



# Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style (Dress, Body, Culture)

*By David Muggleton*

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## Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style (Dress, Body, Culture)

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What motivates people to dress in a manner that marks them out as different to the conventional norm? Is it true that, with dress, 'anything goes' in our mix-and-match postmodern culture? Have easily recognizable, authentic subcultures imploded in a glut of ironic revivals and stylistic fragmentation? Does this supposed 'post-subcultural' generation actively celebrate ephemerality, transience and disposability, merely casting off and trying on one alternative identity after another in an ever-accelerating fashion frenzy? This exciting book is a considered sociological examination of such questions. By listening to the voices of the subcultural stylists themselves - their subjective perceptions of their style and the ideas that lie behind them - the author provides original insights into issues of subjectivity and identity.

Situating an empirical case study within a wider consideration of postmodernism and cultural change, the author rejects cultural studies perspectives that attempt to 'read' subcultures as texts. Drawing on extensive interviews with people who dress in what might be deemed a stylistically unconventional manner, he seeks instead to establish whether contemporary subcultures display modern or postmodern sensibilities and forms. He argues persuasively that they do both - a stress on postmodern hyperindividualism, fluidity and fragmentation runs alongside a modernist emphasis on authenticity and underlying essence. He concludes that a Romantic libertarianism has permeated working-class culture and that the distinction between 'individualistic' middle-class countercultures and 'collectivist' working-class subcultures has been over-emphasized.

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### Editorial Review

From Library Journal

While this book is ostensibly about dress and style in various British subcultures, scholar Muggleton uses clothing largely as a point of departure to explore the values and motives of those who identify themselves, at least partially, as "punk," "goth," "skinhead," or "hippy." With the greater purpose of investigating current claims about the "postmodern" nature of subcultures, Muggleton conducted a series of 57 interviews with subculture participants in Brighton and East Sussex. Subculturalists, he concludes, are postmodern in their identification with fragmentation and heterogeneity but modern in their commitment to individual freedom and self-expression. While there is considerable popular interest in the subject matter covered here, Muggleton writes almost exclusively for specialists in the field. His use of professional jargon and propensity to quote liberally from secondary sources will discourage all but the most intrepid general readers. Highly recommended for academic libraries. DAndrew Brodie Smith, Martin Luther King Memorial Lib., Washington, DC

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### Review

"Highly recommended for academic libraries." *Library Journal*

"Interview excerpts provide powerful illustrations of some of the points made on identification and dress style, and the book is also commendably thorough in its fieldwork details; the interview schedule in particular makes it a book that could be recommended as background reading to students on research methods courses as well." *Times Higher Education Supplement*

### About the Author

**David Muggleton** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology, at University College Chichester.

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**Mary Barnett:**

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