murphy, L. (1985) Racism and the limits of radical feminism, *Race and Class*, XXV1, 4.

Longhurst, B. (1995) *Popular Music and Society*, Polity Press.

Lorber, J. and Farrell, S. (eds.) (1991) *The Social Construction of Gender*, Sage.

Lowe, M. (2004) “Tween” Scene: Resistance within the Mainstream, in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, (edited by A. Bennett and R.A. Peterson), Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville.

Lull, J. (ed.) (1992) *Popular Music and Communication* (second edition), Sage.

MacDonald, A. (1998) Uncertain Utopia: Science Fiction Media Fandom & Computer Mediated Communication, in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (edited by C. Harris and A. Alexander), Hampton Press.

Marshall, A. (2003) *Gender balance within the South Yorkshire Music Industry*, Unpublished research report funded by the Yorkshire Arts Board, Research and Development Grant.

Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, University of Minnesota Press.

McClary, S. (1991) *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press.

McClary, S. (1995) Same As It Ever Was: Youth Culture and Music, in *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap* (edited by E. McDonnell and A. Powers), Plexus Publishing Limited.

McDonnell, E. and Powers, A. (eds.) (1995) *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap*, Plexus Publishing Limited.

McRobbie, A. (1991) *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan.

- McRobbie, A. (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (1999) Thinking with Music, in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (edited by K. Kelly, K. and E. McDonnell), Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (2003) *In the Culture Society: Art, Fashion and Popular Music* (second edition), Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (2005) *The Uses of Cultural Studies*, Sage.
- McRobbie, A. and Garber, J. (1983) Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration, in *Resistance Through Rituals* (edited by S. Hall and T. Jefferson) (second edition), Hutchinson.
- McRobbie, A. and Garber, J. (1991) Girls and Subcultures, in *Feminism and Youth Culture*, (edited by A. McRobbie), Macmillan.
- Middleton, R. (1990) *Studying Popular Music*, Open University Press.
- Milestone, K. and Richards, N. (2000) 'What Difference Does it Make? Women's Pop Cultural Production and Consumption in Manchester, in *Sociological Research Online* (Vol 2 no.4) [www.socresonline.org.uk](http://www.socresonline.org.uk)
- Miller, D. (1997) Consumption and Its Consequences, in *Consumption and Everyday Life* (edited by H. Mackay), Sage.
- Mitchell, T. (1996) *Popular Music and Local Identity. Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*, Leicester University Press.
- Modleski, T. (1982) *Loving With a Veangance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, Methuen.
- Moore, S. (1997) Broadcasting and Its Audience, in *Consumption and Everyday Life* (edited by H. Mackay), Sage.
- Morgan, J. (1995) The Nigga Ya Hate to Love, in *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap* (edited by E. McDonnell and A. Powers), Plexus Publishing Limited.
- Morris, M. (1998) Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (edited by J. Storey) (second edition), Routledge.
- Negus, K. (1992) *Producing Pop*, Edward Arnold.
- Oakley, A. (1998) A Brief History of Gender, in *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing Through the Backlash* (edited by A. Oakley and J. Mitchell), Penguin.
- O'Brien, K. (1995) *Hymn to Her: Women Musicians Talk*, Virago.
- O'Brien, L. (1995) *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*, Penguin.



O'Dair, B. (1999) *Across the Great Divide: Rock Cities, Rock Women*, in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (edited by K. Kelly, K. and E. McDonnell), Routledge.

O'Hara, C. (1995), *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise*, AK Press.

Olson, M. (1998) 'Everybody Loves Our Town': Scenes, Spatiality, Migrancy, in *Mapping The Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory* (edited by T. Swiss, J. Sloop and A. Herman), Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Peterson, R.A. and Bennett, A. (2004) *Introducing Music Scenes*, in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, (edited by A. Bennett and R.A. Peterson), Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville.

Phoenix, A. (1990) *Social Research in the context of Social Psychology*, in *Feminists and Psychological practice* (edited by E. Burman), Sage.

Pilcher, J. (1993) 'I'm Not a Feminist, But...': Understanding Feminism', in *Sociology Review* Vol.3, no. 2.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology*, Sage.

Probyn, E. (1993) *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge.

Radway, J. (1987) *Reading the Romance*, London: Verso.

Ramazanoglu, C. (1989) *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, Routledge.

Raphael, A. (1995) *Never Mind the Bollocks: Women Rewrite Rock*, Virago.

Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Oxford University Press.

Reynolds, S. and Press, J. (1995) *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n' Roll*, Serpent's Tail.

Roberts, C. (ed.) (1994) *Idle Worship*, Harper Collins.

Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research*, Blackwell.

Robson, J. and Jones, M. (2005) 'Sheffield', *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, Part two: Locations (edited by J. Shepherd, D. Horn, and D. Laing), New York and London.

Robson, J. and Tams, E. (2005) *Four Stage Feasibility Study for Harmony Training*, Unpublished research report funded by Sheffield Enterprise Clusters.

Savage, J. (1988) *The Enemy Within: Sex, Rock, and Identity*, in *Facing the Music: Essays on Pop, Rock and Culture* (edited by S. Frith), Mandarin.

Schiffrin, D. (1994) *Approaches To Discourse*, Blackwell.



Schilt, K. (2004) "Riot Grrrl Is...": Contestation over Meaning in a Music Scene, in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, (edited by A. Bennett and R.A. Peterson), Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville.

Shuker, R. (1998) *Key Concepts in Popular Music*, Routledge.

Skeggs, B. (1995) Theorising, ethics and representation in feminist ethnography, in *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production* (edited by B. Skeggs), Manchester University Press.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender*, Sage.

Skevington, S. and Baker, D. (eds.) (1989) *The Social Identity of Women*, Sage.

Sloboda, J.A., Davidson, J.W., Howe, M.J.A., (1994) 'Is everyone musical?' in *The Psychologist* vol. 7, no. 8.

Smith, G. (1995) *Lost in Music-A Pop Odyssey*, Picador.

Smith, D. (1995) Dreaming America: HipHop Culture, in *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap* (edited by E. McDonnell and A. Powers), Plexus Publishing Limited.

Squire, C. (1989) *Significant Differences - Feminism in Psychology*, Routledge.

Stacey, J. (1994) *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, Routledge.

Stacey, J. (1995) The lost audience: methodology, cinema history and feminist film criticism, in *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production* (edited by B. Skeggs), Manchester University Press.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1983) *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1993) *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, Routledge.

Stein, A. (1999) Rock Against Romance: Gender, Rock 'n' Roll and Resistance, in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (edited by K. Kelly, K. and E. McDonnell), Routledge.

Steward, S. and Garratt, S. (1984) *Signed, Sealed and Delivered: True Life Stories of Women in Pop*, Pluto Press.

Storey, J. (1993) *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Strachan, R (2004) *Industry, Ideology, Aesthetics and Micro Independent Record Labels in the UK*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Popular Music, Liverpool University.

Straw, W. (1997) Communities and Scenes in Popular Music, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Straw, W. (1997) Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture, in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (edited by S. Whiteley), Routledge.

Sturdy, M. (2003) *Truth and Beauty: The Story of Pulp*, Omnibus Press.

Sullivan, C. (1999) *Bye Bye Baby: My Tragic Love Affair with The Bay City Rollers*, Bloomsbury.

Tams, E. (2003) *The Gendering of Work in Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ)*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Sheffield Hallam University.

Taylor, I., Evans, K. and Fraser, P. (1996) *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England*, London: Routledge.

Thomas, L. (2002) *Fans, Feminism and Quality Media*, London: Routledge.

Thornton, S. (1995) *Club Cultures. Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Polity Press.

Thornton, S. (1997a) The social logic of subcultural capital, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Thornton, S. (1997b) Introduction to Part Four: Ethics and Ethnography, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Twersky, L. (1995) Devils or Angels? The female teenage audience examined, in *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop and Rap* (edited by E. McDonnell and A. Powers), Plexus Publishing Limited.

Tyler, S. (1997) Post-Modern Ethnography, in *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton), Routledge.

Vermorel, F. and Vermorel, J. (1985) *Starlust: The Secret Fantasies of Fans*, W.H.Allen: London.

Vermorel, F. and Vermorel, J. (1989) *Fandemonium!*, Omnibus Press.

Vermorel, F. and Vermorel, J. (1992) A Glimpse of the Fan Factory, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (edited by L. Lewis), Routledge.

Vroomen, L. (2004) Kate Bush: Teen Pop and Older Female Fans, in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, (edited by A. Bennett and R.A. Peterson), Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville.

Walser, R. (1993) *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, University Press of New England.

Weedon, C. (1987) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Blackwell.

- Weinstein, D. (1999) *Art Versus Commerce: Deconstructing A (Useful) Romantic Illusion*, in *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (edited by K. Kelly and E. McDonnell), Routledge.
- West, C and Zimmerman, D. (1991) *Doing Gender*, in *The Social Construction of Gender* (edited by J. Lorber and S. Farrell), Sage.
- Whiteley, S. (ed.) (1997) *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, Routledge.
- Whiteley, S. (1998) *Repressive Representations: Patriarchy and Femininities in Rock Music of the Counterculture*, in *Mapping The Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory* (edited by T. Swiss, J. Sloop and A. Herman), Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Whiteley, S. (2000) *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*, Routledge.
- Wilkinson, S. (ed.) (1986) *Feminist Social Psychology: Developing theory and practice*, Open University Press.
- Williams, R. (1961) *The Long Revolution*, London: Chatto & Windus.
- Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, Fontana Press.
- Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour*, Saxon House.
- Willis, P. (1978) *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Willis, P. (1990) *Common Culture*, Open University Press.
- Wise, S. (1990) *Sexing Elvis*, in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (edited by S. Frith and A. Goodwin), London: Routledge.
- Yeandle, S., Buckner, L., Gore, T. and Powell, R. (2004) *Gender Profile of South Yorkshire's Labour Market 2000*, produced for South Yorkshire Objective 1.
- Yin, R. (1989) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Sage.

## APPENDIX 1

### **Generating data: sample questionnaires, follow up letters and interview schedules.**

#### *Sample questionnaire*

This questionnaire is part of a research project for Sheffield Hallam University, looking at the relationship between local bands and fans. Needless to say, Pulp is one of the key bands in this study: **ARE YOU ONE OF THE KEY FANS?**

If the reply is 'yes', then please answer the following questions:

1. How old are you and what sex are you?
2. Where do you live?
3. When did you first become interested in pop music?  
\*(If you need more space, please continue on the back of this sheet.)
4. \*Would you describe yourself as a Pulp fan? And if so, when did you get into them and what do you particularly like about them?
5. \*Are you involved in the Sheffield music scene? And if so, which bands/clubs do you go to?

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING FURTHER IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, PLEASE LEAVE A CONTACT NUMBER/ADDRESS BELOW.**

#### *Sample follow-up letter*

Dear

I am at Sheffield Hallam University conducting research into Sheffield bands and fans, and you filled in one of my questionnaires on the Warrington 'Pulp Express'. I found your observations very interesting and would like to have an informal interview about your musical interests etc. at your convenience.

As I haven't got your phone number, I would be very grateful if you would contact me at work or home (see above) to arrange a suitable time and place to meet for a chat.

Thanks for your co-operation and I look forward to hearing from you.



*Sample interview schedule (Kathryn, 1996).*

**The early years**

You say you first got into pop music when you were about 13 years old. Who did you like then? Were you a fan?

What was the first single you bought. Is it a significant memory?

What was the first concert you ever went to? Did you go with friends?

**Pulp**

When did you first hear about Pulp?

You say 'they're different to other shite 90s bands'. In what ways?

What do you think about the supposed rivalry between Pulp and Michael Jackson fans?

What did you think of the Warrington gig - had you seen Pulp before?

Did the concert live up to your expectations? What did you expect?

Is the Sheffield connection important to you?

In the questionnaire, you say you used to be a fan. Can you describe the process of becoming a fan of a particular band and then moving on?

**Now**

What other bands are you into now?

You go to a lot of clubs. Do you go with a group of friends?

Have you ever wanted to be in a band?

So how important would you say music has been/is to your life?

*Sample interview schedule (Helen, 1998).*

**The early years**

When did you first get into pop music? Who did you like? Were you a fan?

What was the first concert you ever went to? Did you go with friends?

How/why did you become involved in the local music scene?

**Velodrome**

When did you first hear about Velodrome 2000? How/why did you start supporting them?

Can you take me through a typical gig - what happens, what do you particularly like?

Is there anything about the band that you particularly identify with?

i.e. genre?, gender?, friendship?

Would you call yourself a fan?

Is the Sheffield connection important to you?

**Themes**

\*Gender and fandom - is it 'different for girls'? re cultural practices.

\*Fandom and age

\*Pleasure re *the Velodrome experience*

\*Identity - what does being a fan mean to your identity, to your sense of self?

**Now**

What other bands/music do you like?

Do you go to clubs as well as live gigs?

Have you ever wanted to be in a band?

So how important would you say music has been/is to your life?

*Sample follow-up letter and questionnaire*

Dear

Way back in '96/97, I interviewed you for my Ph.D. research about fandom and Pulp. Due to their recent 'break-up', I am interested in doing some follow-up research and would be very grateful if you could spare the time to answer the enclosed questionnaire. I have included an SAE for your convenience.

As you can see, I no longer work for Sheffield Hallam University. I now teach Music Business to a range of performing artists and bands at Red Tape Studios. Please don't hesitate to call me if you have any queries or would like to know more about what Red Tape does.

Many thanks in advance for taking the time to complete the follow-up questions.

**PULP 'FANS': FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Name:.....

1) Would you still call yourself a Pulp fan?

If yes, in what ways has your fandom changed since the first interview?

If no, why?

2) How did you feel when you heard about the break-up of the band?

3) Are you still into music as much as you were at the time of the first interview?

What kinds of music are you into now? Would you still call yourself a 'fan'?

4) What are you doing now in terms of work and leisure?

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

**Preparing data: transcription notation features and interview extract.**

The following extract is from one of eight, fully transcribed interviews I conducted. The transcription notation features used are in loose accordance with those developed by Gail Jefferson (in Potter and Wetherell, 1987, pp 188-189).

JR: You know the e-mail I sent you, well those questions covered the bits and pieces that I still don't know, stuff like where you went to school and when you started working at HMV and things like that, you know the bigger picture of your life, like you know where you were born

Penny: Well I was born in Stockport which is about one of the most boring places on the planet [laughter]<sup>237</sup> but it borders Manchester so from about the age of 14 onwards I was going to gigs in Manchester which is a gift really cos it was so vibrant so I just got into seeing bands from a really young age. Me brother, my older brother was quite into going to see bands and he was considerably older than me so I thought it was dead exciting and I couldn't wait to be able to go to them myself [yeah] so as soon as I could, as soon as me Mum would let me get the bus into town on my own, I was=<sup>238</sup>

JR: =you were going to gigs on your own?

Penny: No, no like my best mate was into it as well [mm] so we went to together and we went to loads. From about the age of 16 we were going to like Hacienda gigs [right] so they were like up and coming bands and you know we'd see loads of stuff [yeah] and we loved everything.<sup>239</sup> You know, there was nothing that we didn't love cos it was so exciting so it was probably quite erm erm random [yeah] our taste. Like there was no 'we like this but we don't like this', we just loved everything. From about the age of 16 onwards we got slightly more picky in what we went to and erm

JR: Were you buying records as well?

Penny: Yeah yeah we used to erm we used to cos I got dinner money and she got dinner tokens so we used to buy our dinner on her tokens and save my dinner money and save up and we'd like buy records with it or go on holiday, just like coach trips down to Devon and we'd stay with people we knew and stuff like that [right] yeah that and buy records and just divvy them up between us

JR: Yeah and you know when you were seeing those bands, was that like a turning point for you, you know that live experience, did you think I want a piece of that?

Penny: Well not really for a long time no cos I never thought I could do it. When I was little, well sort of a teenager, I always wanted to be famous (not like)<sup>240</sup> 'I want to be famous' in a sort of arrogant way [mm],<sup>241</sup> **I wanted to be famous so that I could go on Round Table on Radio One and give my opinion of the new releases [laughter] and I wanted to go on Mike Reid's Pop Quiz cos I always got all the answers right [laughs] and that's the only reason I wanted to be famous cos I wanted to go on those things, not cos I had a desire to be a celebrity or something but I wanted to go on those programmes because=**

JR: =because you were a fan and you knew=

<sup>237</sup> Material in square brackets is clarificatory information.

<sup>238</sup> An equal sign at the end of the speaker's utterance and at the start of the next indicates the absence of a discernible gap, or overlap.

<sup>239</sup> Underlining indicates that words are uttered with added emphasis.

<sup>240</sup> Round brackets indicate that the material in the brackets is either inaudible or there is doubt about its accuracy.

<sup>241</sup> Bold text represents talk that I consider particularly important and that I refer to in the analysis.



**Penny: =I knew everything yeah! [yeah!] I absorbed every word of Smash Hits the day it came out, I learned all the words to all the songs, everything, just knew it all, whether it was like you know Def Leppard or Judas Priest**

JR: Mmm and you were into Kim Wilde as well weren't you

Penny: Loved Kim Wilde, I loved Kim Wilde. She was really kind of one of the people who sparked me off being I guess who I am [laughs] sorry if that sounds wanky but [laughter] she wasn't like any of the other girl artists, she was like really scruffy and really tomboy-y and sexy [mm] and she bought all her clothes from charity shops and wore like blokes clothes and women's clothes in a really lackadaisical and completely cool way and I just loved her. That was when I started charity shopping [mm] and you know I still charity shop to this day, I still do bargain stores and charity shops. And that's completely without question where it started, just sitting reading Smash Hits and I remember going into my very first charity shop in like the little place I lived in in Stockport called Davenport and erm they opened a charity shop right next to the bread shop where I had to go and get me Mum's bread order every Saturday and I went passed and I thought, I really want to go in but there was kind of a bit of you know [yeah] charity shops are dirty or whatever [yeah yeah] or me Mum'd really tell me off if she knew I'd gone in sort of thing. But I thought no, I'm going to go in so when I went to get me Mum's bread order, I went in and it was like full of old women and a bad smell [laughter] It was like full of bonkers items and I didn't buy any clothes then I bought a Donovan album [laughs] but from then on I went in every single Saturday, when I got the bread [laughs]

JR: Yeah I did that too but obviously I'm a bit older than you [don't think you are] Well I'm 38 and you're like err 35? [36, yeah 36] and jumble saling was a big thing for us [oh absolutely yeah] and like Echo and the Bunnymen were out at that time with McCulloch and his overcoat and we all had to have one

Penny: I think by that time yeah cos I'd be a couple of years behind you [yeah] and so I was probably about 15, 16 whereas you'd be 18 but erm yeah, I remember going to Liverpool to see the Bunnymen. That was one of the most exciting things when I was little, actually going to a gig out of town. We went to see Teardrop Explodes and stuff like that cos that was a scene I was really into, Liverpool. We used to go to day trips to Liverpool [mm] and buy stuff from cool shops and it was so much cooler just cos it had come from Liverpool [laughs] and then to go and actually see the Bunnymen in Liverpool at the Grafton Ballrooms, it was fantastic! Yeah and all that, that whole culture of charity shops and live music it just went together [mm] and I don't think it's ever rubbed off. Me Mum's still waiting for me to grow out of it [laughter] even now if I go home, we like go to Marks and Spencers and she's like, 'why don't you buy that blouse? 'I'm never going to wear it! I'm never going to wear it!' [laughter] 'It's about time you did.' 'I'm 36 Mum, it's never going to happen' [uproarious laughter]

JR: So how did you end up in Sheffield then?

Penny: Erm well I went to college to do drama in Huddersfield and I used to come over here quite a lot cos my friend who I went to all the gigs with, well she came over here to university and Huddersfield had loads of really good small gigs like erm Mighty Mighty and all those little you know underground bands erm but no bigger gigs, so sometimes I'd come over here for gigs and visit 'Anne' or whatever or if we were going to London for some gigs I'd come here first and we'd go down together. So I used to visit quite a lot [mm] and I got to know quite a lot of her friends that lived here and when I finished college I wanted to start my own business and I didn't want to go and live back with my Mum and Dad, I just couldn't. I love them to bits but they you know they hate the way I dress and what I do and all the decisions I make aren't the same as their friends' children

JR: How would you describe your upbringing you know in terms of class?



Penny: Middle class, very middle class you know standards, golf club sort of standards. 'Why is everybody else's children lawyers and doctors and look at mine' you know it's that sort of thing. [mm] It's the reason I went to university because of me Mum, me Mum going 'everybody else's children go to university and make something of themselves' and I was thinking, 'Well bugger you, I'm going to show you then!' And that was my driving force to get to university [mm] plus the fact that you could go to so many more gigs if you went to university [yeah] So you know I just wanted that studenty life really and for two years of my degree, I did nothing but go round the country watching Primal Scream and Julian Cope [laughs] I just used to follow them round and get on the guest lists. Learned how to get on guest lists from about the age of 18 onwards [laughs] and just followed them round the country. And cos all my mates were at different universities and everyone played university gigs in those days [yeah so you'd got like a circuit] yeah a circuit and just did like a Primal Scream tour, Julian Cope tour and then it'd be time for Primal Scream again, I just did that for two years.

JR: Did you get your degree?

Penny: I did yeah [laughter] cos I worked my arse off in the third year, I did nothing but going to college and working really hard. I could've done a lot better but I got it, it didn't matter, I had a great time. It was a means to an end really going to college [yeah] and still even then, I didn't want to be in a band, **I never thought about me being in a band, that that was an option at all [yeah]. I went to see bands but most of the bands I saw didn't have women in. I couldn't be like Kim Wilde cos she was like a pop star and all the underground bands didn't really have girls in at all**

JR: Yeah so the only option was to be a fan wasn't it

Penny: Yeah, there was nobody that made me think, christ I could do that [yeah yeah] until I saw Talulah Gosh and that was like a [laughs] a revelation, a massive turning point you know, listening to Talulah Gosh, the Pastels and the Shop Assistants [yeah] and thinking, I could do that [mm] you know I could sing songs about that you know and I look like that and I could do that! [laughs] So then I just had it in the back of my mind like to do it but still never did anything about it cos I didn't know how to really. I didn't know how you write a song, didn't think you could write songs, I thought you had to be really special to write a song [yeah yeah]

JR: And did you play any instruments or=

Penny: =Well I learned the guitar at school [right] but I'd stopped playing by then but yeah I still had a guitar and I could play it but you know, I could play like the theme from the Deer Hunter and stuff like that but I couldn't play punk rock [laughter] And I didn't know how you made the the err [connection?] connection really. Even though it's exactly the same thing but I didn't really know that and then erm a friend came round to my house one day and he'd like been learning to play like Smiths songs and we were playing Panic by the Smiths and erm I learnt how to play Beatnik Boy by Talulah Gosh and I thought 'this is a piece of piss' [laughs] **For years you know you think it's really difficult [mm] I think boys shroud it in this mystery by using too many pedals and stuff to make it seem like it's really complicated [mm] and in actual fact that's just to cover their social ineptitude I think**

JR: Yeah and to keep it special to them, it keeps the club exclusive doesn't it

Penny: Yeah yeah and if you put enough technology round it, your average girl doesn't have much knowledge of technology and is intimidated by it therefore it's impenetrable [mm] but once you learn to play the guitar and you learn to play songs, you realise that all of those effects just make you sound more clever than you actually are... []<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Empty square brackets indicate that some of the transcript has been deliberately omitted.